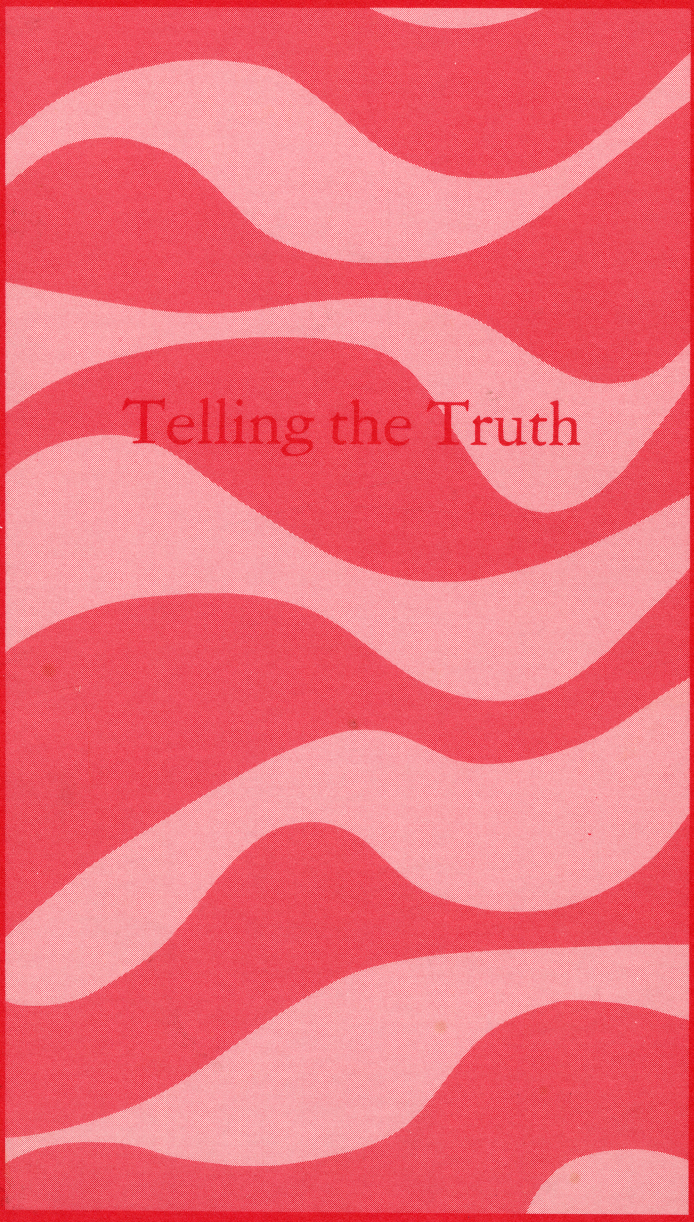
December 1990 Volume 17 Number 6



CURRENTS

in Theology and Mission

Currents

in Theology and Mission

Published by
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

in cooperation with
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Wartburg Theological Seminary

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CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (ISSN: 0098-2113) is published bimonthly, February, April, June, August, October, December by Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a non-profit organization, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60615, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. Annual subscription rate: $13.50 in the U.S. and Canada ($15.50 overseas). Two-year rate: $25.00 in the U.S. and Canada ($29.00 overseas). Three-year rate: $36.00 in the U.S. and Canada ($42.00 overseas). Second Class Postage Paid at Chicago, Illinois and at other mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

CURRENTS is indexed in *Elenchus*, *IZBW*, *NTA*, *OTA*, *Religion Index I* (formerly *IRPL*), *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, and *Theologische Literaturzeitung*.

MICROFORM AVAILABILITY: 16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm, 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Inc., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60615.

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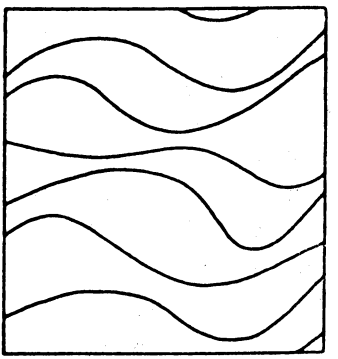
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Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany—Good Friday

Telling the Truth

"In view of the awesome esteem in which the Scriptures are to be held, it is all the more incumbent on the scholar to tell the truth and not permit the text of Scripture to be bent in the direction of any private or collective interest. The exegete must be a watchdog for the church and protect it against distortion of the meaning of Sacred Scripture."

—Frederick W. Danker

To honor a truth-teller and exegetical watchdog, five colleagues in New Testament studies have written articles for this second issue marking the 70th birthday of **Frederick W. Danker.**

Robert H. Smith deals with one of the most troubling statements for Jews and Christians in Matthew's Gospel, "His blood be on us and on our children." He proposes that throughout this Gospel one person's dying/blood brings forgiveness to many. Even Pilate affirmed that the one way people can really be innocent is by not washing their hands of this man's blood. Contact with his blood brings forgiveness and peace. The cry of the Jews is not a self-imprecation in the mind of the author or the intended reader. Instead, through this outcry Matthew urges us readers to see that the blood of Jesus (the tender mercies of God) rests on us and on all. The blood of Jesus rests on Jews too—for their blessing.

Edgar Krentz focuses on another troubling text dealing with the Jews, Romans 2:21-24. Here Paul accuses the Jews of transgressing the very law on which they rely and specifies the charge by naming theft,

sexual immorality, and temple robbing. The latter charge shows up in various ancient vice lists—now made instantly accessible to the scholar by the magic of computer-assisted word searches. The charge of temple robbing is used to demonstrate dishonor for God. According to Paul, God will praise the "hidden Jew," whose heart is circumcised by the Spirit, not the "public Jew," who has the letter of the law.

Gerhard Krodel uses philology to sort out Paul's eschatological timetable in 2 Thessalonians 2. Prior to the day of the Lord (the parousia), history has two periods: the present time, when the religious-political claims of society are personified in a figure called the κατέχων, and the future, when the Lawless One (ἄνομος) will be fully revealed. In the present time, these personified religious and political claims cause tribulations to the saints; they also prefigure the coming mystery of lawlessness and in fact delay its coming.

Wilhelm Linss turns to Luke, on which our honoree has commented frequently, and investigates a number of "example stories" that occur only in the Third Gospel: the Good Samaritan, the Rich Fool, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Pharisee and the Publican. Are they only example stories, or were they once true parables that must be understood metaphorically, as illustrations of the way the Kingdom of God breaks abruptly into human consciousness and demands the overturn of prior values?

John Reumann reviews the history of the interpretation of Colossians 1:24 as part of the ongoing Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. What did Paul mean when he wrote of "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"? At the time of the Reformation, Melanchthon charged that the papists twisted this statement into a discussion of the merits of the saints and imagined that the afflictions of the saints even earn remission for themselves or others. Today's Dialogue partners agree that there is no disparagement in this passage of the unique mediation by Christ through the cross. Rather, we are all involved in a struggle, which does not involve vicariously atoning efforts, but which helps fill up the eschatological quota of tribulations to be suffered by the faithful between the resurrection and the return of Christ.

Concluding essays, by **Paul Bauermeister** and **Peggy B. Eldredge**, located after the Preaching Helps section, provide needed help for all of our Christmas celebrations.

Let Fred Danker once more tell the truth about Luke 2:

"[The Christmas Gospel] is as far from sentimentality as it is sublime in simplicity. What Luke does aim to say in all this is: Jesus does not come with expected apocalyptic splendor. To associate oneself with the fortunes of a Messiah who lacks all recognized status will call for a counting of the cost.... George MacDonald summed it well:

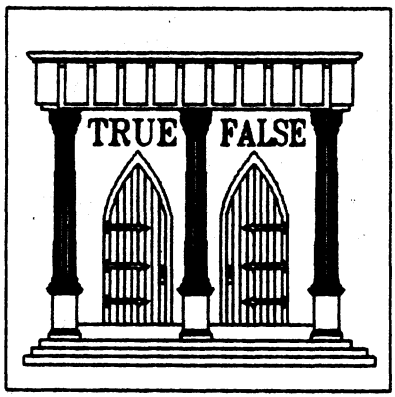
'They all were looking for a king
To slay their foes and lift them high:
Thou cam'st, a little baby thing
That made a woman cry.'"

The exegete must be a watchdog for the church and protect it against distortion of the meaning of Sacred Scripture.

No one ever said Fred was boring.

For many years, watch on!

Ralph W. Klein
Editor



Matthew 27:25 The Hardest Verse in Matthew's Gospel

Robert H. Smith
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

It is a pleasure and a privilege publicly to acknowledge at least a portion of my profound debt to Fred Danker, peerless mentor, colleague, and friend. Long ago he taught me that having questions is the essence of research. And no research is more intriguing than that which begins with questions about the meanings and uses of Greek words, and, as Fred's own labors in semantic vineyards indicate, our studies should always try at least to yield something that is humanly useful. His own scholarship is ever a benefaction.

In the Year of Matthew, we all had ample opportunity to reflect once more on the beauties of Matthew's Gospel and also on what seems to be its uglier and darker side. The darkest and hardest verse in Matthew's Gospel is part of the reading for Passion Sunday: "All the people answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" (27:25)

The *Good News Bible* paraphrases: "Let the punishment for his death fall on us and on our children!"[1]

And how it has! Generations of Jews have been slandered as Christ-killers or God-killers. And especially because of this verse, Matthew has been co-opted as cheerleader for anti-Jewish mobs. (Origen and Thomas Aquinas are usually cited in this connection.) Gerald O'Collins has said that this verse "has done more than any other sentence in the NT to feed the fires of anti-Semitism."[2]

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[1]Some editions have "responsibility" rather than "punishment" where the original has "blood" (*haima*). See Barclay Newman and Philip Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew* (United Bible Societies, 1988).

[2]"Anti-Semitism in the Gospel," *TS* 26 (1965):663-66. Charles Glock and Rodney Stark cite this verse and declare that "the main theme in religious hostility toward Jews has been that they are under a curse." *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 197; cf. pp. 43-59; see also H. Quinley and C. Glock, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 94-109.

A long tradition takes this verse as Matthew's indictment not only of the 50 or 75 people who stood in the courtyard and uttered the cry. It has been seen as a judgment upon "all the people" (*ho laos* and not *ochlos*, "crowd"), that is, "all Israel," indeed upon the whole of Israel ("us") in every age ("our children"). And it has been so used by generations of Christians with dreadful consequences for generations of Jews.

I want to propose a fresh understanding of this old verse, because the traditional interpretation has misjudged both Matthew and the Jews.

Interpretations of the verse.

First we look at some representative comments on this verse. Paul Winter in his book, *On the Trial of Jesus*, refers to this hard verse in Matthew as "a legendary accretion."[3] He denied that "the people" ever said these words. In a period dominated by historical criticism, when scholars were sifting through the texts of the Gospels in the attempt to discover some few lumps of gold (the historical) in the midst of a mountain of dirt (anything mythical, legendary, apologetical, polemical, or homiletical), Winter's remark was not at all unusual. F.W. Beare, for example, says the cry is "nothing but hostile invention."[4]

John Dominic Crossan, writing on "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel,"[5] offered practical advice on the basis of such historical criticism: "the often repeated statement that the Jews rejected Jesus and had him crucified is *historically* untenable and must therefore be removed completely from our thinking and our writing, our teaching, preaching, and liturgy."

Other interpreters, still working within the horizon of historical criticism, have taken a different tack. Joseph Fitzmyer devoted an entire article to Matt 27:25, because Crossan, in writing about anti-Semitism in the Gospels, does not so much as mention this hard verse.[6]

Fitzmyer bites the bullet. He agrees with Paul Winter and others that the verse is not historical, but in describing it he refrains from calling it legendary or fictional. He uses more objective language and calls it "redactional." It is a verse which reveals the evangelist's own interests. Frank Matera in like manner calls it a "theological construction on Matthew's part."[7]

Condemnation or explanation?

This verse is one of several which together add up to a discernible pattern. What is the pattern? Is it a pattern of anti-Semitism? Fitzmyer thinks not. What is important, he says, is that we not "wrench the verse from its Gospel context," by which he means not the literary but the social and historical context. Late in the first century, possibly in Palestine or Syria, Jewish-Christians were pondering the course of recent history. Jerusalem was conquered and the temple was destroyed in C.E. 70. Gentiles were entering the church and that meant entering the kingdom of heaven in greater numbers than Jews. In fact it seemed that the nations were taking over the kingdom of heaven. How could Jewish-Christians understand what was happening?

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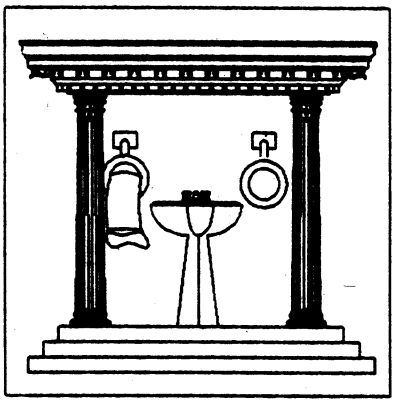
[3](Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961), 55. Winter dedicated his study of Jesus' trial "To the Dead in Auschwitz, Izbica, Majdanek, Treblinka, Among whom are those who were dearest to me."

[4]*The Gospel According To Matthew* (Harper and Row, 1981), 531.

[5]*TS* 26 (1965):189-214.

[6]"Anti-Semitism and the Cry of 'All the People'," *TS* 26 (1965): 667-71.

[7]*Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies* (Paulist, 1986), 110.



Matthew's purpose (apparently as a Jewish-Christian speaking to Jewish-Christians) was not condemnatory but explanatory, says Fitzmyer. He was not pointing the finger at his Jewish contemporaries, and certainly he had no intention of branding later generations of Jews as Christ-killers. Matthew by means of 27:25 was trying to say that the past generation, the generation of the years C.E. 30 (crucifixion) to C.E. 70 (destruction), suffered the consequences of choosing to follow the way of Barabbas instead of the way of Jesus (Matt 27:17).

O. Lamar Cope agrees with Fitzmyer's view. But Cope goes on to focus on the phrase "on us and on our children." He offers good evidence for thinking that the phrase means something like "all of us, adults and children alike" (my paraphrase of his point). In other words it means "this entire generation." Or at most it means "this generation and the next." Cope made a search and was not able to find any indication that the phrase ever means anything else, unless an author adds something like "to the end of the age" (as e.g. in 1 King 2:33; cf. Exod 10:2; 34:7).[8]

Cope's findings are welcome assistance in the effort to discern Matthew's meaning. His work calls into question most older interpretations and even the translation of our verse offered by W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann in their *Anchor Bible* commentary: "Let the guilt rest upon us and upon our children."[9] That verb "rest" is inappropriate. It makes "the guilt" sound like an abiding and ineradicable stain.

Norman Beck describes Matt 27:25 as a piece of "vicious anti-Jewish polemic." He hails Fitzmyer's effort to achieve a better understanding. Nevertheless he agrees with Crossan that such material has no place in our teaching or preaching. He says we should prune this verse out of the text of the New Testament and, if we must retain it, place it into a footnote.[10]

Consensus.

The interpretations considered so far seem to be converging on a number of points: 1) The cry of the people is not historical but is a piece of Matthean interpretation.[11] 2) The cry describes one or at most two generations as guilty. 3) The cry may have been meant not as a condemnation of Matthew's contemporaries but as an explanation for the destruction of Jerusalem.

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[8]*Matthew: A Scribe Trained for the Kingdom of Heaven* (Catholic Biblical Association, 1976), 128-29.

[9]W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971).

[10]*Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the NT* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University, 1985), 147, 160.

[11]Albright and Mann in the *Anchor Bible* commentary seem, however, to treat the cry as historical: "This cry was remembered and preserved by tradition" (345).

Outlook.

I wonder whether further gains may be possible if we try another tack. In what follows I want to propose a fresh reading of Matt 27:25, viewing it not in historical perspective but in literary and rhetorical perspective.

I certainly agree that this verse (among many others) has had a hideous effect in the passing generations. And yet I wonder whether Matthew meant what many readers have found in his work. Perhaps it is impossible to penetrate the secrets of an author's mind and establish intent. But it always pays to attend carefully to an author's words.

Mine is an admittedly friendly reading of the Gospel. I abhor anti-Semitism, and I clearly recognize that Matthew's Gospel has often been put to terrible use. But at the same time I also wonder whether we may have been too quick in judging Matthew to be anti-Semitic. Friendly readings of Matthew are very much out of style.[12]

The current consensus about Matthew's situation, by the way, very nearly condemns us to reading Matthew as anti-Semitic. It is widely believed that the Gospel of Matthew is a Christian polemical document, designed as ammunition for the "church" locked in mortal combat with "the synagogue across the street." This view, propounded in differing ways by such scholars as Krister Stendahl, W.D. Davies, and Reinhard Hummel, has exercised tremendous influence on a whole generation of interpreters and still generally prevails.[13] Benno Przybylski has called for a fresh examination of the question, noting that the references to Jews will mean one thing if Matthew was a Jewish-Christian arguing with fellow Jews and something else if he was a Gentile Christian (as Georg Strecker, for example, claims). Przybylski thinks that Matthew reflects an internal Jewish dispute and not one involving Gentiles versus Jews. Nevertheless Przybylski shares the widespread assumption that the Matthean references to Pharisees and scribes indicate non-Christian Jewish contemporaries of Matthew.[14] That is an assumption which desperately needs re-examination.

What if Matthew's Gospel is a polemic not against the synagogue but against trends within the Christian community? What if this Gospel is a piece of Christian self-criticism? And what if the author is a subtle evangelist and not a literal-minded historian?

This is not the place to lay out all the arguments for rethinking Matthew's situation. It must for now suffice simply to say that the prevailing consensus is a guess, and that other possibilities need to be taken seriously. Interesting things happen to our assessments of Matthew's attitudes and meanings when we shake off the spell cast by the current consensus.

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[12]Fred Niedner of Valparaiso University offers a revisionist essay in the same spirit as this present effort in "Rereading Matthew on Jerusalem and Judaism" in *BTB* 19 (1989):43-47. Nevertheless the consensus is that Matthew was virulently anti-Judaic. See Douglas R. A. Hare, "The Rejection of the Jews in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts" in Alan Davies, ed., *Anti-Semitism and the Foundation of Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 27-47, and see also Erwin Buck, "Anti-Judaic Sentiments in the Passion Narrative according to Matthew" in Peter Richardson, ed., *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity* (Wilfrid Laurier University, 1986), 165-80.

[13]W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge University Press, 1964); K. Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew* (Fortress, 1968); R. Hummel, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Kirche und Judentum im Matthäusevangelium* (Kaiser Verlag, 1963).

[14]B. Przybylski, "The Setting of Matthean Anti-Judaism" in Richardson, ed., *Anti-Judaism*, 181-200.

The argument I would here propose is more literary than historical, and it can, I think, stand on its own, without my setting out in detail a fresh hypothesis concerning Matthew's community.[15]

Blood

Let's begin with that hard word "blood." By substituting the word "punishment" or "responsibility," the *Good News Bible* has muddied the water and perpetuated bad news. We need to retain the word "blood."

Goethe got it right: "Blood is a very special juice" (*Faust*). I am quoting from memory, and perhaps some nimble-minded reader can help me find the source (or even correct my memory of the precise wording). The sentiment is surely correct. Neolithic people smeared red ochre on skeletons as a prayer for the return of life to dry bones, and in earliest times blood was manipulated at countless altars. Scripture says bluntly, "The life is in the blood" (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11).

The *Oxford American Dictionary*[16] calls blood "the red oxygen-bearing liquid circulating in the bodies of animals." It is obviously more than that, as our metaphorical use of the word testifies. Think of colorful terms like "bloodcurdling, blood relative, bloodshed, and bloodsucker."

Matthew tells how ancient authorities (mostly "blue bloods") moved against Jesus "in cold blood," how Pilate was pressed by "bloodthirsty" clamorings, and how Jesus was crucified by tough legionnaires "blooded" in Rome's battles and immune to cruelty.

The word "blood" (*haima*) occurs 97 times in the NT. About half of the occurrences refer to Jesus' death, and in most of these cases the "blood" is explicitly invested with atoning, liberating, or sanctifying significance. The awesome power of Jesus' blood was a staple of early Christian meditation.[17]

New Testament writers from Paul to the Seer meditated on the power of Jesus' blood (see esp. Rom 3:24-25; 5:9; 1 Cor 10:16; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20; 1 Pet 1:2, 19; 1 John 1:7; many references in Hebrews and in the Book of Revelation).

Among the synoptic evangelists Matthew takes a special interest in Jesus' blood. He focuses attention on it in four significant passages in his passion narrative, and these four should be read as links in a chain.

1) Matthew shares with co-evangelists only the first, and even here Matthew exhibits an important difference. The cup is Jesus' "blood of the covenant poured out for many" (Exod 24:8; Zech 9:11), and then Matthew has the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28; cf. Lev 17:11; Rom 3:24-25). The author of Hebrews makes a similar connection in a memorable saying: "forgiveness does not exist apart from bloodshed" (*haimatekchysia*, 9:22).

Here is a fundamental irony: through one man's "blood" (dying), "many" get forgiveness in a covenant of life (cf. Matt 20:28).

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[15]I have offered such a hypothesis in my commentary on *Matthew* (Augsburg, 1989), and I have written the entire commentary as a test of that hypothesis, rejecting the notion that Matthew represented the church locked in combat with the synagogue.

[16]Edited by E. Ehrlich et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[17]See summaries s.v. by J. Behm in *TNDT* 1:172-77; F. Laubach in *DNTT*; W. Nauck in *RGG* (3.Aufl.) 1:1329-30; L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Eerdmans, 1960), 108-24; D. J. McCarthy in *IDB-S*, 114-17. See also '*haima*' in *BAGD*.

This passage (26:28) is first in the series of four in the passion narrative and announces the theme of all four. The following three offer Matthean commentary on the covenant blood of Jesus, and its potency for forgiveness.

2) Judas strikes a cold-blooded bargain for 30 coins (Matt 27:3-10). Judas is "Judah" and bears "the very name of the Jewish nation," writes Paul Kirsch. He cites Richard Rubenstein, who has suggested that the story of Judas may be "the most damaging single item among Christians' negative associations with Jews."[18] Samuel Sandmel even wondered whether Judas was historical. He thought Judas might have been invented by Christian hostility as a symbol representing the Jews.[19]

But these ruminations, together with most commentary on Judas, completely overlook the fact that Matthew alone declares that Judas "repented" (27:3). Nothing in the text would indicate that it was superficial. To the contrary. The word is used one other time in Matthew and means a sincere and complete reversal (21:29).

Judas comes to see Jesus as "innocent blood" (27:4). Now despising the silver as "blood money" (27:6), he throws it to the priests. Fearing contact with that money (as though it were alive with radioactive power), they do not add it to the temple treasury but with it purchase "a Field of Blood" (27:8; cf. Acts 1:19).

This passage is often called "an etiological legend"[20] as though such a label constituted a full explanation, rendering superfluous any further study of the threefold repetition of the word "blood" in this single paragraph.

The prior passage on blood as instituting a covenant marked by forgiveness (26:28) does not stand alone but is the first and chief member in a chain. Here in this second member we have an exposition of how the covenant blood of Jesus works great good. It purchases a final resting place (peace) for "strangers," indigent visitors to Jerusalem as well as resident paupers and criminals. How fitting! How true! Matthew is beginning to spell out the benefits of his "blood of the covenant." See Eph 1:7; 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:9 for other estimates of what his blood "purchases."

3) Pilate "washed his hands" and announced, "I am innocent of this man's blood" (27:24). Viewed historically this is an odd scene. It is easy to find passages in Scripture regarding handwashing as a gesture of innocence (e.g. Deut 21:6-9), but no source ever speaks of a judge washing his hands of his own verdict at the moment of decision. Did Matthew perhaps not understand the scriptural custom?

Matthew has in any case managed to convey a clear picture of Pilate's personal view of Jesus and of himself: "Jesus is innocent, and I, Pilate, would like to be innocent as well."

How strange! Christian readers must surely hear the oddity, the paradox, in this saying of Pilate's. In fact this is a classic case of irony. Readers of Matthew's Gospel know what Pilate as a character in the

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[18]Paul Kirsch, *We Christians and Jews* (Fortress, 1975), 60, citing Rubenstein's book, *After Auschwitz* (Bobbs Merrill, 1966). "*Ioudas*" is not quite the same as "*Ioudaios*" (= Judean or Jew), so the statement of Kirsch and Rubenstein is not quite true. *TDNT* has no entry on *Ioudas*, but see the helpful material collected in *BAGD*.

[19]*Anti-Semitism in the NT?* (Fortress, 1978), 137.

[20]As by Ben Viviano in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Prentice Hall, 1990).

drama does not know: The one way people can really be innocent is by *not* washing their hands of this man's blood! It is precisely contact with his blood which brings forgiveness and peace (26:28, 27:4). (His blood is celebrated as a cleansing power in 1 John 1:7; Heb 10:29, 13:12; Rev 1:5, 7:14, 19:13.)

4) The fourth and final mention of "blood" is the most troublesome. Samuel Sandmel calls it "the most glaring of the NT anti-Semitic passages" (66). "All the people" cried out, "May his blood be on us and on our children!" (27:25).[21]

But how shall we assess this cry, this prayer? Is it not, like Pilate's pathetic handwashing, also full of irony? Once again, readers of the Gospel, unlike the people within the drama, understand the meaning of the blood of Jesus. Unlike the crowds, the readers have been present at Jesus' Last Supper and have heard Jesus expound the meaning of his blood (26:20-29). Readers were present in the temple when Judas entered, repentant, and saw how priests disposed of the blood money by purchasing the Field of Blood for strangers (27:3-10). Readers were also there in dark Gethsemane and learned how the drinking of the "cup" is a transaction involving the Father's will and Jesus' assent (26:36-46). Readers know better than the crowds both the cause and the results of Jesus' death.

History and Text

Matthew's sentences have different meanings, depending on our stance. Do we take our stand in Pilate's courtyard and try to think what such words would mean *at the level of history* in the mouths of historical crowds? Or do we sit at Matthew's feet, as hearers of Matthew's narrative, as he with his words transports us from scene to scene, trusting that we are accumulating understandings as we go? *At the level of narrative* what does this cry mean?

Matthew wants us to see the irony and weep with him for that uncomprehending crowd and all uncomprehending crowds. Their cry is so oddly true! The blood of Jesus was on them—for their blessing! If they do not yet know it, they are in no worse condition than Judas who betrayed (26:47-50), or Peter who denied Jesus with curses (26:57-58, 69-75) or the one who tried to protect Jesus with bloodshed (26:51-55) or the whole crew who abandoned Jesus and fled (26:56). And the reader knows that beyond the cross comes resurrection, and with it come fresh opportunities for "all nations," both Jews and Gentiles (28:19).[22]

Irony

It has long been recognized that John speaks ironically.[23] It has not been seen that John's Gospel contains a passage which is

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[21]I turned to John Chrysostom's commentary on Matthew 27:25, ready for the worst, since Chrysostom so often utters harsh and slanderous words against Jews. At this one point, at least, I was pleasantly surprised. Chrysostom says that God remained "lover of humankind." Although the people in the crowd "cursed themselves," says Chrysostom, God did not ratify their cry but remained open to them and to their children.

[22]Does the phrase "all the nations" (*panta ta eihne*) in 28:19 include or exclude the Jews? I stand with those who take it to be inclusive. See John P. Meier, "Gentiles or Nations in Matt 28:19?" *CBQ* 39 (1977):94-102. See also '*ethnos*' in *BAGD*.

[23]Paul Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985).

an astonishing parallel to the cry of all the people in Matt 27. Caiaphas declared to the council that "it is to your advantage that one person should die for the people (*ho laos*), lest the whole nation (*ethnos*) perish" (11:50).

A major difference between John and Matthew is that John did not quite trust the reader to catch the irony. So John intrudes into the narrative and declares in direct address to the reader: "He did not say this on his own but as high priest that year he uttered a prophetic word to the effect that Jesus would die on behalf of the nation" (11:51). Unlike John, Matthew trusted readers to catch the irony. Unfortunately he was overly optimistic and has suffered misunderstanding as a consequence.

Matthew is not writing to whip up outrage toward unbelievers. Here and everywhere he urges us readers to see that the "blood" of Jesus (the tender mercies of God!) rests on us and on all.

Eduard Schweizer senses that something is wrong with the traditional reading. At least he sees that the passage is directed at Christian readers, warning them not to go astray.[24]

We are halfway to a better understanding of the hard passage when the congregation participates in dramatic reading on Passion Sunday. Then we Christians are the crowd, and we cry out, "May his blood be on us!" And we are forced to ask what that cry means on our lips and not just in the mouths of inhabitants of ancient Jerusalem.

The blood of Jesus speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel (23:35; Heb 12:24). And Matthew heard the "voice" of Jesus' blood. So he is full of compassion and gratitude as he meditates on the death of Jesus. Not in essay form but by means of his narrative, he charts the powerful connections of Jesus' blood with all kinds of people: disciples (26:28), betrayers and strangers (27:3-10), officials (27:24), and even crowds of enemies (27:25).

It is no accident that Matthew in his Passion Narrative, in addition to calling readers to attend to Jesus' blood, compels them to focus repeatedly on Jesus' name. In contrast with Mark's narration, almost every paragraph in Matthew's passion narrative begins not simply with the pronoun "he" but with the proper name "Jesus." By incessant repetition, he reminds us that this one who mounts up on the tree has a divinely given name and mission (1:21-23). The "blood" of "Jesus" has awesome power to fulfill his calling as one sent to "save his people" (*ho laos*; see also 4:16 where again *laos* is used of the people who have seen a great light).

We are wrestling here with misjudgments upon Jews and misjudgments upon Matthew. If we could be at least as repentant as Judas and review our old readings of Matt 27:25, we might not have to discard or cut up Matthew. We might instead recover Matthew as a powerful advocate of the mercy of God. Certainly we must work with all our resources to ensure that relations among the various children of Abraham will be happier in the millennium ahead than in the millennium passing.

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[24]E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (John Knox, 1975).

The Name of God in Disrepute: Romans 2:17-29 [22-23]

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Donum Amicitiae

Fred Danker is a scholar with an eye to problems large and small and a nose for original solutions. As his colleague for 34 years (1954-1988), graduate students together in classes on Cicero's *De natura deorum*, the comparative grammar of Greek and Latin, and structural linguistics, I know Fred's intense commitment to philology and Greco-Roman civilization (ancient tombstones, Greek tragedy, Demosthenes, Greek epigraphy and the New Testament). Aulus Gellius wrote several accolades about the Roman grammarian Probus: *Valerius Probus grammaticus inter suam aetatem praestanti scientia fuit*;[1] *memini audisse me ex Valerii Probi discipulis, docti hominis et in legendis pensitandisque veteribus scriptis bene callidi.*[2] Fred is all of that and more.

Romans 2:21-24

This tribute seeks to combine the interests we share in the New Testament in its Greco-Roman environment to illuminate Romans 2:21-24 in context.

> ...[21]*You teach others, then; do you not teach yourself? You proclaim, 'Do not steal'; but are you yourself a thief?* [22]*You say, 'Do not commit adultery'; But are you an adulterer? You abominate false gods; but do you rob shrines?* [23]*While you take pride in the law, you dishonour God by breaking it.* [24]*As scripture says, 'Because of you the name of God is profaned among the Gentiles.' (REB)*

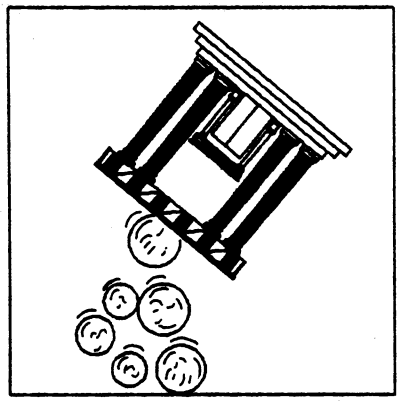
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[1] A "grammarian eminent in his age for learning." Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 4.7.1 (1, 190 Hosius).

[2] "...Valerius Probus, a man learned and well skilled in ancient writings that had to be read and carefully weighed," i.e. interpreted. Gellius 9.12 (Hosius 1.321). Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 119-21 (references from p. 120).

Temple robbing and the name of God

There is general agreement on the theme, function, and structure of Romans 2.[3] At Rom 2:1 Paul turns to judgment on the Jews,[4] a topic that occupies him till Rom 3:20.[5] Rom 2:1-11 introduces the idea of



righteous judgment (Rom 2:5) based upon what one does, not on ethnic heritage (Rom 2:9; cf. 10). Paul distinguishes these between Jew and Greek. Rom 2:12-16 introduces into the discussion νόμος as the criterion of judgment.[6] Its function in the overall argument seems clear from the references to the law, which claim that the law is what gives Jews their privileged status among the nations, and verses which state that possession of the law does not benefit at all if Jews transgress the law. The law implies doing, not having! This lays the basis for what follows.

In Rom 2:17-20 Paul describes claims made by his fellow Jews about their fidelity to the law. In Rom 2:21-24 Paul goes on to accuse the Jews of transgressing the very law on which they rely, while in Rom 2:25-29 he argues that circumcision without a corresponding observance of the law will not benefit them.[7]

In Rom 2:21 Paul's first rhetorical question implies that in reality the law does not do for the Jews what they claim it does. The next three rhetorical questions suggest specific instances in which Jews break the law. Then Rom 2:23-24 states that Jews "defame God" by transgressing the law. As Isa 52:5 said, "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (NRSV). Paul then returns to the principle that the law demands action in Rom 2:25-29.

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[3]The authenticity and integrity of Romans 2 is unchallenged, except for a few phrases. J. C. O'Neill argued some time ago that Rom 1:18-2:29 is an interpolation from a non-Pauline Hellenistic-Jewish missionary tract; his arguments convinced no one.

[4]Käsemann, 53, describes 2:1-11 as a "polemic against the Jewish tradition" represented in Wis 15:1ff.; Cranfield, 136. I refer to commentaries on Romans by author's name only.

[5]F. Hahn, "Das Gesetzesverständnis im Römer- und Galaterbrief," *ZNW* 67 (1976) 34, argues that the discussion returns to man in general at 3:4 (πᾶς δὲ ἄνθρωπος). J. C. O'Neill holds that 1:18-2:29 is non-pauline, an insertion from a Hellenistic-Jewish missionary tract; Scholars have not generally affirmed this view. Michel, 73, argues for a significant break between vv. 16 and 17 because the Jews are first mentioned in Rom 2:17.

[6]νόμος, completely absent from Rom 1:1-2:11, occurs 19 times in Rom 2:12-27, not at all in Rom 3:1-18, 11 times in Rom 3:19-31. Absent from Rom 4:1-12, it occurs 5 times in Rom 4:13-25 (all in vv. 13-16) to distinguish Jews from non-Jews.

[7]These divisions are found in almost all commentators: Cranfield, 139-40; Käsemann, 68-77; Kuß, 58; Dunn, 108-09, 119.

Jews who have the Law (Rom 2:17-20)

Passages in contemporaneous Jewish writings suggest that Paul's description in these verses of Jewish claims is, in general, fair.[8] In Rom 2:17 Paul begins, "**you call yourself a Jew.**" Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.1, uses the term "Jew" as a self designation for the Jewish people without apology, and uses it frequently throughout his works. Billerbeck[9] argues that using the term itself implies the confession of the one God in the face of idolatry.

"**You...rely on the law**" is the immediate interpretation of being a Jew. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.173-78, argues that Jews possess a law superior to that of other nations because it unites precept and practice. It is the boundary and standard for Jews' actions (174), regulates their entire life (156), and is known and observed by them. "So then, learning the laws by heart from our first perception, we have them engraved, as it were, in our hearts, and rare is the one who transgresses them; plea bargaining to escape punishment is impossible." (178).[10] Observance of the law makes Israel famous, separates her from the nations, and protects her in her life.

"**You boast of your relation to God.**" The locution is used in Pss. Sol. 17:1, "because in you, God, my soul boasts." Jews boast that they know the "one and only God." Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.165, says that the Jewish lawgiver demonstrated that their government is a theocracy, "referring the rule and the power to God." Persuading the nation to look to God as the cause of all good things and all help that comes to humans (166), he revealed that he is one, ungenerated, and unchangeable for all time (167). *Ep. Arist.* 132 states that the Jewish lawgiver regarded as of primary importance that God is one, that his power becomes manifest through everything, that he knows all and so no evil escapes him. Philo, *Op. Mundi* 171, says that the confession of the one God corresponds to worship in the one temple (cf. Josephus, *B.J.* 4.201). One God means one race and one cult.[11]

In Rom 2:18 Paul affirms that Jews **know the will of God** (cf. 2 Macc 1:3 and Sirach 43:16). They also **determine what is best because they are instructed in the law.** The phrase in question occurs also in Phil 1:10, where it refers to moral decision-making.[12] Paul's stress on the law as source

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[8]Cranfield, 164.

[9]Billerbeck 3.96.

[10]The Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch summarizes the Jewish attitude to the law very well:

In you we have put our trust, because,
behold, your Law is with us,
And we know that we do not fall as long
as we keep your statutes.
We shall always be blessed; at least,
we did not mingle with the nations.
For we are all a people of the Name;
we, who have received one Law from
the One.
And that Law that is among us will help us,
and that excellent wisdom which is in us
will support us.

Cited in the translation by A. F. J. Klijn in James H. Charlesworth, *OTP* 1.636.

[11]Paul makes no mention of the Jerusalem cult in Rom 2:17-20; he does in Rom 9:4. To mention the cult might undercut his argument, since the one temple might suggest the legitimacy of destroying all competitors.

[12]One can debate whether Jewish writers used the phrase. Lietzmann, 43, offers citations from Plutarch, a Priene inscription, and Ptolemy, but none from Jewish writers. K. Weiss, "*διαφέρω, τὰ διαφέροντα, διάφορος (ἀδιάφορον),*" *TDNT* 9.63-64, argues that the phrase had made its way from Hellenism into Judaism; Michel, 87, agrees; Käsemann, 70, disagrees with Michel's view that the phrase refers to a correct distinction between Judaism and paganism.

of moral instruction is ratified by Josephus' reference to instruction of children and to the reading of the law in the synagogue, *Ap.* 2.183.[13]

Lietzmann (43) states that Rom 2:19-20 give the impression that Paul is citing from a Jewish writing for proselytes.[14] V. 19 speaks of the Jew as "a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness." Certainly Jewish writings in Greek give strong parallels to the content of these verses.[15] V. 20 calls the Jew "a corrector [or 'educator'] of the foolish, a teacher of children." Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.291, speaks of the Jewish laws as "teaching not lack of reverence, but the truest piety, not misanthropy, but exhorting to the community of existent things, enemies of injustice, mindful of justice, banishing crudity and luxury, teaching people to be self sufficient and lovers of work." The language reminds one of the Greek virtues (justice, temperance, bravery, prudence), with piety replacing the last.[16]

Rom. 2:20b credits all these positive benefits not to innate abilities, but to the possession of the law, which embodies knowledge and truth. The law is the manifestation of knowledge and truth, the *locus* in which it becomes visible.[17] The law teaches about the true God. The possession of the law makes one a Jew and so marks one off from the Gentile as one who knows. The non-Jew does not have the law (Rom 2:14) and disregards or closes his mind to what can be known of the true God from nature (Rom 1:18-19). Non-Jews disregard the knowledge they have and do not glorify God (Rom 1:21). Rather, their thoughts are made useless and their heart, having no understanding (Rom 1:21), is darkened so that they worship the creature rather than the creator. Thus "wrong ideas about God"[18] led people to immorality and other vices (Rom 1:24, 29, 30). Jews, because they have the law, can bring the non-Jews light. As Rom 2:17 makes clear, the knowledge of the truth in the law is related directly to the confession of the One God.

The Jewish Reality (Romans 2:21-24)

Paul mounts a "fiercely satirical attack" on the description of the Jews.[19] Paul has prepared for this attack by arguing that God judges on the basis of actions (Rom 2:3,6), not on the basis of any social or ethnic position (Rom 2:11), which possession of the law might give. It is not the

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[13]Dunn, 111.

[14]O'Neill, 53-54, argues that Paul could not have written Rom 2:17-20 because it assumes that Jews and Gentiles can keep the law in a way to win God's approbation. Therefore this section must derive from some Jewish traditional tract. He disregards the argumentative style.

[15]*Sib.Or.* 3 194-196 (Geffcken 58). Wis 18:4 speaks of the "unfading light of law" given to the age. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.293, supports the idea, if not the exact wording: *διόπερ ἐγὼ θαρσήσας ἂν εἴποιμι πλείστου ἄμα καὶ καλλίστων ἡμᾶς εἰσηγητὰς τοῖς ἄλλοις γεγονέναι.* The entire peroration on the preeminece of Jewish laws, 291-296, should be read in this context.

[16]Philo, *de Abr.* 98, expects the Jews to be priests and prophets for humankind (cf. *Vita Mos.* 1.149, while the Sibyl calls them prophets (*Sib. Or.* 3.582-83cf. 195). These two references were cited by H. Schlier, "Von den Juden—Röm 2:1-29," *Die Zeit der Kirche* (3rd. ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1962) 64, and Käsemann, 70.

[17]Barrett, 56.

[18]The phrase comes from Bruce, 82.

[19]Dodd, 39. As sometimes happens at decisive points in Paul's argumentation, he loses his syntax in his rhetoric (*anacolouthon*). Paul never writes the apodosis to his long conditional sentence.

hearers of the law[20] who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law (Rom 2:13). Paul returns to that position in Rom 2:25 when he says that circumcision benefits "if you do the law." The law requires actions that conform to it.

Paul's objection is expressed in a chain of four rhetorical questions. The first is an accusation of either hypocrisy or ignorance. "You who teach another, do you teach yourself?" The next three questions contain a small vice catalog: theft, sexual immorality, and temple robbery. Theft and sexual immorality contradict two specific prohibitions of the decalogue (Exod 20:14 and 15; Deut 5:18 and 19) and the Jewish claims about the benefits of the law. Paul then draws a conclusion in Rom 2:23: The law, the source of Jewish boasting, becomes the means of dishonoring God.

The last question in Rom 2:21-22 describes Jews as those who regard cultic statues as abominations and rob temples (*ἱεροσυλεῖς*, Rom 2:22). Given the commitment to the One God of Judaism, the question ought to conclude "do you practice idolatry?" or "do you worship cultic images?"[21] But Paul instead accuses the Jews of temple robbery.[22] The conclusion does not follow logically.

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[20]Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.175, attributes the institution of the sabbath reading of the law to Moses. Each Jew knew the laws by heart. Thus the law became a "curriculum" (*παίδευμα*) that made sin in ignorance impossible.

[21]One solution might be that Jews had neither the occasion or the desire to worship at non-Jewish temples. However, the existence of the *Mishnah* tractate *Aboda Zarah* suggests that there was continuing need for instruction about idolatry.

[22]Temple robbery in no way affirms cultic statues. In the conclusion to this rhetorical question, therefore, the offenders do not appear to do what they abhor. How does temple robbery implicate Jews in a positive regard for cultic images? Nor does it contradict the first commandment.

The terms *ἱεροσυλεῖν, ἱεροσυλία, ἱερόσυλος* often appear in vice lists in Greek writers. (The references for this discussion were gathered from the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae data base using the Pandora Search Program authored and distributed by the Perseus Project at Harvard University. The terms occur over 500 times in the data base. I cite only occurrences in authors who wrote prior to ca 200 C.E. The TLG data base does not include Greek inscriptions or papyri.) Plato uses the terms 16 times, 7 of which are lists of criminals (1 in *Phaedo* 113e3 [great crimes, e.g., frequent temple robberies or violent murders]; 4 in *Respublica*, all lists of criminals; 1.344b3 [temple robbers, kidnappers, burglars, swindlers, thieves]; 4,443a3 (embezzler of public funds, temple robber, thief, traitor]; 8.552d5 [thieves, cutpurses, temple robbers, perpetrators of great crimes]; 9.575b7 [thieves, house breakers, cutpurses, clothes thieves, temple robbers, kidnappers, sycophants, takers of bribes]; 11 in *Leges*: two list criminals: 8.832a1 [thieves, burglars, temple robbers, violent ruffians, and tyrants; 9.854a2 [temple robbers and incurable or almost incurable criminals]. Nine describe laws for temple robbers and those guilty of equal crimes: *Leges* 9.854b2; 9.854d1; 9.856c6; 9.857a1; 9.859b7; 9.860b1; 9.869b3; 10.885a7; 10.960b3.) Xenophon uses the terminology in four passages. Two contain vice catalogs: *Mem.* 1.2.62 and *Apol. Soc.* 1.1.25. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.13.1374a4 lists theft, outrage, adultery, temple robbery (*ἱεροσυλῆσαι*) and treason. Demosthenes has several lists of crimes: murder, temple robbery, and treachery (*Or.* 23.26); theft, temple robbery, parricide, murder, and avoidance of military service (*Or.* 24.119); temple robbery, impiety, and theft (*Or.* 24.177). Polybius refers to temple robbers in a list of criminals in 13.8.2. Lysis of Tarentum, *Ep. ad Hipparchum* 5, gives a list that includes rape, parricide, temple robbery, and magic spells. Diogenes Laertius 2.99 (1.98 Long) credits Theodorus, a Cyrenaic, with holding that theft, adultery, and temple robbery are not shameful, if the (*continued*)

Paul and Temple Robbery

The vice lists summarized in footnote 22 suggest that ἱεροσυλεῖς in Rom 2:22 should be taken literally. The three rhetorical questions use vices frequent in Greco-Roman vice lists, where they are always meant literally. Paul selects three vices from that tradition and arranges them in ascending order of importance, that is, temple robbery forms the climax.[23]

Paul's striking language seems to give status to the gods of Greeks and Romans. But the tradition of some Jews, at least, suggested that cult statues (images, εἴδωλα) were simply the products of human artistry,

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common opinion of them would be removed. Theft, adultery, and temple robbing frequently occur in the same list, as they do in Rom 2:20-22.

2 Maccabees refers to Jerusalem temple robbery four times: 2 Macc 2:39 states that Lysimachus (called a "temple robber" in 2:42) took many gold vessels. 2 Macc 9:2 claims Antiochus [IV] entered Persepolis and tried to plunder its temples and secure the city. 2 Macc 13:6 recounts how Antiochus Eupator had Menelaus executed in Beroea with the punishment proper for temple robbers. In early Jewish literature "robbery of temples" (ἱεροσυλία ναῶν) occurs twice in the *Sibylline Oracles* (2:14, 13:12), each time in a list of apocalyptic catastrophes. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.359, says the robbery (ἱεροσυλία) of the Jerusalem temple caused the death of Antiochus IV. Nicolas of Damascus accuses the Ionians of appropriating money collected for God and so "committing temple robbery" (Josephus, *Ant.* 16.45). Augustus, according to *Ant.* 16.164, uses the term "temple robber" (ἱερόσυλος) to describe anyone who steals sacred books or money from a synagogue (cf. 16:168). Herod described the overturning of an offering he made in the temple as "robbing the temple" (*Ant.* 17.163; cf. *BJ.* 1.654). Josephus, *BJ.* 5.562 says John of Gischala turned to temple robbery, when he took temple offerings, sacred vessels, etc. from the temple and melted them down. Philo uses the terms eight times: two passages (3 occurrences) describe murder as temple sacrilege; one describes it as a crime; four passages use it in a vice list (three include theft, adultery, and murder).

Murder as sacrilege, since body is a temple (*De Dec.* 133; *De Spec. Leg.* 3.83 bis). *A crime among others*; *Leg. All.* 3.241 (a crime). *Vice lists: De Conf. Ling.* 163 (theft, adultery, murder, sacrilege); *De Jos.* 84 (men who commit robbery, theft, burglary, violence, outrage, rape, murder, adultery, temple robbery); *De Spec. Leg.* (theft, temple robbery, rape, adultery, assault, murder); *De Spec. Leg.* 4.87 (thieves, cut-purses, footpads, burglars, defaulters on loans, acceptors of bribes, temple robbers).

[23]Schrenk, "ἱεροσυλέω," *TDNT* 3.256, argues that the series implies literal interpretation and says the term is used because the "stern warning of the Law (Dt. 7:25f.) stands in the background"; Billerbeck, Str-B 3.256. Most recent commentators adopt the literal interpretation.

Some interpreters have offered alternative interpretations to avoid problems they see in the literal interpretation. Some offer a non-literal interpretation that suggests the desiring of gold or silver located in a temple puts it in the place of God (Franzmann, 53; this is a very Lutheran interpretation, analogous to Luther's explanation of the first commandment in the *Large Catechism*), or they say that setting one's self up as judge over another (cf. Rom 2:1-2) appropriates a devotion proper to God alone. Bruce cites the story of Fulvia (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.81ff., cited by Bruce, 93), a Roman convert to Judaism. Four Jews persuaded her to make a great contribution to the Jerusalem temple and then absconded with the money. In 19 C.E. Tiberius expelled all resident Jews from Rome. Thus, says Bruce, the sacrilege of four Jews "brought the honoured name of 'Jew' into disrepute among the Gentiles." But Paul says Jews dishonor God, not the name Jew (J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St Paul* [London: Macmillan, 1895; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957] 262, credits Wetstein with first using this incident to interpret Rom 2:22. Lightfoot rejects the interpretation).

mute, helpless, and useless (Jer 10:3-9; Ps 115:4-8 Ep. Jeremiah 6:8-73). An alternate view stressed that they were an evil; contact with them was an offense (*As. Mas.* 8:4; Deut 7:26 LXX). Therefore Jews abhor idolatry. Many of the Mishnaic decisions are based on that conviction. Billerbeck cites an impressive number of texts to argue that ἱεροσυλεῖν refers to the theft of statues from non-Jewish temples or, at least, of the gold or silver on statues or dedications set up in temple precincts.[24] *M. 'Abod. Zar.*3.4 mentions statues of Mercury (the god of thieves) and Aphrodite. Commentators from Lightfoot on also cite Acts 19:37 to support the reality of actual temple robbery by Jews.

But Paul regards temple robbery as a transgression of the law (Rom 2:23) that dishonors God. Verse 23 concludes the argument with a fifth rhetorical question: "You that boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?" (NRSV)[25] In some way Jewish robbery of temples that house statues of the gods of gentiles (v. 22) brings the God of Israel into disrepute, "dishonors God" (τὸν θεὸν ἀτιμάζεις). The last phrase surprises.

ἀτιμάζω means to remove or deny one's τιμή. That word describes the honor or dignity that adheres to a god or a superior. It implies special prerogatives, privileges, or powers.[26] In cultic language, honors are the institutions for worship, e.g. feasts, sacrifices, processions, etc.[27] Hence "to dishonor God" means to take away God's honor, dignity, reputation, status, and position. It is more serious than merely to insult.

> "To dishonor God" means to take away God's honor, dignity, reputation, status, and position.

Paul himself feels the problem, as Rom 2:24 makes clear. It gives the basis for the final question by citing Isa 52:5 LXX freely.[28] In Isaiah the passage comments on the Babylonian captivity ("you were led to Assyria by force" LXX). "And now, what is this? The Lord says the following: "Because my people was taken freely, do you marvel and do you howl?" The Lord says the following: "Because of you forever my

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[24]Str-B 3.113-14.

[25]The NRSV and the NAB interpret v. 23 as the fifth rhetorical question in the series, while the REB interprets it as a positive statement. The editors of Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed., 7th rev. printing, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983) punctuate it with a half-stop. Most commentators regard it as a statement (Lietzmann, Michel, Käsemann, Cranfield, Dunn, etc.), following Lagrange, 54-55, who points to the shift from ὁ (the definite article) with the participle in Rom 2:21-44 (four times) to ὅς (the relative pronoun) with a finite verb in the second person singular as evidence for regarding it as a statement concluding the argument. As the climax question in the series, whose implied answers are clear, it is rhetorically effective. Ultimately the sense remains the same.

[26]See Johannes Schneider, "τιμή, τιμάω," *TDNT* 4:169-180, for copious citation of ancient texts.

[27]Honor is related to δόξα (reputation, status, exalted position) in Dio Chrysostom 4.116. See BAGD, s.v. δόξα, 2 .b, for additional references.

[28]Lietzmann, 43.

name is blasphemed among the gentile nations." Paul's citation replaces "my name" with "the name of God" and changes the order of the words to stress that phrase. The exile or Israelite suffering is no longer the cause of Gentile blasphemy of the name of God; rather the sins of Jews, especially temple robbery, transgress the law and so defile God's name.

A Jewish Exegetical Tradition

Of course, for this argument to hold one must be able to demonstrate that robbing Gentile temples is forbidden in the Torah for the honor of God's name. Joseph Barber Lightfoot almost a century ago and Gerhard Delling[29] more recently called attention to a series of passages in Philo and Josephus that suggest an exegetical tradition in Hellenistic (and possibly also Palestinian) Judaism that recognizes the "sanctity" of non-Jewish temples and so provides a framework for Paul's thought.

Philo argues in *De Spec. Leg. 1.53* that the proselyte Gentile and Jew are united by a common bond, the *τιμή* of the one God," for the Jewish lawgiver Moses "counsels them that they must not... deal in idle talk or revile with an unbridled tongue the gods whom others acknowledge, lest they on their part be moved to utter profane words against Him Who truly is."[30] The passage is based on Exod 22:27: "You shall not speak evil of the gods" (tr. from LXX). Blasphemy of foreign gods may lead others to say what is not lawful about the God who truly exists.

Philo says something similar in the second passage, *De Vita Mosis* 2.203: "Whoever curses god, let him bear the guilt of his sin; but he that nameth the name of the Lord, let him die" (Lev 24:15-16).[31] Philo says this passage, which forbids cursing the name of Israel's God, applies to images made by sculptors and painters, that is, the gods of the different cities:

> "For the world as we know it is full of idols of wood and stone, and suchlike images. We must refrain from speaking insultingly of these, lest any of Moses' disciples get into the habit of treating lightly the name "god' in general, for it is a title worthy of the highest respect and love."[32]

Thus the Jew is not to speak disrespectfully of the term "god," even if it is applied to an idol!

The third passage is Josephus, *Ant.* 4.207: "Let none blaspheme the gods which other cities revere, nor rob foreign temples, nor take treasure that has been dedicated in the name of any god."[33] Josephus first refers to Exod 22:27 (see Philo, *De Specialibus Legis* above), interpreting the term "gods" in the Septuagint as the gods of the Gentiles. Josephus next claims that Deut 7:25 (which commands Israel to burn cult statues and not to covet or take the silver or

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[29]Lightfoot, *Notes,* 262-63; Gerhard Delling, "Josephus und die heidnischen Religionen," *Studien zum Neuen Testament und zum Hellenistischen Judentum. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1950-1968* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 45-52.

[30]The translation is that of F. Colson, *Philo* (LCL; London: William Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937) 7.129.

[31]Translation from Colson, LCL 6.549-551.

[32]*De Vit. Mos.* 2.205 (Colson, LCL 6.551).

[33]Translation H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus* (LCL. London: William Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard, 1930) 4.575. Lightfoot, 263, already called attention to Deut 7:25-26 LXX in this context.

The Jew is not to speak disrespectfully of the term "god," even if it is applied to an idol!

gold on them, since it is an abomination) forbids robbery of pagan temples because it is blasphemy. Josephus says he adds nothing to the Torah in this interpretation (*Ant.* 4.196). Philo and Josephus understand the OT in the same way, which suggests a common exegetical tradition. In the fourth passage (*Contra Apionem* 2.237) Josephus says Jews are commanded "not to deride or blaspheme the gods recognized by others, out of respect for the very word "'God.'"[34]

Other Jewish writers reflect this tradition. Wis 13:6-7 regards the worship of parts of the creation as less evil than the worship of idols: "Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him. For as they live among his works they keep searching, and they trust in what they see, because the things that are seen are beautiful." The writer knows that idolatry leads to fornication (Wis 14:31) and other vices (Wis 14:24-26), yet credits some Gentiles with a true seeking after God. *Ep. Arist.* 15-16 holds that the same God that gave the Jews the law directs the kingdom of Ptolemy: "For they worship the overseer and founder god of all things, whom all do, but we, king, do too, calling Zeus by a different name."[35]

Paul uses this exegetical tradition to lodge his attack on Judaism. Jews have not done what the law demands. Thereby they have dishonored the name of God. Temple robbery means that there is no respect for the concept, the name, the honor (τιμή) of God. That demonstrates that the Jews are also guilty of disobeying the law and have no special status before God.

Paul did not select the three transgressions lightly. The are arranged in chiastic order to correlate with Rom 1:18-32. Paul first accused the Gentiles; now he demonstrates that the Jews are guilty of the very sins the Gentiles commit. Gentiles disregarded the knowledge available to them and worship the creature rather than the creator (Rom 1:18-25).[36] The Jews, who claim to have knowledge and truth in the law, did not

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[34]Delling, 46-47, argues that Josephus illuminates the context in which this interpretation developed. Jews needed a defense against the gentile accusation of impiety (*ἀσέβεια*). He refers to Josephus, C. *Ap.* 2.65 and 291 as especially relevant passages. Plato's Socrates (*Apol.* 24b) reports that Metelus accused him of destroying the youth and not revering the gods the city revered, but bringing in other, novel godlets. Juvenal 5.349 says the Jews *nil praeter nubes et caeli numen adorant* ("worship nothing except clouds and the sky god"). Jews appeared as atheists to the Greeks and Romans.

[35]See Peter Dalbert, *Die Theologie der hellenistisch-jüdischen Missions-Literatur unter ausschluß von Philo und Josephus* (Hamburg-Volksdorf: H. Reich, 1954) 19. At times non-Jewish Hellenism contributes to the language, as *Sib. Or.* 3.278 suggests when it calls God the "immortal begetter of gods and people." The phrase is probably the survival of a stock epic. Dalbert, 126.

[36]The doxology that concludes Rom 1:25 marks the end of the section on idolatry. Note that Rom 1:23 speaks of the cult statues of people and other living beings.

teach themselves and so also bring God into disrepute. Pagan idolatry issued in the desire to possess and impurity (Rom 1:24), with resultant sexual immorality (Rom 1:26-27) and the breakdown of social morality (Rom 1:28-31). The Jews too steal and are sexually impure (Rom 2:21-22). What the Gentile is accused of, the Jew also has done.

But it turns out to be even worse, for Paul shows that the Jews will be judged by a different standard than the Gentiles. "Those who sin without law will also be destroyed without law, and those who sin in the law will be judged through the law" (Rom 2:12). Thus the priority of the Jews, affirmed by Paul in Rom 1:16, 2:9,10, turns out to be a priority not only in the law, but also in judgment. The Jews rest on the Torah, get ethical guidance from the Torah, have knowledge and truth in the Torah, and therefore are also the teachers of the nations (Rom 2:17-20). The possession of the Torah makes sin all the worse, for "the obedience due to God is in proportion to the knowledge of him that one has been granted."[37] The glory of Judaism is also its burden.[38]

Paul draws out the implications in Rom 2:25-29. Membership in Judaism by circumcision has no benefit. It is action that counts, for that is what the law demands. Rom 2:29 formulates an enigmatic conclusion. Jewishness is no longer to be defined ethically, but functionally. It is the "hidden Jew," whose heart is circumcised by the Spirit, not the "public Jew," who has the letter of the law, whom God will praise. Greek and Jew, according to Paul, commit the same sins. Both stand condemned of disobedience. Knowledge of God does not benefit unless action agrees with it. Greek and Jew alike need radical divine action, the revelation of God's saving action (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-31), to counteract their bringing God's name into disrepute.

Afterword

There was an amazing process of apologetic rapprochement going on in this period. Aristeas, a Jew of about 130 B.C., argued that Jews and Greeks worshipped the same God under different names. The motif is familiar in the philosophy of the early Roman empire, as Pseudo-Aristotle, *De Mundo* 7 and Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2.52ff. show. The idea of the one god under many names lent itself well to Jewish thinkers, who claimed to know the One God in the Torah. Aristobulus, a Jewish philosopher, was concerned, like Josephus, to show the superiority of Jewish thought to Greek.[39]

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[37]Weiß, 126.

[38]This paper was completed before I read the important article by D. B. Garlington, "*ΙΕΡΟΣΥΛΕΙΝ* and the Idolatry of Israel (Romans 2:22)," *NTS* 36 (1990) 142-50. He asks the question, 'how could Israel *qua* Israel have been guilty of the sort of behaviour depicted by either sense of *lεροσυλεῖν*?" (p. 142). He agrees with Cranfield (1.169) that there is no longer any idolatry in Israel. That may be true in Palestine, but the situation in the diaspora may have been quite different. Garlington then argues that the sacrilege of the Jew consists in "elevating the law of Moses to a position of unwarranted devotion and bestowing on it a permanence it was never intended to have in God's ultimate plan" (p. 151). I find G's argument paralleling the sin of the Gentile with that of the Jew persuasive. However, the passages from Philo and Josephus appear to me decisive for a more literal interpretation of "temple robbery;" the Jew's apparent keeping of the law actually contradicts the law. The law is thus not the object of idolatry, but the means to it and the consequent "defaming of God's name." G does little with that notice in 2:23-24.

[39]His writings are lost. The surviving fragments, preserved mainly by Eusebius of Caesarea, are conveniently gathered by A.-M. Denis, *Fragmenta Pseudepigraphorum Quae Supersunt Graeca* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 217-228.

Yet he had a tolerance for Greeks that is unparalleled in Jewish literature.[40] Another Jewish scholar, Artapanus, even credited Moses with originating the worship of animals in Egyptian religion.

Paul appears to judge non-Jewish religion harshly. But one implication of this study is that Paul judges Judaism even more severely. Both Gentile and Jew stand under the condemnation of God. But Paul also affirms aspects of non-Jewish religion, just as he affirms Judaism. He, like a Jewish apologist, points out that the confession of the "One God" makes tribal religion impossible (Rom 3:28-30).[41] The One God justifies all alike. But Paul too can affirm the existence of the gods (1 Cor 8:5-6), while affirming the One God in phrases borrowed from Greek thought (Rom 11:36, 1 Cor 8:6).

Fred Danker frequently reminded students not to use the word "pagan" for non-Jews and non-Christians, as if they had no religion. I trust that this context oriented examination of one small text will be accepted by him as an affirmation of his lifelong commitment to detail, well represented in his revision of BAG into BAGD. Rykle Borger gave that work an accolade: "Fortunately... the American translation and revision [BAGD] is still available in the bookstores—we hope that the University of Chicago Press (Chicago and London) will market BAGD for a long time!"[42] May Fred Danker live to complete the revision presently occupying him.

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[40]Dalbert, 105.

[41]Christoph Demke, "'Ein Gott und viele Herren': Die Verkündigung des einen Gottes in den Briefen des Paulus," *EvT* 36 (1976): 473-94.

[42]Rykle Borger, "Zum Stande der neutestamentlichen Lexikographie," *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 241 (1989):103-146. The citation is from pp. 145-46 in my free translation.

The "Religious Power of Lawlessness" (*Katechon*) as Precursor of the "Lawless One" (*Anomos*) 2 Thess 2:6-7

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Fred Danker is, for many reasons, held in high esteem as colleague, teacher, scholar, and friend. He is the person who not only introduced us to the Benefactor of the Graeco-Roman world,[1] but who himself has functioned as the benefactor of all English speaking New Testament scholars.[2] His work on the Greek Lexicon of the New Testament[3] gave us a tool much improved over the original by his numerous corrections and additions. One of his additions, found under *katechō*, refers to his own article in the F. W. Gingrich-Festschrift which certainly sheds new light on *katechō* in Romans 1:18.[4] This entry prompted me to look again at the use and meaning of that verb in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7.[5]

We might begin by repeating some of "the varied meanings of this interesting verb"[6]: e.g., to have a legal (or an improper) claim upon a person or property; to lay hold of, to take possession of, to arrest, to seize, to impound, to confiscate. "The verb is

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[1]F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1982).

common in this connection in respect to arrest for non-payment of debt,"[7] to oppress, to suppress (e.g., 1 Macc 6:27), to hinder (Gen 24:56), to detain (Judg 13:15; Codex A has *biazein* instead), to restrain, to occupy (esp. of rulers, Liddle-Scott), to prevail. The verb can be synonymous with *kratein* (e.g., POxy 237), and in Isaiah 40:22 we read that God is *ho katechōn ton gyron tēs gēs*, the one who controls the circle of the earth. Those who, like Dibelius, favor a mythological interpretation frequently refer to an Egyptian prayer in which Horus is invoked as *katechōn drakonta* (the one who restrains the dragon), or to the text of an ostracon: "Cronos, you who restrain (*ho katechōn*) the wrath of all humans, restrain the wrath of Hor, the son whom Mary bore, and do not permit him to speak." The LXX Concordance of Hatch and Redpath lists 17 Hebrew or Aramaic words for which *katechein* is used. This breadth of usage is

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[2]F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age According to St. Luke. A Commentary on the Third Gospel* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1972). —*idem*, completely revised and expanded edition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). *Luke. Proclamation Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). —*idem*, second edition, revised and enlarged (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). Of his many articles only three are noted here. "1 Peter 1:24–2:17, A Consolatory Pericope," *ZNW* 58 (1967):93-102. "2 Peter 3:10 and Psalm of Solomon 17:10," *ZNW* 53 (1962):82-86. "Second Peter," *Proclamation Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

[3]W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. Second edition, revised and augmented (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[4]F. W. Danker, "Under Contract. A Form-Critical Study of Linguistic Adaptations in Romans," in E. H. Barth and R. E. Cocroft, editors, *Festschrift to Honor F. Wilbur Gingrich, Lexicographer, Scholar, Teacher, and Committed Christian Layman* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 91-114. Instead of translating *anthrōpōn...katechontōn* of Rom 1:18 with "of men who...suppress" (thus W. Bauer and the RSV; the NEB has "stifling" which is not better) Danker proposed: "Among the numerous Hellenistic usages of *katechein* is the sense of legal claim.... In Rom 1:18 the point is not that the persons described are 'restraining' the truth, for in that case the qualifying phrase *en adikia* would be tautologous, but rather are 'laying claim' to the truth while at the same time vitiating such claims through their conduct... 'they claim an *interest* in truth but are *disinterested* in justice'" (p. 93).

[5]It came as a surprise that neither the Passage Index of the Lexicon by J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2 vols. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988], vol. 2, p. 367), nor the references in its Greek-English Index deal with *katechō* in 2 Thess 2:6-7 at all. Vol. 1, pages viii–x of the Introduction give reasons for a new type of lexicon. In trying to use this new lexicon I became ever more grateful to Danker's second edition which is a gold mine of information.

[6]J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament Illustrated from Papyri and other Non-Literary Sources* (London, 1952), 336. For the many usages the following were also consulted: W. Dittenberger, ed., *Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*. 2 vols., 1903-1905. —*idem*, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*. 4 vols., 3rd edition, 1915-24. —F. Preisigke and E. Keissling, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden mit Einschluss der griechischen Inschriften, Aufschriften, Ostraka, Mumienschilder usw. aus Aegypten*. 3 vols., Berlin, 1925-31. —H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th edition (Oxford, 1940). There we find 10 entries under the transitive and 4 under the intransitive use of *katecho*.

[7]Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek NT*, 336.

to be kept in mind as we approach our verses in 2 Thessalonians 2. Apart from our two verses this verb occurs 16 times in the New Testament. Of these there are only two instances where the context requires us to translate this verb with "to restrain" (Luke 4:42; Philemon 13).[8] Nor should we forget that the *katechōn* is not a term used in Jewish or Hellenistic apocalypses for a figure that would "restrain," or "delay" the ultimate onslaught of evil before the end.

Commentators, beginning with Tertullian, generally take "the man of lawlessness," the *anomos* (2:3,8) as the implied object of *katechon* (*-ōn*). Second, they generally translate the verb with "to restrain," in a good sense, rather than in a hostile sense. Third, they identify the *katechon* (*-ōn*) with the empire and the emperor,[9] or with the preaching of the gospel and the apostle Paul,[10] or with God's apocalyptic timetable, his plan, which "restrains" the *anomos* from appearing or "delays" his appearance. Its personification is then either the angel of the Lord, or occasionally the *katechōn* is identified with God himself[11] who restrains the *anomos*. All of these hypotheses have at least one fatal flaw. They are unable to explain why the author of this short letter used the word *katechon* (*-ōn*) instead of emperor, or governor, or apostle, or angel, or God. The writer did speak of God in verses 4 and 11 of this apocalyptic section, and if he had assigned a delaying function to a heavenly person and power in accordance with the tradition originating from Hab 2:3, 1 QpHab 7:1-14, etc., why would he have used the verb *katechein* rather than the *chronizein* of Hab 2:3 (LXX)?[12]

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[8]A third case would be Rom 1:18, except that Fred Danker has shown otherwise; see note 4.

[9]Tertullian, De resurrectione Carnis, chap. 24, identified the neuter participle with the empire and the masculine participle with the emperor Claudius (C.E. 41-54). He presupposed that the Paul who wrote Romans 13:1-7 was the author of this letter. A recent interpreter who is sympathetic to this approach is D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 240: "'apocalyptic' or 'metahistory' cannot begin yet because history, which includes the 'restraining hand' of the Roman Empire, is still in possession of the field." Cf. also L. Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 226.

[10]O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*. E. T. by Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 164-67. —J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*. E. T. by F. Clarke (London: SCM Press, 1959), 36-40.

[11]A review of options is found in O. Betz, "Der Katechon," *NTS* 9 (1962-63):276-91. Basic for all interpretations of *katechon* in terms of "delay," and of God, or his angel as subject of the delaying or restraining action is A. Strobel, *Untersuchungen zum eschatologischen Verzögerungsproblem auf Grund der spaetjüdisch-urchristlichen Geschichte von Habakuk 2.2ff* (Leiden: Brill, 1961). W. Trilling, *Der Zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher. KEKK XIV* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), 88-102. R. Aus, "The Relevance of Isaiah 66:7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thessalonians 1," *ZNW* 67 (1976):252-268. —*idem*, "God's plan and God's Power: Isaiah 66 and the Restraining Factors of 2 Thess 2:6-7," *JBL* 96 (1977):537-53. *idem, II Thessalonians. Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 206-13. G. S. Holland, *The Tradition that You Received from Us: 2 Thessalonians in the Pauline Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 67-73 and 91-128. F. W. Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians. JSNT Suppl. Series 30* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 57-62.

[12]According to Trilling, *Der Zweite Brief* (note 11), p. 92, the theocentric interpretation of this participle in terms of "delay" is the best

C. H. Giblin, S.J., has presented us with the most thorough interpretation of 2 Thess 2:1-12.[13] According to him *katechein* is to be interpreted in a hostile sense. It refers to "the seizing power" of a frenzied false prophet who upset the community with his announcement of the presence of the Day of the Lord (2:2). The implied object of the *katechon* (*-ōn*) is not the *anomos* but "you," the community in Thessalonica.[14] One problem, however, remains unresolved in Giblin's magnificent study. We are not led to understand why the ouster of this one false prophet (2:7b) in one particular community should have cosmic apocalyptic consequences.

At this point it is customary to quote Augustine's famous "I don't know" what and whom our writer meant by *katechon* (*-ōn*),[15] and having done so interpreters generally continue to suggest another hypothesis. We too will follow this procedure in the realization that the history of the interpretation of these two verses, as narrated by Bornemann[16] and Giblin and others,[17] should caution anyone from mistaking a hypothesis for assured results.

We are on safe ground when we note the function of the elaborate thanksgiving section (1:3-12), which introduces themes to be developed or taken up again, affirms basic convictions shared by the writer and his audience, and emphasizes the present experience of persecution endured by them. Note the present tenses in verses 4, 5, and 6, which refer to suffering and the endurance of tribulations in the present by the recipients of this letter. The writer consoles his readers that their present suffering will be rewarded in the future and that their persecutors "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction" (1:9).[18] When will this be? Our author leaves no doubt that the apocalyptic reversal will take place "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire," that is, "when

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there is. Cf. also Aus, "The Relevance of Isaiah" (note 11), Commentary, pp. 195 and 211, "God is the one who graciously restrains the second advent of Jesus." It seems to me incomprehensible why the subject "God" should then have been omitted. After all, the writer had no qualms in telling us in the same section that "God is sending (present tense!) upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false." Deception in the present forms an inclusio around this section (cf. 2:3, 10-11). There would be no reason to avoid saying that it is *God* who is restraining the Lawless One, or delaying his appearance.

[13]C. H. Giblin, S.J., *The Threat to Faith. An Exegetical and Theological Re-examination of 2 Thessalonians 2. Analecta Biblica 31* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967).

[14]Giblin, *The Threat to Faith*, 167-234.

[15]De Civitate Dei 20.19: *"Et ideo nos, qui nescimus, quod illi sciebant, pervenire cum labore ad id, quod sensit Apostolus, cupimus nec valemus: praesertim quia et illa, quae addidit, hunc sensum faciunt obscurirorum"*; (and thus we, who do not know what they [the Thessalonians] knew, desire and yet are unable even with toil to discover what the apostle meant, especially because his additions [which refers to the following verses 7-8] make his meaning still more obscure). Concerning "the mystery of lawlessness" the bishop of Hippo confessed: *"Ego prorsus, quid dixerit, me fateor ignorare."*

[16]W. Bornemann, *Die Thessalonicherbriefe. KEK* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht, 1894), 425.

[17]Cf. J. E. Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians. ICC* (New York: Scribners, 1912), 259-65. E. Best, *A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (London: Black, 1972), 290-302.

[18]On the opening thanksgiving section of 2 Thess see: D. Schmidt, "The Authenticity of 2 Thessalonians: Linguistic Arguments," *SBL Seminar Papers* (1983), 289-96. Holland, *The Tradition* (note 11), 35-43, 113.

he comes *on that day*" (1:7,10). Deftly, the author[19] has introduced the catchword of "the day" of the Lord.

We are on somewhat less safe ground when we assume that the prophetic oracle of 2:2, "the day of the Lord has come," was uttered in response to persecution experienced by the Thessalonians. The "opponents," who believed that the day of the Lord was a present reality, based their conviction also on prophetic inspiration,[20] and they may also have been aware of traditions like Mark 13:8, or 1 Peter 4:17. The latter text boldly announces the beginning of the final judgment in the "fiery ordeal" of experienced persecutions in which the "genuineness of faith" is tested (1 Pet 1:6-7; 4:12,17). Moreover the opponents of 2 Thess may have made use of a text like 1 Thess 2:15-16 according to which the wrath of God has come with finality (*ephthasen... eis telos*) upon the Jews. At any rate, our author refers to "a letter purporting to be from us" (2 Thess 2:2) which, unless a pseudonymous letter is meant,[21] probably points to 1 Thessalonians. It is important to note that the slogan of 2 Thess 2:2 is not that the parousia of the Lord has already occurred,[22] but that "the day of the Lord has come."[23] The opponents would probably agree with our author that the parousia of Christ lies in the future. But in distinction to our author they probably held that "the day of the Lord" occurs in history, before the end, prior to Christ's parousia, namely, now, in the experienced tribulations of their present.

Our writer, on the other hand, endeavored to dehystericise an apocalyptic enthusiasm and unmask as deception the prophetic interpretation of certain traditions and experienced tribulations. Without demeaning the suffering of the people he placed it into a new perspective for them by presenting it as a penultimate evil, which is to be expected whenever the gospel is disobeyed (1:8b; 2:11-12). By means of an apocalyptic timetable he set out to refute the notion that "the day of the Lord" is present already. For him that day will climax in the destruction of the *anomos* and the final judgment at the parousia of Christ (2:8b; cf. "when he comes on that day," 1:10). While the opponents apparently distinguished "the day of the Lord" from Christ's "parousia" our writer regarded them as one and the same "day." Furthermore, he characterized the present as time prior to the parousia of the Lawless One (2:3,8) and he added three distinct features to the present.

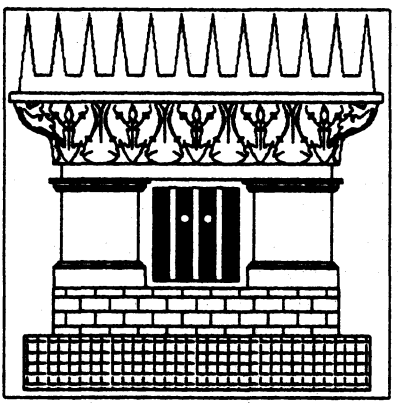
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[19]On the question of Pauline authorship see: Giblin, *The Threat to Faith*; Schmidt, "The Authenticity of 2 Thessalonians"; G. Krodel, "2 Thessalonians," *Proclamation Commentaries* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 73-96. In favor of Pauline authorship: Best, *A Commentary*, 50-58, and R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence. Pauline Rhetoric and Millenarian Piety* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 1-18.

[20]Cf. "*dia pneumatos*," 2:2b. Note that the first explicit exhortation in this letter (2:15) does not include prophetic inspiration as authentic source for the apostolic traditions.

[21]Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, 185, argued that the phrase "by letter purporting to be from us" (2:2) refers to a misunderstanding of 1 Thess which was so gross that it raised the possibility in Paul's mind that a forgery had occurred. For different views see Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (note 11), 56-57; Krodel, "2 Thessalonians" (Note 19), 84-86. Earlier discussions of *hōs di hēmōn* are found in Frame, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (note 17), 246-48.

[22]Pace Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (note 19), 97, 176, 187, 189, 191-92, who thought that 2 Thess 2 was designed to "demolish the belief" that the parousia was present already (192); cf. also Trilling (note



First of all, the present is the time of "rebellion" (*apostasia*, 2:3) in relation to the apostolic tradition transmitted "by word of mouth or by letter" (2:15). Second, it is the time in which "the *mystery* of lawlessness is already at work" (2:7), which may be an ironic tongue in cheek reference to mystery cults[24] that promise salvation, but engender lawlessness (*anomia*) in the present as foretaste of the revelation of the Lawless One (*anomos*) and of the final judgment to come. The third characterization of the present is found in the neuter participle *to katechon* which the readers are presently experiencing.[25] Its personification is *ho katechōn* (2:6-7), who operates[26] in the present until he is ousted[27] according to God's apocalyptic timetable.[28] Then the *anomos* will be revealed (2:8). Hence the *katechōn* is the precursor of the *anomos*. But in what sense?

Remembering that the section of 2:3-12 belongs to the apocalyptic genre and recalling the emphasis on tribulation and persecution in 1:4-9, as well as the variety of meanings and usages connected with *katechein*, I would like to suggest (1) that the verb has essentially a hostile sense here in accordance with the apocalyptic genre; (2) that, as Giblin has argued, the implied object of *katechon* is "you," the recipients of the letter, whose faith and endurance has been praised (1:3-4), and (3) that *katechon* (*-ōn*) refers to the religious/political powers within the empire, to its culture, and its representatives who control, suppress, and lay claims upon the saints and who "believe what is false" (2:11). Some apocalypses, like Daniel, know of a succession of evil empires and rulers culminating in one of

11), 78-80. Already Best had called attention to the fact that the slogan of the enthusiasts was not that the parousia of Christ had already come. "If they had read 1 Thess 4:13-18 they would not have claimed that the parousia had taken place, for they were certainly not raptured" (note 17, p. 278). For a critique of Jewett see Hughes (note 11), 81-84.

[23]Holland (note 11), 98-101; however, I doubt that the author of 2 Thess distinguished "the day of the Lord" from the day of the parousia of Jesus Christ, thus thinking in terms of "two" days (idem, p. 104).

[24]Cf. Holland (note 11), 113-14; Jewett (note 19), 168-71.

[25]On the importance of *oidate* as present experiential knowledge see Giblin (note 13), 159-66. The text does *not* read: you know *what* the katechon is.

[26]The Greek verb which is to be supplied in v. 7b (*monon ho katechōn arti...*) is either the indicative, or imperative, of *einai*, to be, or of *energeisthai*, to be at work, from the prior clause.

[27]Thus the translation of Giblin (note 13), 37, 247. However, his endeavor to avoid the presence of an apocalyptic timetable in the argumentation of 2 Thess 2 is not shared.

[28]An apocalyptic timetable is indicated by the adverb *nyn* in relation to the articular infinitive with *eis* and the phrase *en tō heautou kairō* in verse 6 and the adverbs *ēdē, arti, tote* and the conjunction *heōs* in verse 7.

supreme evil (cf. Dan 11:36, Rev 17:9-11). In our text there are only two such figures, the future *anomos* and his predecessor, the present *katechōn.*

The empire and its magistrates are no longer seen as divinely instituted authority who are "God's servant *for your good,*" punishing evil and *praising good conduct* (Rom 13:1-5). But the empire has not yet been presented as the beast of Rev 13 or the harlot of Babylon (Rev 17). Rather it is characterized as religious-political power of lawlessness and deception that possesses, arrests, seizes, impounds, confiscates, suppresses, lays claims upon, and in so doing causes tribulations for the saints in the present. Its disappearance will signal the revelation of the *anomos* (v. 8a) whose deceptive, lawless powers are operative already (v. 7a). Simultaneously deception and error constitute the judgment of God in the present (vv. 11-12), prior to the final judgment "on that day" (1:8-10). God is in control of his timetable, and this timetable is part of the apostolic tradition which the Thessalonians "were taught by us" (2:15; cf. 2:5).

It may well be that our author chose this vague word *katechein* because some local magistrates had used it in connection with actions against Christians in that city. From the perspective of local civic authorities, religious and political alike, Christians were in need of being "restrained," perhaps even "suppressed." Both activities are covered by the verb *katechein.* Perhaps our writer was alluding to financial claims made against Christians in Thessalonica (cf. Acts 17:9). He could not be more specific in describing such actions of intended suppression lest he blow his cover of pseudonymity. Yet *katechein* is sufficiently vague to cover all aspects of chicanery, short of martyrdom, under which Christians felt they suffered. Our author would like his readers to understand that the activity of the *katechōn* signals neither the presence of the ultimate evil in history, which he depicted in terms of religious deception (2:9-10), nor the presence of the "day of the Lord" which signals the victory of Christ slaying the *anomos* "with the Spirit from his mouth" (v. 8b). History prior to the day of the Lord Jesus has two periods, the present time of the *katechōn* and the future period of the *anomos.* Both periods are distinct, and both are represented by nameless figures. However, these two periods may not be collapsed into one lest the revelation of the *anomos* with pomp, circumstance, and deception be hailed as the revelation of Jesus Christ. Yet both periods are related to each other in that "the mystery of lawlessness" which will be incarnated in the Lawless One is already operative in his precursor. This *katechōn* represents the all-encompassing religious-political claims of society. He will disappear from the scene, because he is only the forerunner of the Antichrist.

Example Stories?[1]

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Since Jülicher's epoch-making work on the parables,[2] it has become customary to designate the four parables in the Gospel of Luke—the Good Samaritan (10:30-37), the Rich Fool (12:16-20), the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31), and the Pharisee and the Publican (18:9-14)—as example stories or example narratives. Jülicher offers the following definition (tr. by WCL): "Thus this third category of *παραβολαί* of Jesus is that of example stories, i.e., narratives which present a general sentence of a religious-ethical character in the dress of a particularly impressively formulated individual case, 'by the evidence of the deed confirm[ing] the general truth.'"[3] Another definition is offered by Hauck, "Then we have... illustrative stories in which the idea is presented without figurative garb. Lk. alone offers this type of parable in the 4 passages 10:30-37; 12:16-21; 16:19-31; 18:9-14."[4] Most interpreters of the Gospel of Luke or of the parables have accepted this distinction, e.g., Eta Linnemann, Dan O. Via, Jr., and others. It is interesting that Lucetta Mowry distinguishes exactly these same four parables from all the others on the basis of another difference: she considers all parables as secular with four exceptions: the Rich Fool, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Publican and the Pharisee, and the Good Samaritan,[5] although she does not designate them as example stories.

To consider them as examples is suggested by the admonition of Jesus after the parable of the Good Samaritan, "Go and do likewise" (10:37), and by the generalization at the end of the Pharisee and the Publican, "for every one who exalts himself

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[1]It is difficult to write an article on a subject in the Gospel of Luke in honor of a man who has written two editions of a commentary on Luke—*Jesus and the New Age According to St. Luke* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1972), and *Jesus and the New Age. A Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel completely revised and expanded* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988)—and two editions of the Proclamation Commentary on Luke—*Luke*. Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976 and 1987)—not to mention articles. However, I will make the endeavor because it would be unseemly to forego an opportunity to express my admiration, appreciation, and gratitude to Fred Danker for all of his contributions. The subject of my article is not one that Danker has dealt with in his writings to my knowledge, and I hope that he (and other readers) will find it of interest.

[2]Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1910). This work was never translated into English.

[3]Ibid., Erster Teil, 114.

[4]Friedrich Hauck, "*παραβολη*," *TDNT* V, 744-761, quote on p. 752.

[5]Lucetta Mowry, "Parable," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, III (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962):650.

will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (18:14).

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or whether they were created by the tradition between Jesus and Luke or whether they were created by Luke. Danker does not support the question of a reconstructed historical Jesus and the authenticity of the teaching materials. He holds that "when the commentary states that 'Jesus said' this or that, the reader will know that it is Luke's Jesus who speaks."[6] Although the question of the authenticity of the example stories is not the main issue to be treated in this article, it is an indispensable prerequisite for the matter under consideration.

The Jesus Seminar, which has been discussed in the newspapers, is not always considered the best means of dealing with the historicity of the teachings of Jesus and the events in his life. It has recently published its findings on the parables,[7] arrived at by voting after thorough discussion. This group of scholars includes William Baird, David Balch, William Beardslee, Marcus Borg, Eugene Boring, Dennis C. Duling, and many others who have earned a scholarly reputation through teaching and publications. The seminar attempts to determine whether specific materials of the Gospels are authentic Jesus materials or not. Whether one can agree with this procedure, the enterprise itself is definitely legitimate. Their judgment on the parables is the first product of their long process of investigation. The book uses four colors as follows:

Red: Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it.

Pink: Jesus probably said something like this.

Gray: Jesus did not say this, but the ideas contained in it are close to his own.

Black: Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later or different tradition.

The result of their deliberations in regard to our four parables is as follows:

Red: The Good Samaritan, but only Luke 10:30b-35 (36-37 is black).

Pink: The Rich Farmer (Fool), but only Luke 12:16b-20 (21 is black); The Pharisee and the Publican, but only Luke 18:10-14a.

Gray: The Rich Man and Lazarus, but only Luke 16:19-26 (27-31 is black).

In order to deal only with the parable material that has the highest claim to authenticity, the "black" sections will be omitted from further consideration. However, I will accept for now the "pink" and "gray" materials as authentically spoken by Jesus.

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[6]*Jesus and the New Age,* revised, 20.

[7]Robert W. Funk, Bernard Brandon Scott, and James R. Butts, *The Parables of Jesus. Red Letter Edition* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988).

Recently, some scholars have deviated from the general consensus that these four parables are example stories and have argued that at least in the original setting of Jesus' own teaching these four stories were really parables. By this assertion, they mean that Jesus did not simply encourage imitation or avoidance of the behavior discussed in the story, but that he meant to indicate by them a characteristic of the kingdom of God, just as in the other parables. While they agree that Luke understood them (or misunderstood them?) as example stories, they maintain that these parables must be treated as metaphors before they can be understood in the setting of the life of Jesus. The question to be investigated in this article is whether it is justified to say that these example stories were originally true parables that must be understood metaphorically.

Funk, Breech, Crossan, and Scott are representative scholars who think the example stories were originally parables to be understood metaphorically. Their arguments need to be considered.

Funk considers at length the story of the Good Samaritan and argues that it is not an example story but a metaphor. Many interpreters have noticed the difficulty in the context of the parable and the discrepancy which exists. The question in Luke 10:29, "Who is my neighbor?" is not answered by the narrative, but the parable answers the question in 10:36, "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" In other words, the first question asks for the *object* of neighborly love, while the parable really answers the question of the *subject* of neighborly love. This is one of the difficulties of the parable. While this issue enters into the argumentation of Funk and the others, the main point of their argument is different. After the callous behavior of the priest and the Levite, the listener would expect a lay person to be the helper, so that the story could confirm the secret anticlericalism of the hearer. In fact, a different point is made. The helper turns out to be a person whom the victim could not expect to help, indeed does not want help from. The literal, i.e., historical, significance of the Samaritan gives the parable its edge. Thus "the 'logic' of everydayness is broken upon the 'logic' of the parable. It is the juxtaposition of the two logics that turns the Samaritan, and hence the parable, into a metaphor."[8] "If it is the literal meaning of Samaritan that provides the initial jolt to the everyday mentality embodied in the story, it is the non-literal meaning that triggers, through the parable, a whole new vista—i.e., the penumbral field.... The parable is both just a story of a good Samaritan and a parabolic metaphor opening onto a referential totality which is informed by a new vision of reality that shatters the everyday view."[9] Funk does not discuss the other example stories in this context. It would be interesting to see how the other narratives could be understood as metaphors.

Breech and Crossan offer further clarification and interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan as a metaphor. For Breech the force of this parable, which he calls "The man going down the road who fell among robbers," is "that superabundant power out of which the third man lives, and which he communicates to the innkeeper."[10] "Jesus' parable of the man going down the

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[8]Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 212-13.

[9]Funk, *Language*, 213f.

[10]James Breech, *The Silence of Jesus. The Authentic Voice of the Historical Man* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 180.

road quite clearly construes actuality as charged with superabundant vitality, the power that sustains those who are human in the personal mode of living in story" (183). Breech does not discuss the other three example stories.

Crossan is more complicated. He considers the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-36 only) a "parable of reversal" and says, "good (clerics) and bad (Samaritan) become, respectively, bad and good."[11] But this is on the metaphorical level. He concludes that the literal point would be "that one should help the neighbor in need." "The metaphorical point is that *just so* does the Kingdom of God break abruptly into human consciousness and demand the overturn of prior values, closed options, set judgments, and established conclusions" (65). Crossan also classifies the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican as "parables of reversal." In these parables it is easier to see the reversal clearly, with more clarity than in the Good Samaritan, for the reversal unexpectedly happens to the persons in the parables. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, it would be unexpected only to the hearers of the story. He draws again rather abstract conclusions about the point of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The parable must be restricted to Luke 16:19-26. He distinguishes between the literal point, which is a strikingly *amoral* description of situational reversal, and "its metaphorical point [which] was the reversal of expectation and situation, of value and judgment, which is the concomitant of the Kingdom's advent" (68). According to Crossan, the kingdom's disruptive advent is metaphorically portrayed and linguistically made present. The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican is limited to Luke 18:10-14a. Neither 18:9 (Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others) nor 18:14b (every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted) must be considered as a part of the parable; both are applications which do not fit the parable, the latter because it elsewhere appears separately. Crossan says that "the metaphorical challenge is again clear: the complete, radical, polar reversal of accepted human judgment, even or especially of religious judgment, whereby the Kingdom forces its way into human awareness" (69). The parable of the Rich Fool is not a "parable of reversal," according to Crossan, but is included with other parables (Treasure, Friend at Midnight, etc.) in the group he calls "action parables." This parable is only briefly discussed in his book, but in an article Crossan also interprets it as an original parable and not a negative example story. He says, "the literal, and quite amoral, point is the tragic or pathetic story of a rich businessman making good, solid administrative plans while death stands waiting for nightfall; the metaphorical point is that well known from so many of the other parables: the necessity of making immediately a proper decision when confronted with the ultimate urgency of Jesus' message concerning the kingdom of God."[12]

Scott's is the newest book on the parables.[13] He concedes that in the Gospel of Luke they are example stories. But he thinks it is suspicious that they occur *only* in

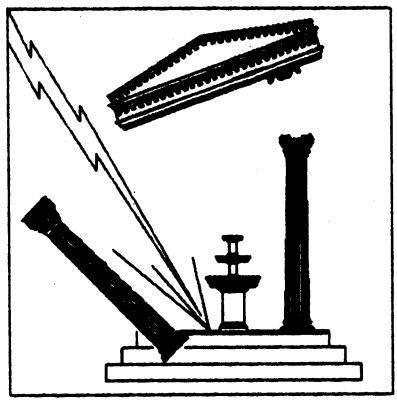
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[11]John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables. The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 64.

[12]Crossan, "Parable and Example in the Teaching of Jesus," *Semeia* 1 (1974):79.

[13]Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable. A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

Luke, so that the criterion of multiple attestation raises questions about whether the genre of example story belongs among those genres used by Jesus. He refers to Funk and agrees that the Samaritan cannot be an example because this literal sense of the parable would create a shock to the (Jewish) hearers. Scott then refers to metonymy, which is defined "as a linguistic substitution in which a thing is named not directly but by way of something adjacent to it either temporally or spatially" (29). He believes these four parables exhibit metonymic characters rather than metaphoric ones. He suggests an alternative to Jülicher's example story: "the issue of transference revolves not around behavior to be imitated or avoided (example story) but around the question of what part of the real world something is adjacent to" (30). Scott quotes Funk again: "Why, he asks, if the parable is to be an example of neighborliness, did the storyteller choose a Samaritan, since such a figure would be an obvious scandal to a Jewish audience and not a likely example of 'goodness'" (46). "The literal significance makes the parable a metaphor, but then it is no longer an example for neighborliness" (46). But Scott also says that Luke assumes that the parable is about "neighborliness" (48), but in this way he has bypassed the literal level for a secondary level. It is a transference from referent to parable. And again: "The narration of Luke's Gospel had determined the story as an example story, an example of being a good neighbor. Funk challenged this by questioning the Lukan point of view as arbiter of meaning and by imagining the parable as metaphor within the language of Jesus. The result was a quite different reading of the parable. Yet the parable still exhibits themes (Samaritan, care of neighbor) that are typical of Luke" (68). In his later analysis (189-202), Scott argues again that the hearer in the time



of Jesus would be unable to identify with the Samaritan, that one would expect an Israelite (lay person) as the third man who would have compassion on the victim, and that "the story subverts the effort to order reality into the known hierarchy of priest, Levite, and Israelite" (201). Thus, the boundaries are wiped out. "Likewise in A Rich Man Clothed in Purple, many themes from Luke are on display: the contrast between wealth and poverty, the use of father Abraham, and the failure of belief in the resurrection. But only this last theme is suspect, for it betrays the concerns of the early community and not those of a Jewish Jesus" (68). Scott discusses the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican under the title "Two Men Went Up to the Temple." He denies it is originally an example story although Luke treats it as such. "There is no lesson to learn!" (97). Instead, the "parable subverts the metaphorical structure that sees the kingdom of God as temple.... In the parable the holy is outside the kingdom and the unholy is inside the kingdom" (97). The parable of the Rich Fool is entitled "The Land of a Rich Man." After a thorough analysis, Scott draws the conclusion that

Is it so impossible that Jesus himself taught by means of example stories?

the man mismanaged the miracle of the great harvest because he did not provide for the needs of others; this is idolatry (127-40). After arguing convincingly that the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus originally ended at v. 26, which means that the section concerning the resurrection from the dead is a later addition, Scott analyzes it and sees the main point as follows: "The parable subverts the complacency that categorizes reality into rich and poor or any other division. The standard is not moral behavior as individual, isolated acts but the ability to go through the gate, metaphorically, to the other side, solidarity" (159).

In summary, we see that all four authors are concerned with demonstrating that these four accounts were originally true parables, to be interpreted as metaphors that taught a reality of the kingdom of God. All authors agree that Luke reported them as example stories and put them in such a context that they could be understood as examples. Since Luke enlarged the stories and set them in a specific framework, it is quite natural that they have been so understood from Jülicher to the present.

Is this a correct view? Is it so impossible that Jesus himself taught by means of example stories? In my view, the position of these four authors is not convincing. Let me list some of my criticisms.

1. The labors of the authors to substantiate the exact metaphorical content of these parables are too obvious. Granted, a number of Jesus' parables (Unjust Steward, Unjust Judge) are difficult to understand because we no longer know the circumstances of their origin. But this is not true of the literal level of these four example stories. They all have a convincing meaning on the most literal level and do not need a metaphorical interpretation. Crossan concedes as much when he distinguishes between the literal and the metaphorical level. It is needlessly complicated to see the Good Samaritan as an example story on the literal level, while also maintaining that Jesus meant it metaphorically and Luke reconverted it into an example story.

2. It was eminently feasible for Jesus to use a Samaritan as a good example. Certainly, a Jewish lay person would have served as well, but Jesus was willing to shock his hearers in many of his sayings or narratives. The example of a Samaritan makes the parable distinctly sharper, more cutting, and therefore very memorable.

3. To see the parable of the Good Samaritan as a parable of reversal makes it very complex and not in keeping with Jesus' normal methods of teaching. There is as little reversal here as in the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. Reversal is found frequently in the reported teachings of Jesus, but it is always different from Crossan's "metaphorical point."

4. When Crossan speaks of the metaphorical reversal in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, it is hard to make the distinction from the *amoral* reversal of which he speaks in the literal reading of the parable. He seems to indicate that peopie have to change their expectations about the kingdom, that those who, humanly speaking, are deemed closest to the kingdom will be excluded and vice versa. Perhaps he means

that the reversal has to take place in this world and in the minds of the hearers rather than as a reversal in the other world. But this would certainly not be easy for the original hearers of the parable to conclude from the story.

5. In critique of Crossan, it must be said that the "metaphorical" statements make these parables much more complicated than they are and need to be.

6. By classifying the parable of the Rich Fool as an action parable, Crossan suggests that something must take place, that an action is required. Therefore, the parable actually becomes a (negative) example. The "necessity of making immediately a proper decision" does not apply here because the decision was made, and when death comes, it is too late to make any other decision.

7. When Scott says that the man mismanaged the miracle, he indicates that the man's action is a negative example. Yet Scott denies that it is an example narrative. He cannot have it both ways. This is definitely a negative example. The same is true with the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Even in Scott's metaphorical understanding, where he distinguishes between individual morality and the solidarity, the decisive act would still be the behavior of the rich man, making it an example narrative.

The attempt to interpret these four parables metaphorically is not successful. Luke understood them correctly when he read them as example stories, even granting that he made certain additions and added other materials to the original stories. The only interesting argument is the fact that they are found only in Luke, but the "criterion of multiple attestation" must not be used in isolation to reject any narratives or individual sayings as authentic. Furthermore, this criterion cannot be applied to a whole genre but only to individual materials.

Colossians 1:24 ("What is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ"): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance

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Frederick W. Danker, a longtime friend, has been a benefactor for many in classical and biblical scholarship and through courageous churchmanship. He exemplifies how New Testament studies involve "philology plus."[1] In his case the plus is passionate intensity, theological concern, and willingness even to accept sufferings in struggles within Lutheranism toward a more human church.[2]

This essay deals with a verse which Fred Danker's work has touched on at least editorially,[3] and on which he makes a passing comment in his book, *Benefactor*.[4] The verse reads:

> Now I rejoice in (my) sufferings (*pathēmasin*) on your behalf, and I fill up what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ (*antanaplērō ta hysterēmata tōn thlipseōn tou Christou*) in my flesh on behalf of his body, which is the church... (Col 1:24).

The history of interpretation for this verse is full of contrasting opinions, by no means simply from the Reformation period.[5] Within the New Testament, Col 1:24b is *not* incorporated into Ephesians.[6] The verse is thus unique in Scripture. There is no reflection of it in the Apostolic Fathers or the Apologists. This may show "how diffi-

cult the verse had already been found to be" (Schweizer, 101, n. 12).

The first real efforts at interpretation came in the East from the *School of Antioch* (Kremer, 10-33). John Chrysostom makes more references to 1:24 than any other Greek father known to us. He does not distinguish the terms *pathēma* and *thlipsis*. The phrase *thlipsis tou Christou* is seen as a subjective genitive. In Chrysostom the final clause in the verse, *ho estin hē ekklēsia*, is not discussed, and Christ's *sōma* is not referred to the church.[7] There is regularly a consciousness that Christ had accomplished full expiation for the sins of the world (Staab, *ThR* 53:169), but Chrysostom explains that Christ "not only died for us but is also ready, after death, to experience affliction on our account," in that Christ works and can suffer in his apostles as if, when a general, who has been protecting a line of troops with his shield, goes away, a lieutenant takes his place and receives his wounds until the war is over. Hence Paul wrote, "What That One had to suffer, I suffer in his stead [*paschō ant' autou*]."[8] Chrysostom

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[1]J. Fitzmyer, "Historical Criticism: Its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989):254.

[2]The phrase, drawn from E. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), is appropriate for one criticized for maintaining that Jesus showed a sense of humor; cf. F. W. Danker and Jan Schambach, *No Room in the Brotherhood: The Preus-Otten Purge of Missouri* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1977), 51-52, 70.

[3]See *hysterēma, antanaplēroō, pathēma,* and *thlipsis,* in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature,* 2nd ed., rev. and augmented by F. W. Gingrich and F. W. Danker from Bauer's *Wörterbuch* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), the excellencies of which, in comparison even with the 6th edition of the Bauer *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch,* ed. by Kurt and Barbara Aland (1988), are pointed out by R. Borger in *Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen* 241,1/2 (1989):103-46.

[4]*Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1982), 365.

[5]An earlier version of this essay was presented as part of a longer paper to the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue at its meeting in Chicago in September 1986. Eduard Schweizer's summary of the history of exegesis of Col 1:24 (EKK, 1976; trans. Andrew Chester, *The Letter to the Colossians* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982]:101-5) rests especially on the dissertation by Jacob Kremer, *Was an den Leiden Christi Noch Mangelt: Eine Interpretationsgeschichtliche und Exegetische Untersuchung zu Kol. 1, 24b* (BBB 12; Bonn: Hanstein, 1956); cf. the reviews of Kramer by E. Käsemann, in *ThL* 82 (1957):694-95, and by K. Staab, in *ThR* 53 (1957):168-71. I have also checked additional references in the *Biblia Patristica* at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Strasbourg. PG = Patrologia Graece, Migne. PL = Patrologia Latine, Migne. GCS = die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte. LNPF = A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.

[6]Only the phrase about "his body the church" at Eph 1:23 (where, however one interprets *tou ta panta en pasin plēroumenou,* the sense is christological) and possibly *pathēmasin hyper hymōn* at Eph 3:1, *desmios... hyper hymōn tōn ethnōn,* and 3:13, *tais thlipsesin mou hyper hymōn.* Cf. C. Leslie Mitton, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), esp. Appendix I, pp. 279-315, where possible parallels are arranged in columns.

[7]Cf. Kremer, 19-20, who in 20, n. 1, rejects the notion that Chrysostom already sees the church and Christ as one person; cf. also 7, n. 1.

[8]Kremer, 11; Homily 4 on Col 1:21,22; PG 62:326-27; trans. J. Ashworth, LNPF 13 (1890):276.

further relates 1:24 to the "ministry of reconciliation" in 2 Cor 5:18, 20: "I suffer on his behalf (*hyper autou*) in order that he [Christ] might draw them [the Colossians] more to himself." "What is lacking" is connected with Romans 8:34 in that Christ, in his suffering (*paschō*) after death, if there is still a deficiency [*elleimata*], "intercedes for us."

Elsewhere Chrysostom connects the reference at 2 Cor 1:5 ("as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings [*pathēmata*]") to Col 1:24 with the claim that we suffer *more* [*perissa*] than Christ in number of afflictions; this is taken to be one of the "greater signs" that Jesus' followers are to do afterwards (John 14:12; PG 61:387; LNPF 13:274). Finally, with regard to Phil 3:10 ("being like Christ in his death"), Chrysostom also cites Col 1:24, to show that Paul's persecutions, afflictions, hardships, and sufferings parallel those of Jesus, we being moulded to the image of his death (PG 62:266; LNPF 13:236). Kremer adds that they are alike in that the sufferings are imposed in both cases by the enemies of the truth.

Overall in Chrysostom there is thus, from the context in Col 1, a strong sense of Paul as preacher being able to endure the sufferings of Christ that are still lacking because, just as "the Father sent the Son... in his place [*hyper autou*]," we have received the office of emissary [*presbeia*], and so we make our appeal in his place and in place of the Father [*ant' autou kai tou Patros*] (cf. Homily 11 on 2 Cor 5:20; PG 61:477; LNPF 12:334). The office is not that of accomplishing reconciliation but of proclaiming it.[9] Schweizer (p. 101 n. 12) stresses on the whole in Chrysostom the apostle's humility—not arrogance (*aponoia*) but affection (*philostorgia*) for Christ, pointing away from his own sufferings to Christ (Hom. 4; PG 62:326; LNPF 13:276), who demonstrates his great love for us by continuing to suffer (cf. also Hom. 15 on Romans; PG 60:547-48).

Within the School of Antioch there were other answers besides those of Chrysostom. Severian of Gabala[10] insisted that "Christ's afflictions" were *only* those of the apostle and the church for Christ's sake; they are so named because he is the head of the church. Theodore of Mopsuestia,[11] on the one hand, took Christ's afflictions to be only what he suffered during his earthly life (not afterwards) and the further sufferings by Paul to be what he endured in mission work as he preached; on Gal 2:9, Theodore asked, "What is lacking [*to prosleipon*]? that you learn what things were rightly done by him [Christ] for you and receive the promise concerning them. And this never happens without toil and afflictions.... I suffer... as I preach... in order that you may believe." The lack is proclamation (Schweizer, 102, n. 14). Similarly Theodoret (d. 458), who makes that which is lacking to be proclamation of Christ's saving work specifically to the Gentiles (PG 82:604).

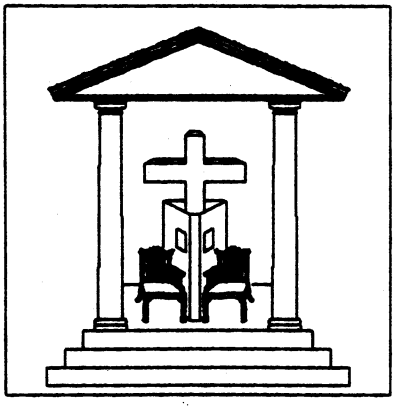
In the 9th century Photius, sometime patriarch of Constantinople, answered, to Question 121 of Amphilochius, that there are two opinions on *ta hysterēmata* (what is lacking) in our verse (PG 101:705). (1) It denotes what Christ still must suffer. To the apostle it has been granted to do "greater signs"; Paul did more than was demanded (e.g., in not accepting support for preaching the gospel), and so he helped fulfill in his

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[9]Kremer, p. 18, who compares Homily 4 on 2 Tim 2:10; PG 62:621; LNPF 13:489.

[10]Ca. C.E. 400; texts in K. Staab, *Die Pauluskommentare aus der griechische Kirche*, 1933, 321.

[11]Ca. C.E. 350-428; see Swete's ed. of his commentaries, 1:279-80.



body *ta hysterēmata tou Christou*. Photius replies one cannot speak of a lack when Christ suffered so much; the "greater signs" really depend on Christ himself, not us; and from Paul's practice of supporting himself one cannot argue there was any lack in Christ's work. Rather, Paul means, "I fulfilled in my flesh the least [*hystata*] afflictions of Christ, those that take last place; i.e., my sufferings are so far separated from the sufferings of Christ that I do not dare to compare them with the greater sufferings of Christ" (101:708). So (2) the phrase refers to what the Redeemer would have suffered as Teacher if he were still on earth at the time Paul was preaching. Paul suffers in Christ's stead (*ant-anaplērō*). But Photius added that if a person later found a better answer, that was ok with him (101:711).

In the West (Kremer, 34-56) the views of Ambrosiaster were similar to those of Chrysostom: the sufferings are Christ's because persecution is directed against Christ (*Commentaria in ep. Pauli* [Monte Cassino, 1901]:328; PL 17:425). Pelagius was the first to take 1:24 simply as a reference only to what was still lacking in the apostle's own sufferings as a disciple.[12]

Augustine, however, presented a new interpretation: Paul supplements what was still lacking in the *universa passio* of the one Christ, *caput et corpus*. The afflictions include, as a whole, those of both Head and the body. With Chrysostom, he understands the "afflictions of Christ" (subjective gen.) to be those of the apostles and of all believers as well as of Jesus. With Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret, Augustine held that Paul's are an addition to the sufferings of Christ. Unlike Chrysostom, he grounds the unity of Paul and Christ not in the concept of Paul as the missionary representative of Christ but in the body-of-Christ idea. Because Paul and all members of the body of Christ form one person with Christ, their sufferings are Christ's. Taking *in carne mea* with *desunt*[13] allowed Augustine to conclude that every member of the church has a definite contribution to make (an idea not found in the East) and that Paul fulfilled his part and contributed to what is designated for the body. It is like a quota or tax (*canonem*, Kremer, p. 44 n. 2) that each pays, in a storehouse (*pariatoria*) that will be completed only at the end of the world (PL 36:730-31, on Psalm 61; LNPF 8:251-52). Similarly Gregory the Great (PL 75:612).

The period of *medieval scholasticism* (Kremer, 56-73) generally followed Augustine in his treatment of the verse. However, with Bruno, founder of the Carthusian Order, who died in 1101, "there enters

[12]A. Souter, *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St Paul* (Texts and Studies 9, 1926) 2:456.

[13]Vulgate: *adimpleo ea quae desunt pressurarum Christi, in carne mea pro corpore eius*; other renderings: *suppleo... reliqua, reliquae... passiones... tributationes.* On the nuances of the Latin translations of 1:24, see Kremer, 54-56.

in for the first time the idea of satisfaction for sin in connection with our passage" (p. 58). In his Expositions on Paul's Epistles (PL 153:381), the words *in carne mea* stand not in opposition to *in carne Christi* but to a desire for earthly good or honor; Paul offers his own flesh as an expiation, for multiplying the church (*carnem exhibeo ad poenam*). By the mid-thirteenth century one began to speak of the church's treasury of merits (Hugo of St. Cher, 1230; the bull of Clement VI, "Unigentius," 1343), though Col 1:24 played no role in this development.[14] But Aquinas and Peter of Tarantaise (Innocent V, d. 1276) brought the verse into a connection with this theme.

> The verse is not about any lack in the merit of Christ the leader but rather in his "troops."

Thomas Aquinas rejected as heresy any notion that Christ's sufferings did not suffice for salvation, citing 1 John 2:2. But then, employing 1 Cor 12:27 ("you are the body of Christ"), he insisted that the Head, Christ, and all the righteous form one mystical person, the church. "God has in his predestination determined, just as he has fixed the number of the elect, also how many merits there must be in the whole church, both in the Head and the members. Among these merits are especially the sufferings of the saints. The merits of Christ, the head, are infinite. But a saint produces some merits according to his measure."[15] Hence Paul in effect says, *addo mensuram meam*, though it is allowed that it could also mean "what sufferings are lacking in my flesh." Aquinas also cited the *Glossa* of Peter Lombard about a *paritoria*, a vessel or house which is not yet full with the merits to be accomplished by our sufferings.

With these words was conveyed the idea of a *thesaurus meritorum*. Sufferings are lacking because merits still to be accomplished are unpaid. "Thus the saints also suffer for the church, which is strengthened by their example" (Kremer, 67). Aquinas combined the facts that Christ alone has worked salvation for us and that "Paul was not crucified for you" (1 Cor 1:13) with Col 1:24 by stating that "Christ's suffering was salvific for us not only *per modum exempli* (1 Pet 2:21)... but also *per modum meriti et per modum efficaciae*... (Heb 13:12). But the suffering of others is salvific solely *per modum exempli* (2 Cor 1:6)."[16]

Kremer's summary of Aquinas, including debate over whether he changed his view late in life, is clouded, however, by uncertainties over the text of lectures on Colossians taken down by Reginald of Piperno and the significant Quodlibet II, art 16, written in 1270; here it is said that the works of the faithful can possess the value of satisfaction for others, though, however, Col 1:24 is *not* cited. Hence Schweizer's

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[14]So N. Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter* (Paderborn, 1922):192-97.

[15]*Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, cura R. Cai (Rome, 1953), 2:137-38.

[16]Cf. also his answer in the *Summa Theologica* III, q. 48, art 5, ad 3, as to whether saints can be called "redeemer": the sufferings of the saints aid the church not *per modum redemptionis sed per modum exhortationis et exempli*, not by way of redemption but by way of exhortation and example.

comment re Aquinas: "whether these afflictions are merely exemplary or fully expiatory is... given a confusing and contradictory answer" (p. 102).

Peter of Tarantaise more clearly taught that the sufferings of Christ and of the saints together form the *thesaurus ecclesiae*. Each brings a share. As with a vessel for alms, all put in something in like manner, through the castigation of the flesh, persecution, martyrdom, etc.[17]

During the *Reformation period* (Kremer, 73-79) Catholic exegesis showed influences from humanism, the Antiochene views became better known, but Augustine's interpretation held its place. The Reformation charges with regard to Col 1:24 were that (1) Catholic theologians twisted the Scriptures in order to find a doctrine of good works and the treasury of merits in the church; and (2) according to the Catholics, Paul speaks of a lack in Christ's expiatory sufferings for sins (not merely for punishment of sins) and thus the expectation of the saints must supplement what is lacking in Christ's work. This becomes a disparagement of the once-for-allness (*ephhapax*) of Christ's work for us.

Col 1:24 is not cited in the *Book of Concord*.[18] Luther himself is mentioned by Kremer only for how he translated the verse, initially in 1521 with the words "vnd erstatte den feyl der trubsaln Christi, an meynem leybe, fur seynen leyb, wilcher ist die gemeyne." This is like Pelagius' interpretation in that "in my flesh" is taken with "the afflections of Christ." But later (1546 Bible) Luther rendered it, under the influence of Erasmus, "und erstatte an meinem Fleisch, was noch mangelt an truebsaln in Christo, fur seinen Leib, welcher ist die Gemeine...." Here, "in my flesh" goes with the verb, and the genitive *tou Christou* is taken as "in Christ."[19] Luther understood the verse to mean not that Christ's own sufferings were deficient but that Paul (or the church) supplements still-lacking sufferings in the fellowship of Christ.

Melanchthon set forth a more detailed understanding in his *Enarratio epistulae Pauli ad Col.* (Corpus Reformatorum 15:1225). The verse is not about any lack in the merit of Christ the leader but rather in his "troops," the community of followers in service as soldiers in his cause. Though both he and they are opposed by the same devil and the form of afflictions for both is the same, Christ is both propitiator and doctor, Paul only a doctor or teacher. Thus the afflictions of Christ are to be distinguished from the afflictions of Christ and the apostles, the latter being the theme of the verse; cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia. More polemically, Melanchthon goes on that "the papists impiously twist this statement into merits of the saints and imagine the afflictions of the saints even earn remission for themselves or others." Then Romans 5 (grace abounded to many through one person, Jesus Christ) and 1 John 2:2 are cited. Cf. also CR 15:1246-47. Kremer comments (pp. 112-13) that Melanchthon was assuming that the merits of the saints were valued as propitiation for sins (not for punishment for sins), though Cajetan had made such a distinction. After considering Flacius and Chemnitz, Kremer concludes (p. 114):

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[17]Kremer, 70; *In omnes divi Pauli epistolas enarratio*, ed. under the name of Nicolaus Gorranus (Lyon, 1692), 1:556-57.

[18]So the index in the Tappert et al and Bekenntnisschriften editions.

[19]Weimar Ausgabe, Die Deutsche Bibel 7 (1931):228-29. Cf. A. Freitag's note, p. 601, that "in Christ" seeks to avoid the idea of Ambrosius, via Erasmus, *unam esse passionam Christi et martyrium.*

Paul's involvement in this struggle—as well as yours, and mine, and all who minister—is not to be lacking.

> The Reformers explain Col 1:24b... in accord with the meanings already common in the Middle Ages and the Church Fathers. The controversy with the Catholic theologians, whose explanations over the doctrine of the church's treasury and the supplementing expiatory sufferings for punishment for sin they unfortunately never took up adequately, resulted in two tendencies....
>
> 1) Except for Flacius, all exegetes, who rest on Augustine, endeavor to understand by "Christ's afflictions" only the afflictions of the church, similarly Nicholas of Lyra.
>
> 2) Melanchthon and D. Pareus [d. 1622] take efforts to defend the perfection of Christ's propitiation from every onslaught, stressing the distinction between Christ's expiatory suffering and the sufferings that serve the upbuilding of the church.

After exploring subsequent Catholic treatments ("C" below), Kremer compares them with "modern Protestant [=P] exegesis" (pp. 93-110, 120-54) thus:

C,P (1) *thlipseis tou Christou* as suffering for Christ or for Christ's sake—found in exegetes of both traditions.

C,P (2) the Augustinian approach—e.g., John Gerhard; cf. Pius XII, *Mystici Corpus Christi* (1943), where Mary was said to fill up those things that were wanting in the sufferings of Christ.[20]

P (3) the Christlike sufferings of the apostle—that in Paul there is a fulfillment of Jesus' words at Matthew 5:11, 10:22-24; John 15:18-19.[21]

C,P (4) Christ mysticism—as in A. Deissmann and others.

C (5) the approach of the School of Antioch.

P (6) only the afflictions experienced by Christ in his earthly life—so J. B. Lightfoot, who distinguished "satisfactory" from "edificatory" sufferings.[22]

Space does not permit analysis of further interpretations and combinations of them in the intervening periods, but recent treatments, often ecumenical, have narrowed the gaps considerably between and among denominational groups,[23] and even within

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[20]Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum,* 30th ed. (1954), #2291; = R. Deferrari, tr., *Denzinger: The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (St. Louis: Herder, 1957), 619. J. Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief* (HTKNT 10/1; Freiburg, 1980), 95-96, places in this category C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (CGT, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 76-77: the "messianic woes" are the sufferings of Jesus on the cross and of the community, "since the Messianic community, incorporated in Christ, are one with him: their sufferings are his, his are theirs."

[21]G. Kittel, "Kol. 1,24," *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 18 (1941):186-91.

[22]Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (London: Macmillan, 9th ed., 1890); cf. A. Schlatter; Gnilka, 96-98.

[23]Cf. Schweizer in the Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar.

Conservative Evangelical ranks.[24] Opinions may still differ as to whether it is preferable to hold that the reference is to "the sufferings that the author vicariously endures for the 'saints' or the 'church'..." or to invoke the idea found in Judaism of apocalyptic "woes of the Messiah," a quota of endtime afflictions. But opinions scarcely follow confessional lines.[25]

As a result of the eighth round of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in the United States (1983-90), the Common Statement has been able to say that

> however the details of 1:24 are understood, there is no disparagement in the passage of the unique mediation by Christ through the cross. Nor does the "filling up" contradict the reconciliation wrought by God through Christ "in his body of flesh" and solely "by his death," a reconciliation of which the author regards himself a "minister" (1:22-23).[26]

It is surprising, in the long history of interpretation, how rarely 1:24 has been treated in conjunction with 1:29–2:1 and the *agōn* motif. The entire section, 1:23c–2:5, is first-person *narratio*. Paul's ministry (1:23,25) in God's *oikonomia* or administration of the divine plan to reveal and spread the word includes the apostle's struggles (1:29, 2:1) "for you" (in Colossae and those in Laodicea and others, 1:24, 2:1). It is a context involving sufferings (*pathēmata*, 1:24).

While some interpreters have seen Jesus as engaged in such a "struggle," especially in the *agōnia* in the garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:44), such psychologizings about the historical Jesus seem not to be in the Pauline purview. But an apostolic *agōn* (struggle) which does not involve vicariously atoning efforts but which helps fill up the eschatological quota of tribulations to be "suffered by the faithful between the resurrection and the return of Christ,"[27] fits well with the context. Paul's involvement in this struggle—as well as yours, and mine, and all who minister—is not to be lacking.

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[24]See Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*. Word Bible Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 75-81, 92, 100.

[25]See respectively J. Fitzmyer, "Biblical Data on the Veneration and Intercession of Holy People," and J. Reumann, "How Do We Interpret 1 Timothy 2:1-5 and Related Passages?" in *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 8 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, forthcoming). Further, J. Reumann, *Colossians* (ACNT, with W. F. Taylor, Jr.), *Ephesians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 133-34.

[26]Ibid., Part Two, I. A.

[27]Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (NovTSup 16; Leiden: Brill, 1967), 111; 130-33 on Luke 22:44. Cf. Danker, *Benefactor* (cited in n. 4).

Book Reviews

JESUS AND POSTMODERNISM. By James Breech. Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1989. 96 pages. Paper. $7.95.

Postmodernism is a collective term which covers a number of movements in current thinking all of which begin with what is called the "legitimation crisis" following Jürgen Habermas and the Frankfurt school of interpretation. What this means is that there are no outside guarantees left for the truthfulness of witness and testimony in literature. Everything is driven back into the life of the individual and, thus, psychological modes become the key to interpretation. At issue is whether or not meaning is discovered or constructed in our world; the postmodernists, represented in fiction (e.g.) by the work of the French *nouveau novelle* of Alain Robbe-Grillet, consider that the surface of text is all that may be known. Depth, where it is achieved in reading Robbe-Grillet, is invented in the interaction between the reader and the text (or the observer and the natural world). Thus meaning is created, rather than discovered.

Breech suggests that this interpretation of life leads us to the conclusion that human stories have no endings. They are therefore not to be subjected to the sort of criticism which would enable meaning to be suggested over the course of a life; there is no End and thus the means themselves are but a series of happenings, none of which may be connected by a thread of interpretation. Against this view Breech places himself and the work of Paul Ricouer. Ricouer is willing to accept that there is no ending in the sense of a fulfilled conclusion to a story, but that stories are the bearers of an end in themselves, which end is the meaning and significance of the story. But Breech recognizes that the issue raised by postmodernism is whether or not human life can have a project; the postmodernists say no, that we live episodically and nothing in terms of an overarching project can be detected in human story. The conceivable end of such a line of reasoning is nihilism.

When Breech turns his attention to the stories (parables) of Jesus, he discovers that they are, in fact, not like other stories which come from a pre-modern or even a modern period; they do not moralize, which is the original intent of both the parables which are told by the rabbis and also of modern fiction (see *Don Quixote* or *Gargantua* as early examples). There is narrative but there is no moralizing. This is of great interest to Mr. Breech, because it opens the possibility for another interpretation of the parables beyond the postmodern critique, an interpretation in which meaning is inherent in the text itself and is not grounded in interaction with the reader.

Further examination reveals that it is the *antagonists* in the parables who have a motive for their actions; the main characters are unmotivated (e.g. the "good Samaritan"), but they choose one course of action out of many which are presented. Jesus' characters *do* and they are present in speech. This choosing one option, again, makes the characters different from the postmodernists who want to choose *everything*, and thus opt for a life devoid of project and meaning. This choosing on the part of the main characters in Jesus' parables creates a set of options and a reality within which they live.

Further, Jesus uses "multi-linear time" (Breech's term) in his stories. All the characters act with different time senses, and what this does is to abolish the law of cause-and-effect so that the story stands before us devoid of both moralizing and causation. By offering us stories built on multi-linear time, Jesus opens up the "dimension of self and other" in a way that no other stories of his time, and few of our own, are able to do. Thus, even though we do not know the names of the characters, they take on full shape before us because their choosing means that the self does not disappear but is heightened in the dramatic action, even without closure.

The stories of Jesus thus avoid the dilemma of moralism or nihilism proposed by, on one hand, traditional fiction and, on the other, the postmodernists. At this point Breech scores his *coup de grace*: the resurrection, in the light of which the stories of Jesus must be read, is an affirmation of the open-endedness of story, a reality created by the characters in the stories. The resurrection grounds us in the reality of the stories in which the main characters (and, presumably, the readers and hearers) no longer have to judge by results or fall into despair. We may not know what happened to the innkeeper, the injured person, or the good Samaritan when the parable is over, but we are aware that *our* reality has been broken open to new possibilities because the story had profound significance. These new possibilities are inherent in the proclamation of the kingdom of God which is at the heart of the parables of Jesus.

To this reviewer, it seems that Breech may be criticized for simply but cleverly re-inventing an existential interpretation of the parables, but I leave that issue to further readers of this engaging and important little book.

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THE ACQUITTAL OF GOD: A THEOLOGY FOR VIETNAM VETERANS. By Uwe Siemon-Netto. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1990. 107 pages. Paper. $7.95.

Siemon-Netto did CPE with Vietnam veterans at a VA hospital in Minnesota when he was an M.A. student at LSTC. To his work he brought a theological understanding, especially as focused in Bonhoeffer's writings. He used readings from Bonhoeffer as discussion starters in rap groups. The book contains excerpts of dialogues and commentary on them. *The Acquittal of God* is clear and focused; Siemon-Netto is a seasoned journalist who spent five years in Vietnam.

The book is a theological taxonomy for interpreting the depth of pain these men suffered in the field and upon return home. In the book he relies much on William Mahedy's pioneer work on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the term for the set of dysfunctions seen among vets.

Siemon-Netto believes American society suffers what he labels the "Tin Drum Syndrome": like the little boy in Guenter Grass's novel we refuse to grow up, a syndrome seen in the self-indulgence of our society and our double standards of morality. He points to the double standard that would call returning vets "baby killers" at a time when abortions hit an all time high in the States.

Siemon-Netto knows that the gospel of the suffering, hidden God who enters, in Christ, the pain of the world-come-of-age to both forgive and be forgiven, makes sense to Vietnam vets. He wants us to see the Vietnam veterans as a latent *sanctorum communio* who, through understanding and acceptance, may become the backbone of a mature church which knows the power of evil in an America come of age.

The book is poignant, one-of-a-kind, and recommended reading.

Jay C. Rochelle

THEOLOGY IS FOR PROCLAMATION. By Gerhard O. Forde. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990. viii and 199 pages. Paper. $10.95.

Forde accuses systematic theology of spending too much time talking about God rather than establishing ground rules for proclaiming the Word of God. With such talk, theology tries to pierce the curtain Luther perceived between the hidden and revealed, the naked and clothed God to spend time in speculation. Forgotten in such wrong moves is a third, crucial, dialectic between God not preached and God preached.

The God not reduced to explanation (the god of idealisms, the god of Kant) is an *electing* God who needs preachers sent with the word of election. "The explained God is the God not preached who does everything in general, and so in the end does nothing in particular, no matter how much one might talk about the 'mighty acts of God in history'" (31). What humans crave, without knowing how to articulate the craving, is the Present God of proclamation. Forde uses

"proclamation" instead of "preaching" so that we include both audible and visible Word under the rubric of proclamation.

A problem: the electing God is also the predestining God. Two false solutions have been proposed to the problem: universalism or resort to "free will." Neither one works; both must be subsumed under the proclaimed God. In proclamation the issue is not what or when but rather Who does the electing, and preaching is necessary to announce to *all* within earshot that *they* are the elect.

To preach is thus to act on the presupposition that word and sacrament are the Telos or End of it all, that sacred history culminates in the moment of proclamation, which *is* the mighty act of God in the living present.

The hearers are trapped in the bondage of the will; we suffer the "upward fall" (Forde's term), an attempt to move beyond the image of God to *be* God. Since God cannot come among us as the Glorious One who is the sum of abstractions about gods, a glory we seek because we are in a captivity we don't even recognize, then God must descend to us. Proclamation is where the downwardly mobile God comes among us in humility in the Christ and intersects the upwardly falling hearer and contraverts our supposed "wisdom."

There is a radical discontinuity between the proclamation of Jesus and the proclamation about Jesus. Forde insists this is not a new problem, hermeneutical insights of the 20th century notwithstanding, but has been with us since the beginning. We cannot preach what Jesus preached with authority, only he could do that; so we must *point* to Jesus as the author of the proclamation. We do this by bearing in mind the triangle of communication which points beyond Jesus to the eschatological fulfillment of any titles used for him ("Christ," "Messiah," "Son of man," etc.). Titles gain meaning, not as descriptors by which we can once more tame Jesus, but as the Point of his own proclamation and our proclamation about him. The preacher is thus drawn into the circle of communication and must first answer the question for herself, "who do you say that I am?" Our talk can be proclamation is if it is rooted in the cross, which brings to naught all our old ways of thinking about Jesus and presents him in this time as the new thing God does among us through the resurrection.

Subsequently Forde leads us into the christological problems which have been with us since early times in the Alexandrian and the Antiochian solutions to the relation of God and man in Jesus; the former is couched in the language of being, the latter in the language of becoming. For the preacher, the solution is to opt for a language of *action*. This means that "Jesus is the One in whom God does God for us." Proclamation is the concrete event in which that Word comes to us.

Hearing is the avenue by which faith is born, and faith is "the state of being grasped and captivated in the Spirit by the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus" (137). Forde discourages us from the attempt to limn the details of faith in any extensive way, for fear of degenerating once again into faith-as-works. Sound counsel here. The chapter on hearing contains a brief, bright section on the concept of God and necessity, in which God's freedom is underscored and we are barred from the idea that God is neccssary. Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux both lie below the argument that God is to be passionately desired out of love, not because God is "needed"; this word also turns toward the church, which is not in business to ameliorate "human need" but to proclaim the lavish grace of God. This grace includes care for creation which, Forde reminds us, is not derived from a sense of grace-completing-nature; nature is already fine as it is, ruined only by our sin, and that is what the address of the gospel deals with so that nature may be seen afresh as creation, which is a theological and not a natural perspective. Viewed from its proper perspective through faith, we are re-established as creatures "who live in gratitude for the sheer gift of creation" (146). Jesus, who lived an "ecstatic identity" (Arthur McGill), an identity wholly derived from his origin in God, becomes the model for our own thanksgiving; when we perceive ourselves as gift, we are ready to give thanks.

Vital proclamation depends upon the unity of Word and sacrament; to uplift one at the expense of the other is to miss the point. The grace

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which is worded to us in proclamation is not merely informative or explanatory: "God does God to us in preaching," as Forde says repeatedly, and this doing of God continues in the sacraments. The way this doing of God has been proclaimed, historically, is through the proper distinction between law and gospel. Again there is a problem: the analysis made an unclear division between free will and free choice, as if the subject approached the law and was boosted by the gospel to perform it. Instead, Forde reminds us, the law-gospel dialectic is another way of approaching the death-new life dialectic of the original proclamation. Thus the hermeneutical problem is to self-consciously work, as preacher, on understanding what the text *did* to its original hearers. The point is eschatological: an end must be brought to the hearer's old life (the letter which kills) in order that the new life offered in the gospel (the spirit which gives life) might rise from the ashes. This word always comes as news from without, not from the self, thus it coincides and is one with the sacraments, which are demonstrations of the grace of God. There is nothing behind them: they bear their own truth within them. So does the proclaimed Word, which is a "material" of its own (to follow the sacraments model): the Word is address from outside the self, it is always a material and autonomous Word. So preaching and the sacraments are valid, objective; but they become efficacious when they give birth to faith in the hearer/participant, and so the threat of falling into an *ex opere operato* posture is overcome. One does not first have faith and then the sacrament "works"; faith comes, with and under the sacraments.

The *Now* of proclamation comes through strongly in this book; to every side Forde undercuts that retreat into historicism which is so deadly to proclamation. His focus on the in-breaking of God's End time in Christ through both Word and sacrament enables the overcoming of "non-problems" that constantly arise, like pitting Word against sacrament or vice versa. Like "functional" versus "ontological" views of ordination.

Forde has given us a finely focused piece of work. His book is strong medicine for a sick time. I cannot recommend it too highly for pastors of the church.

Jay C. Rochelle

CALLED AND ORDAINED: LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTRY. Edited by Todd Nichol and Marc Kolden. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990. xii and 226 pages. Notes. Paper. $14.95.

Into the increasingly embarrassing ruckus over the office of the ministry in the ELCA jumps the Nichol-Kolden book. Here is an attempt to quell the fracas by reiterating the Lutheran commitment to the gospel of Christ understood as justification of the ungodly by God's grace and by drawing out its implication for ministry. The implication is clear: we have freedom to structure ministry in each situation so it best serves the presentation of the gospel.

Called and Ordained is a collection of more than a dozen essays written by individual members of the faculty at Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminary. The book's first half is a series of historical essays beginning with Scripture and running though the early church and Reformation to contemporary America. Roy Harrisville examines the New Testament to find that our word 'ministry' is a rendering of *diakonia*, originally meaning service, especially service at table. For us, he says, it refers to "service of the gospel," a service to which ministers are commissioned yet, most importantly, it is an activity dependent for its definition upon the saving event proclaimed in the gospel.

This New Testament root also produces our word 'deacon,' which, Gerhard Forde and Alvin Rogness argue, can refer to public social service through medicine, education, or social welfare. As such, diaconate ministry is important in its own right. It ought not be defined as a transition office en route to the ministry of Word and Sacrament; it ought not be defined by what one cannot do while waiting for ordination.

Concluding the second half of the book dealing with thematic perspective, editor-contributors Nichol and Kolden provide readers

with a glittering gem of succinct and forceful Lutheran thinking about ministry. Committed to both the catholic and evangelical heritage, their first loyalty goes to the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. This loyalty implies that "ministry follows mission and serves it." The result is "commitment to flexibility in form and practice for the sake of consistent service to the gospel."

This is not a concession to mere functionalism. The office of the ministry is divinely instituted. Yet the hierarchical distinctions within the ranks of the ministry are human creations, contingent creations appropriate for the practical work of the gospel in various times and places. The authors are cautious about the establishment of ecclesiastical hierarchy when such hierarchy claims divine authorization. The ministry of the gospel is divinely authorized, to be sure; but hierarchies are not. "God's authority cannot be identified with the church or the ministry but only with the authority of the Word spoken by the Holy Spirit." The result is that Lutherans do not ascribe divine institution to any single polity or to any ecclesiastical tradition, including their own. In these matters they contend that Christians are granted a freedom qualified only by their commitment to mission in the world for Christ's sake.

All possibilities for organizing the office of ministry stand open for Lutherans, save one. What is forbidden is accepting any argument that a particular form of the office of oversight is essential to the life of the church (whether of its actual being or *esse*, or of its well-being or *bene esse*, or of its full being or *plene esse*). This is a temptation among current Lutheran ecumenists who may be willing to concede this point in the name of rapprochement with other Christian communions for whom apostolic succession means episcopal succession. Rather than compromise, Nichol and Kolden suggest we take the occasion of the present impasse to invite all Christians to give public assent to that which is most important: the gospel of God's justification of the ungodly by faith alone, making all other things such as oversight secondary. On this basis, the Lutheran churches of the world should unilaterally announce their recognition of the ministry of all churches that confess this catholic faith. This recognition could then lead to the cooperative fashioning of a new understanding of the office of ministry, an understanding aimed not at furthering past patterns but rather at the future effectiveness of the gospel mission.

This argument, forceful as it is, leaves one item only partially answered. Some ELCA ecumenists, desiring a unified ministry with Rome and Canterbury, are recommending the adoption of the threefold ministry of bishop, pastor, and deacon. This structure, they argue, would dovetail with the commitments these non-Lutheran communions have to episcopal succession, thereby opening doors to further Christian unity. As long as Lutherans are "free" regarding the structure of the ministry, they should be "free" for the sake of ecumenism to embrace these non-Lutheran positions. Yet the Nichol-Kolden book identifies this as the one point at which Lutherans are not free. The added stipulation is this: unless the form of the ministry is free for all parties, Lutherans cannot join. Yet, one might ask, does this not obviate the principle of freedom? This is a tricky point. Yet much hangs on it. It deserves further attention before it can be resolved.

Overall, I think, *Called and Ordained* will prove to be a valuable book. Brief and readable, this collection of essays provides easy access to biblical and historical data, clarifying distinctions, and persuasive argumentation. The ruckus in the ELCA may continue for a few more years yet. So, on the one hand, to those who oppose what Nichol and Kolden advocate—to those who would like to invest teaching authority in life-long bishops and claim that authority through an independent episcopal succession—this book will appear to increase the fracas. But, on the other hand, to those who see in the book a representation of the essential Reformation commitments to ministry in service to the gospel, this volume may open a path that leads to the kind of ordering of the office of ministry that will make it an effective witness to God's Word for the generation that is to come.

Ted Peters
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and GTU, Berkeley, California

Briefly Noted

MERCER DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE. Edited by Watson E. Mills and others (Mercer University Press, $27.50). Many of the 225 contributors to this fine paperback Bible dictionary are members of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, but all contributors, Baptist or not, were encouraged to express themselves freely, fairly, and honestly. Lutherans contributing include Frederick Danker, Richard Jeske, Lamontte M. Luker, and Ted Peters. Many other household exegetical names also appear: Walter Harrelson, Douglas Knight, James Crenshaw, Reginald Fuller. This dictionary was designed also for use in introductory courses, and syllabi are offered by the publisher to those who adopt this book as a text. Recommended for lay use and church libraries. RWK

CREATION AND THE PERSISTENCE OF EVIL. By Jon D. Levenson (Harper & Row, $18.95). L. continues to make excellent contributions to the theological understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures from a Jewish perspective. In this book he explores the fragility of the created order and its ongoing vulnerability to chaos and stresses the role of humanity in forming and sustaining the world order. He also protests against the frequent (Christian) dichotomy between God as creator and God as lord of covenant. He traces the dialectical tension between the autonomous Abraham of Genesis 18 (where he argues with God about the destruction of Sodom) and the heteronomous Abraham of Genesis 22 (where Abraham obeys unflinchingly God's command to sacrifice Isaac) and concludes that either chapter in Genesis without the other would be a terrible distortion of God's will and ways. Even when the forces of chaos pose no threat to the creator, they still persist as evil, and their persistence qualifies—and defines—God's world mastery. Abundant insights on Genesis 1, Psalm 104, Job, and much more. RWK

WHAT DOES EVE DO TO HELP? By David J. A. Clines (Sheffield Academic Press, $28.50). C. has been a leading advocate of new readings of the Bible, ranging from the author-centered method of the 1960s, to a focus on what the text means in the 1970s, and finally to a reader-centered method in the 1980s and 1990s. When readers bring their own questions to the text—instead of insisting always that the text set the agenda—the text becomes illuminated in unpredictable ways. C. illustrates his method with six essays: three on Genesis, one on OT histories, one on Job, and one on Nehemiah. The first, from which the book gets its title, is a critique of the feminist proposals of Phyllis Trible. C. holds that her attempt to redeem the text of Genesis 1-3 for feminism is unsuccessful and that a mature feminist criticism will find these chapters to be irredeemably androcentric. He argues that what Eve does to help is to bear children and this helping, despite the opposite claims of Trible, is in Genesis the act of an inferior helping a superior. C. is always creative, sometimes outrageous (Nehemiah was a liar, who cannot be confidently believed about anything), and never dull. To read these essays is to learn first hand about the exciting possibilities that stem from "readerly questions" about the Bible. RWK

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Preaching Helps

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany—Good Friday, Series B

"Way To Go!"

Do it well, whether "it" is hitting a home run or getting a promotion at work or winning a piano competition, and friends will say, "Way to go!" I guess it means you have pursued your path all the way to its goal. You are traveling your way successfully.

This year (Year of Mark) we will see the phrase "The Way of the Lord" used frequently in Sunday School and Bible class materials and in commentaries and articles on Mark. Mark portrays Jesus as traveling a hard and narrow path, making a single deliberate journey to Jerusalem and the cross. The passion predictions (8:31, 9:31, 10:33-34) punctuate the midsection of the Gospel and remind us of the way Jesus goes.

That road to his passion is marked by service and suffering, but it is no sorry defeat. It is "the way of the Lord." It is paradoxically "a glory road." Not just because it finally ends in a triumph that cancels preceding lowliness. Rather, every inch of that Way, every deed of service, every moment of self-giving along the path, is a defeat for the enemies of God and of humankind. His servant path is a triumphal procession to those who have eyes to see it, as the centurion did who shouted at the cross, "Way to go!"

Where are we heading? What is our goal? What are we aiming at with all our days and all our doings, all our coming and going? If we deeply desire to travel the way of the Lord, how exactly do we today do that? Our contributors help us mull over these questions, seeking answers.

Eldon L. Olson is the Director of "Consultation to Clergy," an agency of the Bishops' offices of the Northwest, delivering confidential pastoral care and spiritual growth to pastors and their families in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska. He has provided the "First Readings" for this issue. His tough-minded analyses explore the texts, opening them up in unexpected fashion, continually surprising.

I first met Darcy D. Jensen in Fresno, California, when he was campus pastor at Pax Dei Chapel. During the summer of 1990 he moved south toward the coast and is now involved in Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In personal and anecdotal fashion he shares his own struggles with the texts in a way that is both helpful and downright encouraging, as he writes the "Pastoral Reflections."

From his base in Appalachia, Don Prange continues to challenge and prod us to think beyond the inner and individual dimensions of the text and see how God's care extends to communities in the whole of their lives, including the political and the economic, as he writes "Prophetic Voice."

God's people are continuously bombarded and tempted by the icons and stories of our culture to settle for money or power or pleasure as the goal of our historical path. Preachers have the high responsibility of announcing week by week the glory of the way of the Lord. To our three authors this issue and to all of you preachers and proclaimers I say,

"Way to go!"

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany February 3, 1991

Psalm 1
Deuteronomy 18:15-20
1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Mark 1:21-28

FIRST READING

The Deuteronomist writes to emphasize the moment when the people of God cease their wilderness sojourn to begin their occupation of the promised land. In that transitional moment between promise and fulfillment, Moses takes the occasion to recall the stories of their ancestral hope, to rekindle the singular devotion which God has commanded, and to lay a structural foundation for this new national identity they will devise. Matters of economic justice, national festivals, and political order are set out with a clear mandate that there must be consistency and integrity. "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (16:20). This mandate is developed for judges, kings, priests, Levites, and soldiers. In the context of these positions of civic order and power, the ancient promise of the prophet is repeated, a prophet whose words will be God's words, whose authenticity will be validated by history itself. God's word will be, in the mouth of the prophet, consistent with the experience of God's people.

In Mark's narration of God's reordering and restructuring of power in the Christ, the context is not the potential for abuses of power but the violent clash between the old order of power and the new order of power. The age of the good news has begun, Isaiah's prophetic voice has made its wilderness cry in John the baptizer, the new identity of the people of God has been established in the calling of Simon, Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee. Today's text initiates Jesus' public ministry with the dramatic scene of Jesus teaching in the synagogue of Capernaum, as one having authority. His authority is validated by the power he demonstrates over the unclean spirit of the demoniac. The public epiphany of God's new order is no still, small voice; it is a cataclysmic wrenching, a convulsive moment not unlike the tearing of the temple's curtain as Jesus cried out and breathed his last (15:38). The exorcism validates who this Jesus is and by what authority he teaches. Just as in the preceding baptismal narrative the voice from heaven claims him as Son and Beloved, and as the centurion witnessing his death confesses him as Son of God, so the demonic power itself bears witness to the vanquishing Holy One of God. The cosmic drama of the experience of God's people will consistently, as Mark's narrative unfolds, validate its first sentence's claim to be the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This epiphanic new order, for all its vivid drama, will consistently be misunderstood as either blasphemy by Jesus' despisers (Mk 3:22) or befuddled confusion by his disciples (Mk 4:30). The signs of the new order, however, are clear: Jesus confronts an oppressed, possessed, and dehumanized world, one kept in the guise of structure and order by the tyrannous powers that have filled the vacuums, the wildernesses, with presumed and pretended power. These pretentious powers evaporate under the cleansing power (authority, *exousia*) of Jesus' exorcising words. Paul's admonition (1 Cor. 8:1-13) reminds us that there are those who cannot yet know the freedom this kairotic moment offers. The gospel itself can become, for those whose lives have become accustomed to the constraints of idolatry, a stumbling block. This moment between promise and fulfillment, this moment of the epiphany of Jesus Christ and his new order, is a moment of precautionary certainty. The inevitability of the outcome of God's promise is assured; indeed, its immediacy is so urgent that the future's hope is proleptically at hand, as even the demon powers confess. Yet that reality remains veiled, obscured by the very powers which confess Christ's sacramental identity. It remains the task of God's newly created people to both lift that veil with a caution that honors the fragile faith of the neophyte, and to affirm the clarity and vision of the promise's certain fulfillment. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The banishing of an unclean spirit is not a familiar experience for myself or others I know. What, therefore, was immediate to one is vicarious to the rest of us. We are, at best, second-hand observers of the event, sitting in the back pews, peering over the shoulders of four disciples, listening to Mark's rendition of their experience. Thus we speak, not of a familiar personal experience. Rather we admit the alien character of this text and render our testimony from afar.

Joseph Sittler, in an essay entitled "The View from Mount Nebo" from the collection *Grace Notes and Other Fragments*, introduced me to this very useful hermeneutical move. In that essay he confessed he was not among the earthly company of those who had crossed over into the promised land of spiritual fulfillment with its varieties of bliss. Rather, like Moses, he had lived his life on Mount Nebo—seeing the promised land in all its grandeur but never entering there or partaking of all its wondrous joys.

My approach in this instance would follow Sittler's lead. It would be a testimony to that which has been seen from a distance, to that which has not been a personal experience. It would also address the yearning, seemingly universal among us, for just such dramatic, faith-confirming demonstrations of divine authority and for the miraculous banishment of all our personal uncleannesses. It would speak of what is believed and hoped for, without inferring that such was already known.

In so doing, I would look initially for the ordinary features of the text, to find those other points at which there may be personal identification. For example: No limousine. No press conference announcing the start of Jesus' public ministry. Only a short trip into Capernaum and a normal stop at the synagogue. It was the common practice. Nothing out of the ordinary. Much like adult forum between services. The children go to Sunday School; the adults pour a refill of coffee and go .o the adult discussion. The usual.

Then, the ordinary becomes the cradle of the extraordinary. The gray synagogue air slowly brightens, as Sinai's bush suddenly burns in the midst of the gathered. Jesus' words are soothing waters for thirsty souls and hot coals to the hard of heart. Their astonishment, already bursting, is quickly surpassed; an unclean spirit speaks out from its hiding and the extraordinary encounter increases its light. Amid the roil of unrest, divinity is revealed. In the midst of antagonism and confusion, Christ liberates. Even self against self is unbound.

The accomplishment of the past becomes our promise for the future. What happened for the one, happens for the many. Friends and strangers. The known, the unknown. Christ encounters anyone, any time, any place. And it's all for the sake of their deliverance, their healing, their freedom, including freedom from their own uncleanness. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

What gave Jesus' teaching an authoritative newness (Mk 1:27) was that he was not into scribal theologies about God, but into a full participation with the voice of God (1:11) in calling the "kingdom of God" (1:15) into being. The voice of Buckminster Fuller is helpful: "God is a verb, not a noun."

Jesus silences the "unclean spirit (1:25) of presumptuous (Deut 18:20) theologies in which doctrinal and confessional statements become an idolatrous preoccupation for those who claim a special knowledge and understanding, those who boastfully say to Jesus: "I know who you are" (Mk 1:24). But as Paul says, "It is love that edifies" (1 Cor 8:1) and contributes to an authentic 'church growth' around that which is new. To "find pleasure" (Ps 1:2) in this teaching makes for a happiness (Ps 1:1) which is fundamental to authentic evangelism! DP

The Transfiguration of Our Lord Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany February 10, 1991

Psalm 50:1-6
2 Kings 2:1-12a
2 Corinthians 3:12–4:2
Mark 9:2-9

FIRST READING

Our texts today describe the transformative power of God which comes to the witness so that continuity is established between the witness and the vision. In viewing Elijah's ascent in a whirlwind into heaven, Elisha is entitled to inherit God's Spirit from Elijah, symbolized by Elijah's mantle. The witness not only becomes a participant in the vision's purpose; indeed, the vision itself ontologically transforms the witness into witness-bearer.

This, then, is the transfigurative icon of Christ which Paul proclaims. Unlike the veiled Moses who is uncloudedly seen only when one turns to the Lord, the Christ himself stands in naked glory. It is a clarity of perception which, by God's mercy, progressively transforms the witness into the image she or he beholds.

This conviction in the ontological transformation of the believer into the icon of the Christ would comfort the persecuted in the prison cell (Phil 1:12-14, 20-22), motivate the itinerant missionary apostle (I Cor 1:10-17), and grant a clear hope to the martyr at the face of death (Acts 7:54-60). So central was this conviction in the mind of primitive Christian experience, that the transfiguration was often regarded as the symbolic moment of the church's creation. For as the disciples witnessed the transformative image of Christ, once the veil was removed, the Holy Spirit was present and the ecclesial community was commissioned (2 Cor 3:17-18).

The history of Christian experience has not always honored this theme with Pauline integrity. It has become the foundation for the rigorists' quest to attain the holiness and perfection of Jesus as well as the neoplatonic mystics' quest for transcendent oneness with God. In the abuses of this theme, in whatever expression, there is a consistent treatment of the Transfiguration and the transformative image of Christ as an instructional event which the beholder should seek to imitate. The words of the texts themselves disallow this pedagogical or tropological understanding. The disciples stand in terrified numbness (Mk 9:6), Paul's church beholds the unveiled glory of Christ, reflected to give courage and freedom.

Many interpretations have been offered for the symbolic significance of Moses and Elijah talking with the glorified images of Christ. Although Mark mentions no reference to the law and the prophets of Israel, that is the most common suggestion, a suggestion which presupposes a theological distinction. What is more important than the symbolic identity of Moses and Elijah, theologically understood, is the symbolic community in which Christ appears transfigured and the real community of Peter, James, and John. Three figures, of which Jesus is the central image, appear to three figures, of which Peter is the central actor. A parallel congruence is established between the Christ and his community of memory, on the one hand, and the church of current experience. This is mimesis in its most Hebraic integrity. Jesus Christ becomes a participant in the historic memory of God's people, the Old Testament becomes a Christological community, so that the historic prefiguration is transfigured into the New Testament community's self-understanding. This is more than a matter of establishing historical continuity between Old and New Testament, Israel and the Church—it is a symbolic expression that Jesus Christ stands as the transformative act of God's grace according to which, in both memory and promise, God's people are being transformed.

The three texts for today might stand in reverse order in their treatment by the preacher. An awesome transformative event has been witnessed by Christ's disciples, an event which Paul portrays as descriptive of the lives of all who dare to view Christ's glory, the image of which is a

mantle passed from generation to generation. There is a vision of Christ, a corporate understanding and appropriation of that vision, and an evangelistic inheritance of that appropriation. Today's church may well view the vision with awe and wonder, but it often fails to claim that vision as its transformative inheritance, and feebly passes that vision to the world. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

This text is nearly impossible to treat in a traditional textual sermon. The snares are many, and narrow is the interpretive way. In trying to reach for its epic proportion, we are in danger of abridging the incarnation and slipping into heresy. If we make less of it, we risk impiety and triviality. It stands somewhere beneath the Incarnation and Resurrection but above miracles, healings, and exorcisms in the Christian tradition's ranking of the holy mysteries.

Perhaps it is a closer companion of the baptism of Jesus, which is alluded to in the text itself (Mk 9:7). Lest it be misconstrued as a second baptism, we would need to use different language. Maybe, for the sake of the discussion, it could be referred to as a re-affirmation of baptism, Jesus' confirmation.

However enigmatic, it is a text that asserts and, in its own mysterious way, confirms the divinity of Jesus. That was the assertion of Jesus' baptism. That is the continued claim of the Transfiguration.

Whatever else may be said about the text is modest, and maybe that is appropriate. We are in its great shadow, seeing and hearing the event through a curious mix of imagination and suspended disbelief. It dents our modern scientific sensibilities about what wonders God performs. But soon we are back to our customary certainties. It simply requires too much imagination. The Incarnation and Resurrection are all we can bear by faith alone.

The Transfiguration demands the extra ounce in our capacity for faith. The Incarnation and Resurrection seem to be more than enough to fill us full, up to the brim. But along comes this text, and the wineskin of our faith is pressed to stretch just a bit more. We discover that it can, and we are the better for it.

From the humility born of struggle with the text, these additional thoughts might serve the sermon and the text:

• The account engenders mystery. It reminds us that the Christian faith has a reach beyond its own grasp. It looks beyond the power of our own eyesight. So, we preach a mystery. Without apology. With all the confidence of faith, faith alone.

• The event was for the disciples present, whether aware or not at the time, the soul-strengthening food necessary to endure the Passion of Christ soon to follow. It has been the same for countless followers through history as they faced their own suffering and death.

• It might be something like the surprise 25th anniversary trip to the home country the children arrange for mom and dad. When dad dies the following March, the trip's memory is mom's strength through the lonely, dubious weather of the spirit.

• It is something like... DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

A transfigured theology puts a premium on listening (Mk 9:8) rather than speaking (9:6). The "voice" (9:7) implies an on-going and active dialogue with, and around, the Word of God in history. There is always the danger it will be enshrined (9:5), if not watered down (2 Cor 4:2) in doctrinal formulations and human traditions which only pay lip-service to God (cf. Mk 7:6-13), and avoid the prophetic and dialectical challenge to the Pharaohs (Moses), the Ahabs/Jezebels (Elijah), and the Jerusalems (Jesus) who refuse to *listen* to the Word of God.

It is out of authentic listening and by "an act of mercy" (2 Cor 4:1) that we become heirs (1 Kgs 2:9) to an authentic prophetic tradition capable of "stating the (unveiled) truth openly in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4:2), always knowing that ultimately it is God who will always get the last word (Ps 50:6). DP

Ash Wednesday
February 13, 1991

Psalm 51:1-13
Joel 2: 12-19
2 Corinthians 5:20b–6:2
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The occasion of Joel's post-exilic prophecy is debatable. Perhaps a swarm of locusts has provided the occasion for Joel to call his people to repentance and renewal; perhaps the locusts are symbolic expression of an invading northern army (2:20) which is futilely resisted by anguished people. In either case, Joel uses the occasion to proclaim the nearness of the day of the Lord, the eschatological day of destruction, darkness, and gloom (1:15, 2:1). The signs of that coming day are twofold: a mood of warfare permeates the land (1:6, 2:4-5, 3:9-10, 19-21) with dehumanizing violence and mayhem, leaving a sense of dazed futility; and the earth itself lies victim, its pastures and vineyards destroyed, its storehouses empty, its livestock groaning and wandering.

Joel calls God's people to a solemn assembly, an assembly marked by grief and lamentation. For whatever has caused these signs of the day of the Lord, the appropriate response of God's people is grief. Fasting, weeping, mourning, and the tearing of hearts are the formula ritual of Hebrew lamentation. In themes reminiscent of the Deuteronomist's Song of Moses (Deut 32: 1-44), Joel convenes the nation to face its humiliation and grief, to entreat God's mercy and pity. And as the people repent and turn to God, God will likewise repent and return to them. God hears the grief of the people and responds. This assurance of God's response to the terror of warfare and the grief of the earth itself is an enormously timely message for contemporary American ears.

For Paul, God's response is not simply the end of judgment and the return of blessing, it is the divine exchange in which reconciliation with God is effected by God (2 Cor 5:20b–6:2). God assumes the fate of the sinner, allowing the sinner to become the righteousness of God. In Christ, God and sinner interchange to declare the day of salvation. In this interchange, Christ and sinner work together, cooperate to accept God's grace. Using Isaiah's servant song (Isa 49:8), Paul proclaims the immediacy and urgency of this day. For in this divine exchange, the people of God have become participants in God's redemptive response, assuming the posture of servant which Christ has assumed (2 Cor 6:3-10).

Matthew's text, from the Sermon on the Mount, further defines this participation of the disciple community in language which makes a connection between Christ's humility and suffering and the humility and suffering of the disciple. The disciple of Christ, as the light of the world and salt of the earth, will demonstrate that image of Christ which is marked by his poverty in spirit, grief, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peace, and abusedness. Matthew underscores these Christ-defined qualities for practices of piety, for piety itself risks the reward-seeking mindset which compromises Christ's image. The concern of Matthew, throughout the teachings of Jesus, is that a Christian's practices of discipleship maintain the integrity of Christ's example. If we have become participants in Christ's evangelistic mandate, we must do so from Christ's posture of humble service. Matthew develops a formula instruction for matters of piety. Whether it be almsgiving, prayer, or fasting, disciples are instructed to avoid public acclaim, to perform the discipline in secret (inwardly, as from the heart), and to anticipate rewards only from the father/God who alone knows our inward pieties. ELO

First Sunday in Lent
February 17, 1991

Psalm 6
Genesis 22:1-18
Romans 8:31-39
Mark 1:12-15

FIRST READING

The Old Testament lesson for today is a dangerous text; and that danger, especially in the context of the nightmare incidence of domestic violence in North American culture, must be part of any exegetical understanding. For to neglect that danger is to permit the text to legitimate, if not encourage, patriarchal violence and even murder. Without question the context of Genesis 22:1-18 is the patriarchal culture of Hebrew society. Whether that culture produced greater or lesser domestic violence than ours is debatable, but a text which speaks of a father who would tie his son, place him in a sacrificial posture on a pyre, and threaten to kill him with a knife cannot be permitted to stand in a culture such as ours, a culture in which at least one of three children will be the victim of physical or sexual violence, usually in their own home, usually by their own father. The exegete's task is not only to expose but also to address the text's cultural context of paternal violence. Left in the hands of abusive parents who would justify their violence as obedience and faithfulness to God, this text becomes a text of terror to countless children.

It is critical, therefore, to articulate that the narrative of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is an inappropriate example of an important message. God does indeed call God's people to faithful obedience; God will indeed provide deliverance for God's people; God does indeed grant the gracious promise of a blessing which will multiply God's people to become a blessing to all humanity—but God does not sanction paternal violence or even the threat of paternal violence; God does not engage God's people in "games" of terror. Although Abraham is surely an example of faithfulness, the Yahwist's example of Abraham's faithfulness is not appropriate. It is important to observe Paul's treatment of Abraham as the example of faithfulness in Romans 4, not the treatment of Abraham employed by the author of Hebrews (Heb 11:17-19).

The Gospel narrative of the temptation of Christ is also troublesome. If the text is so read that the Spirit of God is portrayed as a capricious games-player who subjects human beings to random tests of integrity and obedience which involve human anguish, suffering, temptation, or even the threat of death (as in the Gen 22 narrative), the steadfast trustworthiness of God, to which Romans 8:31-39 bears powerful witness, becomes compromised. Paul's clear statement of the Christ's indelible and immutable love must not be allowed to be obscured or even negated by a contrary image of God.

Does God cause suffering? Are the wildernesses of human life merely tests that a suspicious God uses to discern faithfulness? Does God abandon people to observe whether or not they will succumb to temptation? Of course not! In the temptation narrative of Mark, the angels of God serve Jesus. The enemy is not God, it is Satan and Satan's legions. The wilderness is not simply a game which God plays, it is the reality of a cosmos which is devoid of form, an anarchy of illusions and pretensions carefully orchestrated by demonic forces. Jesus Christ, Son of God, has been ordained by God's Spirit to bear God's good pleasure (Mk 1:11) to begin the time of the good news. As Jesus concludes his public ministry, the apocalypse of chapter 13 speaks of the distracting temptations, lies, illusions, and sacrileges that will accompany the Son's triumphal appearance. Angels of God will be sent to be with God's people. The faithful people of God must beware, keep alert, or they cannot know when that time will be fulfilled.

The temptation narrative is not chapter 1 of Mark's Jesus story. Instead, it serves as one of two bookends which hold the many chapters of the Jesus-story in place. The structural context of the Jesus-story is the apocalyptic context within which it takes place. Mark provides only the sparsest outline of this apocalyptic story, relying on the ability of his hearers to flesh out the symbols he employs in rapid succession. The

wilderness evokes memories of God's deliverance of God's enslaved people from Egyptian bondage as well as Isaiah's prophecy of deliverance from Babylonian captivity; the forty days of temptation recalls the forty years of desert wandering; the wild beasts recreate Daniel's night of terror, and the angels ministering to Jesus reconfirm the divine presence which sustained Elijah in his wilderness experience (1 Kgs 19:4-8). The remembrance of God's great stories of deliverance sets the stage for what is to come, just as Jesus' apocalyptic narrative sets the stage for the deliverance of God's people during this end-time kingdom.

"What then are we to say about these things?" (Rom 8:31). We are to say that God's grace is sufficient, God's vindicating judgments prevail, God's love enables us to be victorious, and nothing in human imagination or experience can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Beginning this Sunday and for those remaining in Lent, I would have elder saints in the church read the Gospel texts. These texts call for life experience. The breadth and depth of the lector's life experience would complement the same in each reading.

The great gospel meaning of this text is rooted in Jesus' inaugural suffering in the wilderness. Read by a younger, less experienced person, the text might sound remarkably facile, the suffering too easily understood, and the gospel proclamation unfortunately distanced from its martyred origin. Older persons, who have personally endured the wilderness, embody the proclamation of the text. They offer the Gospel text on the paten of their own suffering and thereby give it a vitality and truthfulness unequaled.

With few words, because few words are necessary, and because too many would stricken us, Mark announces Jesus' early pilgrimage through the land and time of desolation. The economy of words seems to make it more desperate. For, without the particular evils being defined, then all evil becomes part of the text. All the evil we have known, all the evil others have known, imposes itself upon Jesus. We are not told what sufferings and temptations Jesus met, so we are left to imagine. Just imagine.

It lasts forty days, Mark tells us. How are they measured, these forty days, when one is left to the wilderness? In terms of the isolation. The wretchedly hot, forsaken air. By the hours and minutes, strung eternally, one after another.

Amid suffering, time has no meaning. The days are endless, and the nights are longer. there is no beginning, no ending. The pain stretches forever in the boundless middle. Like a cavern's pit, you see no bottom, only endless emptiness, as time itself become empty. No escape. No relief. Only the wild beasts of the wilderness devouring your spirit.

No, not only the beasts. Angels were there, too. They served Jesus, we read. At last the first comforting, hopeful word! Right there, in the middle of the whole wretched mess, the angels cared for Jesus. Again it is briefly spoken. Room for us to imagine, to imagine that every endless minute was filled with angelic love and comfort. There was not any moment left empty of divine help.

What seems empty and desolate is filled with the more-than-boundless presence of God. Do we believe the wilderness, or do we believe the witness? That is our encounter with the text, and that is why I would have wilderness survivors tell the story. They have been there. And they have been sustained by the gospel of Christ. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

An authentic and authoritative proclamation of the Good News (Mk 1:14,15) is always being put to the test (Gen 22:1). Satanic strategies (Mk 1:12,13) mount both internal and external challenges in resisting the mission authorized by the Spirit. There is a discipleship which continually misunderstands (Mk 6:52, 8:17-21) the Good News and resists (Mk 8:31-33, 9:30-35, 10:33-45) the way of the cross. On the other side there are conspiratorial forces intent on using the cross as a means of repression (Mk 3:6, 10:33-34).

These spirits of anti-Christ contribute to moments of torment (Ps 6:2,3) and anguish, but

these are "the trials through which we [ultimately] triumph" in the "power of [the Christ] who loved us" (Rom 8:37), a power where "Christ-communities" of repentance and faith (Mk 1:15) have "made visible" (Rom 8:39) the Good News. DP

Second Sunday in Lent February 24, 1991

Psalm 115:1,9-18
Genesis 28:10-17(18-22)
Romans 5:1-11
Mark 8:31-38

FIRST READING

The preaching possibilities for this second Sunday of Lent are several, but the texts seem to focus on the theme of God's purposes of blessing, reconciliation, and redemption being hidden within human circumstances of weakness, suffering, and even death. The sometimes elusive vision of God's promise comes at moments of humble service, obedient neediness, ungodly sinfulness. The uniting statement of this theme is the second lesson, Romans 5:1-11, but the contexts of the first and third lesson stories of Jacob's dream and Jesus' prediction of his passion provide dramatic reinforcement.

Esau hated his twin brother Jacob, and Jacob fled alone into the desert to seek the protection (and the daughter) of his uncle Laban (Gen 27:1-45). Jacob carried nothing but the clothes on his back (28:20-21). With no comforts except a stone to support his head, Jacob rested on his frantic journey. In this position of fright and flight, Jacob dreams a vision of God in which God reiterates the promise of his father Isaac, a promise of land, offspring that cover the earth, and a blessing to all the families of the earth. Jacob awakens to acknowledge that this foreign, dangerous, and lonely place is indeed none other than the house of God.

God may indeed have mighty purposes, but their promise was well hidden by Jacob's abject circumstance.

The context of Mark 8:31-38 suggests that this hiddenness of God's purpose is precisely the form God intends. Having heard Peter confess Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfillment of Israel's promised deliverance, Jesus orders them to keep his messiahship a secret. Instead of proclaiming the great confession they have just made, the disciples are given the prediction of Jesus' forthcoming suffering, rejection by the elders, death, and resurrection. When Peter, who had just confessed his Messianic glory, protests his prediction of humiliation and death, Jesus makes the parallel connection between Peter and the demonic power—for until this point of Mark's Gospel, only the demonic powers have recognized Jesus as God's chosen one (Mk 1:24). Similarly, the disciples' request to share in Jesus' glory will be associated with another formula prediction of the passion (10:33-38).

Mark insists that Jesus' messianic glory remain hidden—for if it is revealed, it obscures the meaning of discipleship (Mk 8:34-38, cf. 10:42-44). That is, the messiahship of Jesus is intentionally hidden so that true discipleship might be vividly clear. This consistent theme in Mark lends credibility to suggestions that Mark's Gospel may itself be a commentary on a christological hymn such as Phil 2:6-8, in which case Mark's purpose in today's pericope is clearly that the Christian community "might have this mind among yourselves," the image of Christ's humbled and dying servant form. It is Paul's Roman letter that defines this critical theme most succinctly. The people of God do have the messianic promise of *shalom* through the grace of the justifying death of Christ; they do boast in the hope of sharing God's glory. But that hope arises from the foundation of suffering (5:1-5), and it is made most vividly present in an awareness of weakness, sinfulness, and enmity. For salvation comes through his life, because of which we boast in the reconciliation he has given. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Erna was the one I related with most easily. She was more approachable and shared her kindnesses effortlessly. Art was another story.

Art had a disposition of vinegar. He was lean, almost gaunt, with an ever-present peevishness on his face. Art had sold insurance for a living—more like intimidated insurance, I'd say. It isn't that he was mean; he simply wasn't particularly warm, perhaps because he hadn't had anyone like Erna early in life to soften him. And yet I think there was a deep tenderness inside him, which he tried to protect from life's trampling by being a bit prickly himself.

Erna was his balance, his heart, his great love. They had met late in life and married when most people their age were spoiling grandchildren. She had none of the inner storms apparent in Art. She was one of those rare people who had come to terms with the large questions of life early on. A career Army nurse during World War II, she had prayed many a dying boy into the peaceful arms of Christ. Erna was strong of constitution and of spirit.

Continually active in service to others, she was often around church—ushering, altar guild, newsletter folding, the usual. Her special ministry, however, was the weekly worship at a local convalescent hospital. Each Wednesday, conspicuous with her silver-blue hair and thick-lensed eyeglasses, she played the accordion and sang "Sweet Hour of Prayer" with her congregants.

When I met them, Art's health was already failing. It was a two-year descent into hell. Hospitalization after hospitalization. Erna sacrificed and nursed and loved. They invited me into their life, and into his dying. It remains a most humbling honor.

Toward the end, Art finally declared: "No more." There would be no more returns to the hospital. No more medication. No special measures to prolong his life. It was because he was weary of the pain, and it was because of Erna. He so loved her that he did not want her spending the rest of her life nursing his broken body, exhausting her good health on his bad health.

The end finally arrived. Erna called: "Come visit Art. He wants to talk."

She led me to his bed, then left. Ever the sensitive one, she knew it was a word for me that he had. His strength nearly gone, his vinegar completely gone, he could only whisper. I had to lean over, my ear directly above his dry lips.

"I didn't know it would be this hard," he said. Employing all my well-honed pastoral skills, I responded: "You mean you wish you hadn't decided to stop the medication?"

He stopped that foolish thought immediately. "No, I just didn't know it would be this tough!" That was it. They were the final words I was to hear from him.

Erna was courageous. Art was courageous. And stubborn, too. Discipleship of the sacrificial sort, of the cross-bearing sort, sometimes requires such. That, and loving kindness. That they both had, in abundance. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

The most serious threat to authentic "Christ-communities" comes from a spiritualized theology (neo-Gnosticism?) denying the material nature of the Good News.

The patriarchal vision (Gen 28:10-22), however distorted and misunderstood even to this day, involved a "promised" *land.* Now the correction Jesus brought to the distortions/misunderstandings was not a spiritualized heavenly place, but an incarnate witness to the "love and faithfulness of Yahweh" (Ps 115:1) based on a communal practice centered around the forgiveness of debts (Mk 1:4, 2:1-17) and providing the daily bread of food (Mk 6:30-44, 8:1-21) and other physical necessities.

Living by the Good News means being involved in a dialectic, and sometimes a confrontational one, with the system administered by "the elders, chief priests and scribes" (Mk 8:31) even if its ultimate political consequences meant the cross (8:34-38).

What Jesus says to Peter and to us is: "Get from behind me" (Mk 8:33). Stop playing "christian." Stop claiming to be a follower when "the way you think [your ideology] is not God's way but man's way" (8:38). It is the spirit of anti-Christ. One can't claim to "have been reconciled" to God and "saved by the life of [God's] Son" (Rom 5:10) and remain an active enemy (ideologically/strategically) of the God of justice and the Good News. That is Paul's argument throughout the Letter to the Romans. DP

Third Sunday in Lent
March 3, 1991

Psalm 19:7-14
Exodus 20:1-17
1 Corinthians 1:22-25
John 2:13-22

FIRST READING

Paul's Corinthian congregation had become fragmented by conflicting allegiances to authority figures. To each of those figures divisive followers have attached attributes of compelling self-validation. Paul summarizes those validating attributes as either wondrous signs or wisdom. Signs demonstrate God-given power and strength; wisdom demonstrates God-given eloquence and insight. The absence of a power produces a stumbling block to some; the absence of insight produces foolishness to others. But it is through the foolishness (1:21) and weakness of Christ's message-bearers that the cross of Christ is empowered and made wise (1:27). For it is not the charisms of signs and wisdom that validates the message of Christ, it is the cross itself, a cross which is both stumbling block and foolishness to any who seek validation. God's validation confounds both signs and wisdom. The unfortunately brief segment of Paul's reflection which is the second lesson for today needs to be informed by his more comprehensive statement, that the cross of Christ is itself the power and the wisdom of God.

The connection between that second lesson and the Gospel text from John is the angry request that Jesus defend his cleansing of the temple of Jerusalem with signs. The mayhem of whip-driven sheep and cattle, scattered coins, and overturned tables recalls for the disciples the psalmist's zealous cry of anguished indignation, "I have become a stranger to my kindred, an alien to my mother's children. It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me" (Ps 69:8-9). As the zealot bears in himself the insults which have affronted God, Jesus makes the connection between his body and the house of his Father, a connection no one else would make until after his resurrection. His disciples would then recall the scene of havoc, the indignant zeal of the psalmist, the validating sign Jesus would give for his rage, and the identification he made of himself as the bearer of the insults made against God.

The scene of the cleansing of the temple, Jesus' second public appearance in John's Gospel, stands as the fulfillment of John the Baptist's declaration, "Here is the Lamb of God who carries the sin of the world." It is not simply a narrative of Jesus' indignant response to commercialism in the temple; it is John's way of making a prediction of Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. No one understood this prediction, veiled as it was in the mayhem of temple scourging. But John offers it as Jesus' self-validating sign. Although crowds would quickly gather to believe in Jesus because they saw the signs of his miraculous works, Jesus alone validated his ministry by his cross on which he would carry the insults made against God (Jn 2:23-25). And although the early chapters of John give no theological understanding of the meaning of Christ's atonement and instead appear to focus on his incarnation, the movement is clearly established that this Word of God incarnate has come to die so that he might bear the sins of the world. The cross alone betrays the purpose of God.

It is interesting that the Exodus version of the ten commandments is included among the pericopes for this Sunday's texts which are otherwise so focused on God's atoning work. Connections could be made between the holiness of God's law on Mount Sinai and the holiness of God's temple on Mount Zion. Or contrast could be made between the theophanic signs which accompany God's giving of the law on Sinai (Ex 20:18) and the subtle passion prediction Jesus offers. More likely, the ten commandments are included to remind the worshipping community that sin is defined by God according to God's law which God alone has given. Therefore, sin is an insult to God, a violation of God's sacredness, an insult to God's holiness. The second and third lessons for today unite to proclaim God's plan for how that insult will be resolved. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Here we have the loudest text used to demonstrate that Christ has not been wholly domesticated by the "Jesus is my best friend" phenomenon. Despite my personal preference for Christ's kinder side, it does prevent a reductionism from creeping in. Christ surely is more than the cuddly, soft teddy bear that protected us from nightmares and gremlins under the bed. So, periodically it is good for the temple to be cleansed.

This text has also been used to justify our own angry outbursts, under the rubric of "righteous anger." That is less solidly rooted in the text. The righteous anger of the text is Christ's, and we increase it when we equate ours with his.

By suggesting that our sense of righteousness corresponds with Christ's, we make two dangerous moves:

1. In so doing, we cleverly place ourselves in the judge's seat. Yet, we are the judged. We are the servants of Christ, not the inverse. We must be scrupulously clear, especially homiletically, that all our determinations and pronouncements of righteousness are fundamentally derivative. Thus they are fallible and always subject to Christ's higher judgment.

2. This text is not an opportunity to harangue others in the house of Christ. If we use it so, we've suddenly domesticated the text itself. Its hermeneutical bits comes from the challenging thought, "This could be us!" We are not Jesus in the text, we are the sellers and brokers. The lesson causes us to reflect upon our own practices in the church. Do our fund-raisers, boutiques, and car washes sometimes turn the church into a marketplace not altogether unlike the temple in Jerusalem? This is a confrontational text, and the confrontation is between Christ and us.

The final verses referring to the destruction of the temple continue the confrontation but shift its field of vision. It moves from the ethical to the christological. The cleansing of the temple was not simply a righteous, prophetic restoration of the temple's sanctity, as important as that was. It signalled that Christ was replacing the temple as the locus of God's presence.

This was not instantly apparent to the disciples. Nor would it be for us. So much of our insight and understanding comes later. It does not immediately appear amid an experience. The disciples believed and understood the richer meaning of the temple encounter in retrospect, when seen through the lens of subsequent experience. The same occurs with us. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

Now if slavery and oppression in Egypt shape the biblical context out of which principles evolve for a new way of life rejecting idolatry and injustice (Ex 20:1-17), then doesn't the material content of the Good News around the forgiveness of debts and daily bread make sense? And doesn't it help to understand Jesus' Passover action of upsetting the market (Jn 2:13-22) in a temple which presided over an idolatrous economic system? Even the Ten Words (Ex 20:3-17) are co-opted in an anti-Christ system and become counter-revolutionary doctrine, manipulated and misinterpreted absolutes about God, family, and property used to perpetuate an ideology of injustice and oppression.

But the ultimate anti-Christian manipulation is a spiritualized preaching of a crucified Christ (1 Cor 1:23) which robs the crucifixion of its political and social content, and too often serves to perpetuate the very "temple robbery" which Jesus resisted. Isn't it anti-Christian to speak ever so loudly about "Christ crucified," while remaining silent about "bad-news" economic systems? Such anti-Christian theologies become an obstacle to exorcising the madness of injustice and oppression. DP

Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 10, 1991

Psalm 27:1-9(10-14)
Numbers 21:4-9
Ephesians 2:4-10
John 3:14-21

FIRST READING

The raised staff is a familiar symbol used by the Priestly writer of the Pentateuch to denote God's deliverance of God's people throughout the Exodus. When the people of Israel complain of the hopelessness and hardship of their journey, a priestly leader raises a pole to guide them safely through the sea (Exod 14:15), to consecrate the priestly order of Aaron for deliverance from plague (Num 17:8-11), or to protect them from the poisonous bites of serpents (Num 21:4-9). The serpent surmounting a pole protected the people from the consequences of their own sins of impatience and faithlessness while wandering through the wilderness of the Sinai peninsula. That symbol of the raised pole would become a biblical type, like the red marking or thread, the mention of which redeemed those who recognized it. In beholding the symbol, the memory of God's promise was kindled, and courage and hope were reaffirmed.

John's lengthy theological reflection on the meaning of Christ's atonement, set in the context of a conversation between Jesus and the aged teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, employs the ancient symbol of the serpent-surmounted pole. Although no mention is made of the humiliation, suffering, or death of Jesus, the announcement is clearly made that God has sent a son in order that the world might be saved through him. How that salvation will come remains unspoken, except through the implied parallel of the serpent-surmounted staff and the Christ-surmounted cross. John's Gospel will continue with obscure references to the means of God's atoning act in Jesus (cf. 6:51, 8:21-28). But it is increasingly clear that the purpose of God is that through this Son the world may be brought to life, even eternal life (Jn 1:3-4, 12-13). God's atoning work in Christ in the hypostatic union of Father and Son is that of life-giving birth, not a death-giving judgment, available to the eyes of faith. Those who fail to understand and receive this gift of eternal life do so because they are either blind (spiritually deprived of sight, cf. 9:24-34) or overwhelmed by darkness (spiritually deprived of light, cf. 8:12, 9:4, etc). The means of Christ's atoning work, his death and resurrection, are predicted in John's Gospel as Jesus performs miracles of healing the dying or raising the dead. On those occasions, Jesus' living and acting in hypostatic union with the Father performs the same miracle of death/resurrection that will be the means of the Father's atoning work in him. For Jesus is not only the one who is resurrected, he embodies resurrection and life (11:25).

John consistently connects faith and vision, on the one hand, and life and light, on the other. Christ has come to bring life, a life which is light to all people (1:4). To believe in Christ is to see the light, to overcome the blindness and darkness which Christ alone dispels. Faith in Christ comes as an act of seeing (9:35-39), of permitting the light to supplant darkness. Darkness, however, operates as an addiction—its addict fears its exposure, clings desperately to it, and compulsively chooses the judgment of death which darkness brings. Darkness, like an addictive drug, takes on a life of its own, a power over its victims (cf. Jn 12:31-36). Demonic darkness leads only to death, but the light of the Christ, viewed as an ensign which draws people out of darkness, brings life.

John's theme of the life-gift in Christ is repeated in the Ephesians lesson, with emphasis on two other familiar johannine themes—that the life-gift of Christ is entirely an act of God's gracious love, and that the life-gift of Christ is ordained from creation to eternity. Because of God's abundant love, entirely unmerited (2:15, 2:8, 2:9), entirely by God's grace (2:5, 2:7, 2:8), God has raised us and made us alive (2:5, 2:6). This text's sentences weave these several clauses in variations of syntax, but with the same consistent meanings. Indeed, from the very foundations of the world (Eph 1:4-5), God has woven this gracious act of redeemed life through the entire

fabric of human experiences (2:10), just as God's grace will raise us with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6). ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

From my childhood, my parents' childhood, and surely from their parents' before them, John 3:16 has served as one of the most popular expressions of divine intimacy. In it is kept the most prized of personal treasures—God's magnificent love in Jesus Christ given uniquely and personally to each of us. It has long served as the Lutheran correlate to the prominent confession of faith made by sisters and brothers from other traditions in the Christian Church: "I believe in Jesus Christ as my own personal Lord and Savior."

Indeed, the entire text is intensely personal, breath-takingly intimate. Even the closing verses of large-scale judgment cause an inward assessment of one's personal conduct.

The text has other dimensions equally splendid and rousing. They, too, merit our homiletic attention. They are, however, of such a cosmic scale, so extensive, so comprehensive, that they dwarf our customary, more personal metaphors. When measured alongside the witness itself, our metaphors look like trifling baubles. Or, we settle for abstractions that measure the size of the witness but fail to equal its vivacity, its drama, its breath-taking power. Perhaps this is why, in part, we hear so few sermons about the cosmic scope of Christ's presence and salvation. Yet the text calls for just such an attempt.

Here are two who knew the size of the challenge and got nearer than most. Abraham Heschel, one of the most eminent Jewish scholars of this century, suggested that the challenge was one of disposition and perception. Humanity, said Heschel, has lost its ability for reverence and awe. In its bent for scientific measurement, it has abandoned its appreciation for mystery. He wrote:

> Awe is an act of insight into a meaning greater than ourselves.... The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe.... Awe is a way of being in rapport with the mystery of all reality.
>
> The meaning of Awe is to realize that life takes place under wide horizons, horizons that range beyond the span of an individual life or even the life of a nation, a generation, or an era.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning spoke with a heart of reverent awe. She put both size and passion together, as in this verse from her poem "Aurora Leigh":

> Earth's crammed with heaven,
> And every common bush afire with God;
> But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.

Perhaps the mystics and poets are the ones to give us the words to preach the cosmic, passionate dimensions of this text. It really is worth our trying. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

It is the nature of anti-Christ theologies to distort the truth about the material realities of eternal life by emphasizing "personal salvation" (Jn 3:16, Eph 2:8,9) at the expense of "the good life [including political and economic justice] God meant us to live from the beginning" (Eph 2:10). We too easily lose "patience" (Num 2:5) in the midst of hardships which go hand in hand with the struggle to restore justice in the land. Anti-Christ theologies are then too easily bitten by the temptation to glorify catchy little biblical quotations—a practice which makes for a kind of immunity to the greater biblical truths about the "way of Yahweh" and "the path of integrity" (Ps 27:11). DP

Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 17, 1991

Psalm 51:11-16
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Hebrews 5:7-9
John 12:20-33

FIRST READING

Jeremiah's text, perhaps more familiar to us as the text for Reformation Day, proclaims the establishment of a new covenant. It will write the Torah within the hearts of the people producing for everyone an inherent knowledge of God. Those who have broken the former covenant through sin and iniquity will know God intimately, and those whom God has known intimately (as a faithful husband) will be forgiven of their sin and iniquity. This boldly eschatological pronouncement comes as a promise, not a plea. There are no appeals for repentance or reform, no judgment, no pedagogic postures. On the contrary, at that new covenant there will be no need for pedagogy or prophecy—it will come as a divine fiat, a *fait accompli* initiated and executed by God.

This new covenant will not, however, be individually appropriated by God's people. Jeremiah's prophecy is consistently addressed to the whole people of God regarding the whole people of God. No one is excluded from his judgments (5:1-5), no one individually or conditionally receives his words of promise. The new eschatological knowledge of God and of God's law will be engraved in the hearts of all of God's people. There will be no need for preachers or teachers, no need for priests or prophets. Karl Marx, for all his visions of an egalitarian society, never imagined such a day!

There is much in the letter to the Hebrews that is hard to reconcile to Jeremiah's vision. God's promise is clearly conditioned by an individual's resolve (Heb 4:1); more mature Christians will guide those of faltering faith (Heb 3:13); and the appeal to holiness, purity, and perfection marks the course of the new covenant (9:15-28). Hebrews portrays Christ in the priestly office of Melchizedek, "in charge of things pertaining to God... to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin" (Heb 5:1). Jesus, as priest, offered up prayers and supplications to God who could save him from death. Because of his reverent submission, having been perfect, he learned obedience in his suffering to become the pioneer of salvation for all who obey him. Although Jesus was God's Son, his pioneer priestly role was clearly earned by his perfect obedience to suffering and death (2:10). In like manner, the Christian runs the course to salvation following the course Jesus has set (12:1-2).

Having raised Lazarus from the dead, the event which both prefigures his own death and resurrection and also prompts the chief priests and pharisees to plot his death, Jesus, in John's Gospel, enters Jerusalem to be met by some Greeks (Jn 12: 20-22). To them, Jesus summarizes his teachings in such a way that his prediction of his death and resurrection becomes descriptive of the life his community would live in this world. Whoever would presume to serve him must also follow the course he sets in sacrificing their lives. The purpose of their sacrifice, however, would not be their own salvation alone; it would be for the sake of others who through them would come to know him. His death, as a single grain of wheat, will bear much fruit in multiplied shafts of grain. Whoever would follow will be similarly subjected to death, similarly fruitful and similarly honored by the Father with resurrected glory. The union of Jesus and his Father is extended to include those who would follow him. This is the reason for which Jesus has come to this hour. Parallels to the high priestly prayer of John 17 are obvious, both in structure and in content.

All three lessons speak of an eschatological community. Jeremiah's community faces immanent destruction (Jer 32:1-5), the community of the author of Hebrews is demoralized with persecution and apostasy (Heb 12:12), and John's community is beset with darkness. So the eschatological vision is based on hope, itself a defiance of the ruler of this world (Jn 12:31). ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Apologies to John, but this text is a jumble. The first part (12:20-26) reads like a mixed collection of favorite quotations of Jesus, not entirely foreign to one another but also not unified in theme. It's more like a rocky, twisting stream. It turns and splashes chaotically, and yet we want to believe it still moves with purpose. It certainly parallels the meandering, often wayward course of life lived by those servants to whom it is addressed.

The second part (12:27-33) is the strangest of encounters. It hints at Jesus' baptism, the transfiguration, last week's text (Jn 3:14), and a cross-filled moment, all in one. Particularly compelling is verse 27. It is a Gethsemane utterance (cf Mt 26:38), full of pathos. It evokes in the reader the rare response of empathy for Christ and Christ's suffering.

As a single piece, it is a fast-paced, visual text. On the mind's stage the crowds swirl, Jesus steps forward with a few intimates and begins his discourse. Like much in the world of art or poetry, it is first to be experienced, not explained. Reflection upon its meanings comes later. The first part moves so quickly that it creates a sense of haste, of urgency that draws us into its momentum. We may want to linger in thought over each statement, but we are abruptly pulled into the next. In many ways, like the disciples, our first time to pause and really reflect upon it all is after the resurrection.

The unit begins as many other texts have, with crowds gathering around Jesus. Nothing unusual for them. But it is for us. For we know what is yet to come. The hoorays will be short-lived. There are but a few days before the great Passion. So, for us it has a higher degree of tension. Our own pulse races, but with forboding. Won't someone warn them?

With them, we draw near to the finale, knowing something they don't. The background music swells. A handful of Greek pilgrims come forward and speak with Philip. They want to meet Jesus. I wonder why. I also wonder why Philip went to Andrew first, before going to Jesus.

Whatever it was the Greeks asked, they surely got more than they expected in response. Now the text accelerates, charged with electricity. Aphorism follows aphorism.

Then the Gethsemane expression. It is a moving word from Jesus' heart. It evokes deep feeling in us. We consider our relationship with Christ, how we bruise Christ's heart with our wandering ways, how our rebellions set Christ on the way to the cross.

The moment quickly passes. Partly because it's too much for us to bear all at once. Partly because Jesus' own resolve returns so swiftly. Yet Jesus' own explanation brings no understanding. God's name will be glorified when Christ dies?

John's closing narration is a door suddenly slamming. The chilling, inexorable truth by which all former truths are to be interpreted is declared: Jesus will soon be crucified, and he will thereby bring greatest glory to God. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

Voices out of current situations of oppression and injustice all over the globe are a "clap of thunder" (Jn 12:29) calling anti-Christ theologies to a conversion and a renewed commitment to the covenanted mission of "the people of God" (Jer 31:33-34). The document named "The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion," signed by Third Word Christians, is such a thunderclap. Those voices aren't just reassuring themselves in their commitment to the mission of justice and to "the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:10) that God is with them. They are calling out to those captive to the theologies of "this world," reminding us that a "sentence is being passed" (Jn 12:31) on those who have rejected an authentic theology of the cross for theologies of triumphalism and glory which certainly give God "no pleasure" (Ps 51:16, Heb 10:7).

It is certainly troubling to hear Jesus say: "unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies it yields a rich harvest" (Jn 12:24). DP

Sunday of the Passion
Palm Sunday
March 24, 1991

Psalm 31:1-5,9-16
Zechariah 9:9-10
Philippians 2:5-11
Mark 14:1–15:47 or 15:1-39

FIRST READING

The first two lessons for this Sunday of the Passion are hymns written in contexts of human misery to comfort and encourage desolated people, to assure them that beneath the humble forms of oppression and bondage, God is working a miraculous deliverance. The glory of God is hidden, and though the people of God may be imprisoned in realities of despair, they are, in fact, prisoners of hope (Zech 9:12).

Zechariah's hymn can barely be read without echoes of Handel's "Messiah" singing in the subconsciousness of the reader. Its lines describe the conquest of a king who uses no weapons of war, a warrior whose charging mount is a donkey, whose imperial command is peace, whose Jerusalem capital controls a kingdom reaching to the ends of the earth. The messianic kingdom will be an unimaginable cosmic realm of peace through humility.

Paul's hymn is recorded during the lowest point of Paul's ministry. Confined to an Antiochan prison, Paul longs for his Philippian congregation. He is lonely, upset by conflicts, having suffered the loss of all things for the sake of Christ. Indeed, in his afflictions, he asserts a continuity between himself and Christ. The key sentence in Paul's hymn is its introductory line, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). Paul calls the Philippian community to participate in the christological meaning of their suffering, just as he has come to define his situation christologically. The image of the servant allows Paul to glory in his humiliated suffering, for in the suffering of Christ's cross, God has exalted him. Palm Sunday's triumphal tones and Passion Sunday's solemn narrative are not conflicting themes; they are the two stanzas of the Philippian hymn, lived simultaneously in the life of the apostle and the community which lives by its music.

The great drama of salvation, the passion narrative of the 14th and 15th chapters of Mark, is surprisingly long. Its length precludes extensive analysis. Perhaps this Sunday's sermon needs no further exposition than the narrative itself. There are several characteristics of the Markan Passion narrative, however, which might be helpful for the preacher's sermons of this week.

1. The Parable of the Tenants (12:1-12) provides both a summary of the whole story of Mark (as well, perhaps, as Mark's summary of God's frustrated dealings with the people of God) and a preview of the Passion.

2. The only faithfulness displayed by the followers of Jesus is the ritual rites performed by women. A woman interrupts a men's dinner to anoint the Messiah, in a ritual act of consecration, at the beginning of the discourse. Only women sit in silent vigil at Jesus' death (15:40-41). And, when it is all over, women alone lovingly attend his corpse (16:1). Only the most humble in the patriarchal culture of Mark observe the rites of Jesus' death.

3. Throughout Mark's Gospel, the consequence of the cosmic battle between God and the legions of Satan is, on the one hand, the victory of God, and, on the other, human suffering. It is precisely in the midst of Jesus' suffering that the centurion confesses, "Truly this man was God's Son" (15:39).

4. Mark disallows an upbeat closure to his story. Jesus' only faithful attendants are made mute with fear (16:8). Why this starkness? It is as if the horror of death and abandonment, vividly narrated, provides, for the hearers of this story, "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ" (Mk 1:1). The acknowledgement of the abject reality of the cross is the provocation for the church to begin its eschatological task. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

On this day, as well as on Good Friday, we preach the liturgical theme of the day as much as the assigned text. That is a necessary concession to the power of the liturgical calendar. It is a given factor in the preparation dynamic.

Whatever we do, it must be acknowledged that our effort will be less powerful than the text itself. *It* is the central testimony. That is good news for the preacher's anxious psyche. The pressure to deliver the perfect sermon can be debilitating. Confession of that truth is release from the compulsion to come up with fireworks. Our calling is not to duplicate or outdo the text. It is simply to bear witness to it.

Because we are post-resurrection believers, it is lamentably difficult to enter into the tragedy of the text. We are swift in our impulsive reach for the resurrection. In doing so, we lose depth in our experience of the Passion, and as a consequence I believe we lose the heights of the resurrection too. With our pomp and palms and happy-tuned children's choirs, we risk overwhelming the note of tragic irony at the core of Passion Sunday. A sermon that at least slows the race for resurrection joys would be worthy of the day.

In recent years I have been captivated by two interpretive notions related to studies in Mark that are particularly useful with the Passion narrative. First, consider the theatricality of the text. Study it as if you were a playwright setting it for the stage. Imagine the impact of the High Priest questioning Jesus about being the Christ and Jesus saying, "I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven," while, at that exact moment, across the stage, Peter responds to the woman in the courtyard saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean."

The second notion is that of irony. It is present throughout Mark, but it is at the center of Jesus' derisive enthronement as "King of the Jews." It is obvious in Pilate's words with Jesus.

Because of all these considerations, a narrative sermon might be most appropriate in an effort to represent the tension and vitality of the text. If there isn't the time to craft such a piece, maybe a thoroughly rehearsed work by someone else would serve well. I think, for example, of Walter Wangerin's "Ragman."

Passion Sunday is loaded with ambiguities. The challenge is to hold our joy in reserve and observe the divergent, ambiguous pulls inherent in the day. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

Before the high priest Jesus freely admits he is the Christ (Mk 14:16), a reality hidden in parabolic language earlier because of confused expectations about what that meant. But before Pilate, who asks a different question ("Are you the king of the Jews?") he gives no direct reply. In a way Jesus' silence is a subtle rejection of political power, a point made clearer in the John narrative (cf. Jn 19:11). But it should also be clear that Jesus resists any kind of hierarchical model, any model by which some lord it over others.

By the same token we can be quite clear about the content of the program of the Christ. The Good News certainly includes abolishing indebtedness and making sure everyone's basic human needs are met. Indeed, that may be its essence! But how and when we act on the "Lordship" of Jesus Christ remains a matter of strategic wisdom. However, one thing is certain: it is not just a matter of saying, "Jesus is Lord!" but a humble commitment to pursue the actions of the Christ.

The mind of anti-Christ will easily enough say, "Jesus is Lord," as long as we permit it to continue practicing the politics and economics of Caesar.

On a day which just happens to be the anniversary of the martyrdom of Oscar Romero, we can celebrate a contemporary 'mind of Christ.' He was a threat to 'Caesar' not because he had ambitions for political power, but because he insisted that the church live out its authentic Christly power. DP

Maundy Thursday
March 28, 1991

Psalm 116:10-17
Exodus 24:3-11
1 Corinthians 10:16-17(18-21)
Mark 14:12-26

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

It is such a benevolent, placid scene. Maundy Thursday eve and its accompanying Scripture reading become one. The setting of the upper room warmly transforms into the nave and chancel of Christ Lutheran Church. Glistening dark wood, the lighting a glowing tranquility, friends nodding quiet affection, the burgundy brick walls emanating security and strength. Dare the world to invade this night. Just dare it to bring with it its sorrows, its betrayals. It cannot.

What is there to be done with a scene like that, with a scene that is both true and false? It is true because Maundy Thursday has been that refuge for the faithful. It has blessed numberless believers with quiet transport, welcome contentments. Yet, it is no escape. The world still presses in. The text presses in. By the witness of Mark 14:18-21, Judas sits inside the brick walls, a friend among friends.

This text sits itself down amid our tranquil night as truthfully as Judas sat himself down among his friends. Surely they expected no less than we expect on such a night: calm, harmony, encouragement, solace. And perhaps they received it in some holy, unexpected way. If not then, later. But its coming was not in contrast to the world, in opposition to the world. Its coming was amid the world, awash in the world's tragedies, for the very sake of Judas.

The homiletic challenge of Maundy Thursday is to place the sacrament *in the center* of sorrow and betrayal, rather than outside. To offer the Eucharist to and for the Judas in us all. What is so striking about this reading is that the sacrament is established at the very height of tension and anxiety. In fact, one can't help noticing that the serenity of the occasion is broken not by an outsider, not even by Judas. It is broken by Jesus. Jesus introduces the world of sorrow and betrayal into that sacramental moment. Surely all concerned would have been more than pleased to have had a blissful, trouble-free evening. But Jesus brings reality inside the walls and sets it down beside the bread and wine.

Jesus announces the presence of the yet-unnamed betrayer, and the tranquility is shattered. Each fears himself the one, yet denies it too. The mood is broken. They are broken. It is then, at that precise moment, amid their deep torment, that Jesus inaugurates the sacrament. DDJ

PROPHETIC VOICE

While Paul is dealing with a very specific kind of cultic or ritual problem in writing to the Christ-community in Corinth, the point he is making is just as relevant for 20th century Christians who may be living under political and economic systems in which there is conflict with the ideological content of the Good News (cf. Lent 2), especially as that content is celebrated around the eucharistic table. Not only are mercy, justice, and equality primary around that table, it is a "communion with the blood of Christ" and "with the body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16).

For members of Christ-communities to participate uncritically in political and economic systems which perpetuate injustices and inequities is, for Paul, idolatrous. "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot take your share at the table of the Lord and at the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:21).

Participation in the "cup" and "table of the Lord" simply cannot be dichotomized from the politics and economics in which we participate! DP

Good Friday
March 29, 1991

Psalm 22:1-23
Isaiah 52:13–53:12 or Hosea 6:1-6
Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9
John 18:1–19:42 or 19:17-31

FIRST READING

The four Servant Songs of Isaiah (42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-9, 52:13–53:12) comprise an image of the Christ which informs virtually every author of the New Testament. Other images of Christ—the New Moses, a priest after the model of Melchizedek or Levi, or even prophetic images from Elijah's model of piety or faithfulness—would be less comprehensive. Isaiah's servant, a corporate personality for Israel herself (Isa 49:3) is patterned after the ancient Near Eastern trusted envoy or delegate of the ruler, ordained from the womb (49:5) to establish a new ordering of power, intentionally comprised of the weary and marginalized of the earth. The kingdom of this servant will reach to the ends of the earth, its mark of identity will be justice, its arsenal the words of truth from the servant's mouth. From the birth narratives of Luke and Matthew to the great commission of Matthew, the image of Isaiah's servant informs the language chosen to describe the Christ-event. The appropriateness of the servant image was no doubt recognized especially because of the servant's humble form, vicarious suffering, and redeeming death. Although the whole collection of Servant Songs provides a comprehensive christological gestalt, the fourth Song focuses on a portrait of the suffering servant. To its lines the authors of the Gospels seem to make constant reference for their Passion narratives.

In John's passion narrative, Jesus is incarcerated by the betrayal of his disciple (Jn 18:1-3, Isa 53:8), he eschews any armed resistance (Jn 18:4-11, Isa 42:2-3), the religious establishment colludes in his death (Jn 18:12-14, 19-24, Isa 53:7), his faithful disciples desert him (Jn 18:15-18, 25-27, Isa 53:3), appeals to justice fail (Jn 18:28-40, Isa 53:8), he is mocked and beaten (Jn 19:1-5, Isa 53:3), his own race condemns him (Jn 19:6-7, Isa 53:8), his death is justified as the judgment of God (Jn 19:13-16, Isa 53:4), his death is a portrait of brutality (Jn 19:17-25, Isa 52:14), he makes no words of protest (Jn 19:28-30, Isa 53:7), and he is buried in an alien grave (Jn 19:38-42, Isa 53:9). No other Old Testament image would seem so appropriate or comprehensive to portray the crucifixion.

Nor would the image of Isaiah's Servant Songs be limited to the event of Christ's crucifixion. That same language would be used to speak of the life of the community of Christ, particularly in the face of persecution. For the image was the collective persona of Israel now transformed as the image of the church. ELO

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

There are some random wrinkles in this reading that stimulate the imagination.

The first verses attend to a few details that initially seem unnecessary to the event of the crucifixion. Because of that, however, the text forces a serious search for possible reasons and connections. As a literary technique, it is a very clever means of deepening the reader's own investment in the text.

For example, I wonder why John, with the synoptic writers, so specifically identified the place of the crucifixion. Or why there is such detail in describing the arrangement of the three crosses (19:18). One reason, I imagine, is that they serve as concrete illustrations of the text's historical foundation. It is not unlike the opening lines of a local newspaper article. It did happen, and this is the evidence John cites.

One feature in John's account is contrary to that of the synoptics. In John, Simon of Cyrene is missing. Jesus must bear the cross alone. Apart from the historical question of which account may be correct, this one has its own penetrating effect. Dwelling within that one brief phrase, "bearing his own cross," is a hint of tormenting loneliness and abandonment. From all the crowds, from the remaining circle of friends, there is not

a one to walk even part of the way on Jesus' behalf. That is tragedy!

Meanwhile Pilate has the sign made proclaiming Jesus' kingship of the Jews. On the one hand, it mocks a later truth of faith. On the other, it resurfaces the deep tension between Pilate and the chief priests. The crucifixion obviously had not settled any of the problems between them. Pilate joined their collusion of death but would not change a flimsy, makeshift sign. Crazy.

Further on is the catch-in-the-throat scene in which Jesus' mother, Mary, is given into the care of the beloved disciple. The closing line of the episode haunts, for what is not said. The grief of all griefs is for a parent to see a child die. Gone is the future, dreamt in the birth of that child. Gone is the hoped-for contribution to life of this child. Gone are the joys, the triumphs prayed each night for this child.

Yet, profound love is present at the cross, despite the horror. Even though dying, Jesus makes one last gesture of love. He sees to his mother's care by giving her another to love and to be loved by. From that hour, John writes, they were as mother and son. Oh, the courage, the strength, the faith, the love it must have required of them! Perhaps in giving them to each other, Christ gave them those gifts too. DDJ

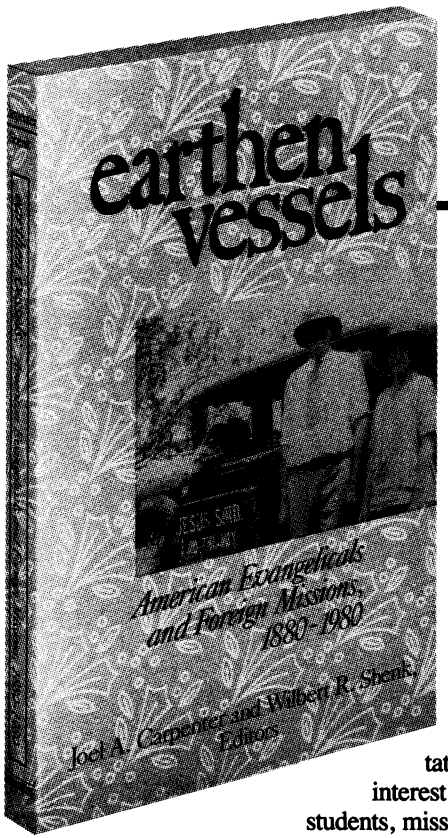
PROPHETIC VOICE

Jesus' moment of triumph in resisting even the 'last temptation' to renounce the way of the cross silences the spirit of anti-Christ and exposes its powerlessness once and for all. But its demonic energies continue to make last-ditch efforts to twist even that reality with subtle distortions. Jesus' invitation to die with him is almost totally obscured by a theology which sees him only as dying for us.

Authentic servanthood ushers in the Good News, and the Good News of Jesus and servanthood makes clear God has not "deserted" (Ps 22:1) the poor. The Good News lifts up the material realities of "peace" (Isa 53:5) and "justice" (53:11). The Good News establishes "mercy" (Heb 4:16) as the guiding principle within communities committed to the Christ. The Good News indeed focuses on "the good life God meant us to live from the beginning" (Eph 2:10). The crucifixion is the final proclamation that Good News is a reality! "It is accomplished!" (Jn 19:30). DP

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Eliezer Was a Shepherd

Paul Bauermeister
Washington, Missouri

A sermon preached on Christmas Day at Bethel Lutheran Church, University City, Missouri

Christmas morning is the best time there is to meet Eliezer. Eliezer was a shepherd. Don't get the idea that he wanted to be a shepherd or that he wanted to be called Eliezer. Oh, it was an honorable name, the name of priests and prophets. It means "God is my helper," which is okay as Hebrew names go. But Eliezer preferred to be called Ellie. Somehow it sounded less ethnic and not so far back in the woods. Ellie had a more up-to-date ring to it. It was what his friends called him.

Ellie was a shepherd. No question about it, he was a shepherd. He came from a whole family of shepherds. They were all shepherds at his house. Still Ellie preferred not to think of himself as a shepherd. When he was a little kid he had wanted to be a shepherd. He could remember standing at the door as a five-year-old crying, as he watched his father and uncles disappear over the hill with the sheep. He was crying and saying over and over to himself, "I wanna be a shepherd, I wanna be a shepherd!"

But when he got to be 12 and went along the first time for a longer stay with the sheep, he found it to be boring. Hour after hour with nothing to do, sitting on a rock, watching. You never knew when a wolf or a stray dog would come along or when a sheep would fall or get lost, so you had to watch.

Ellie preferred to think of himself as a poet and a musician. A singer of songs is what Ellie was.

But because he was a shepherd he could never write anything down; paper was too expensive, so many of his best songs would be forgotten and only the dumb sheep would hear them. And that was probably the way it was always going to be. He would get to play and sing at a few family gatherings, and people would say, "That Eliezer, he is so clever with his songs...." But that would be the end of it. The next day he would be back with the stupid sheep. He had no right to hope for anything else. His own father had told him so.

You would think in a country that had been over-run by Roman soldiers there would be room for a singer of songs. He could give the people hope and heart. He had memorized a long list of words that rhyme with Roman and could sing verse after verse of a song he had made up about

running out the Romans, how they would hurry and stumble and bump into each other. People laughed when he sang that song, and they really felt better afterwards. Some of the brave ones told him that he should never ever sing it where any Romans could hear, or it might be the end of him.

Last night started out like every night out with the sheep, only a little clearer and a little colder. From his hill top he could see Bethlehem and watch the lights go out, one after another, until the whole town was dark. He heard a short argument between two men a long way off, then silence. Later a dog barked somewhere, and he thought he heard the shrill quick cry of a very young baby.

Then everything was quiet, and the cold settled around him and he moved closer to the fire, and felt the usual chill seeping down the back of his neck.

He had the first night watch, which meant that he would sit there in silence and listen to the quiet night time noises the sheep make and the not-so-quiet night time noises the shepherds make. Some of them snore unmercifully, and then they snort just before they turn over in their sleep. He played a little game with himself in which he predicted when the snort would come. Actually he was pretty good at it.

The other shepherds had been talking about the bright star which came up shortly after dark. They could not remember having seen it last year. They said it was getting brighter every night. Ellie had not seen it for about a week because he had been at home sleeping indoors. There it was, the bright star, much brighter than a week ago. If you didn't know better you might say it was pointing at Bethlehem.

Why would any star want to point at Bethlehem? Dinky little sheep town.

He poked the fire with a stick and made it burn brighter, which gave him hope for a little more warmth, and pulled his thick blanket around his shoulders and wondered if he were getting sleepy. If you felt sleepy it was tough doing these night watches, because they really got on your case if you fell asleep. But he assured himself that he was too cold to fall asleep.

An hour later, his thoughts were on Rebecca and the way her smile lights up her face and on a melody he was making up for her. He would play it only for her ears to hear; that way it would be his special gift to her. He got up, put some more wood on the fire, counted the sheep one last time, and was just about ready to wake his brother who had the second night watch when it happened.

Suddenly the night was gone and it was day! No, it was brighter than day, with a strange kind of white light that left no shadows and no shade. This light was terribly bright, but it did not hurt your eyes or even make you squint, and you could see absolutely everything, exactly the way it is. Ellie had never seen things this way before. He could see the other shepherds exactly the way they were, strong and weak, kind-hearted and mean-spirited, beautiful and ugly, and he could see himself the same way. The light was so bright that he could see everything about everything, and somehow, in that light, it was all right being a shepherd.

Next he saw the man—or was it a man? A big person! The light seemed to be coming from this big person.

Before he had a chance to think about it the person spoke. What a voice! It sounded like thunder in a canyon! "Be not afraid!" the bright one said. Ellie had not had a chance to be afraid yet. He was just blinking and wondering. The other shepherds were grunting themselves awake and looking around. Nobody was afraid. Nobody could think enough to be afraid.

The voice went right on: "I bring you the best news you are ever going to hear, but it is not just for you. This joyful news is for *everybody*, because today Christ the Lord is born in David's city."

Now Ellie was scared. David's city meant Bethlehem. "Christ the Lord" was Messiah talk, which meant trouble! Anything could happen!

In Bethlehem? That was what the voice said. Then there was more talk about a new born baby in a manger, which was just a little crazy. *Nobody* puts a new baby in a manger.

Next the really big sounds came. A thousand voices like the first voice, was it even more than a thousand? And much more light. And even though the sound was very loud it did not hurt your ears; instead it was breathtakingly beautiful. More beautiful than any song he had ever heard or even thought of. Complicated, rich, full, wonderful song, and so beautiful! But Ellie, the musician, could not remember it—try as he might, he could not remember it. It was a song of praise to God, no doubt about that. Everybody could tell that.

And then all of it was gone. As quickly as it had started, it ended. Not an echo, not a whisper of the great song remained behind, not the least flicker of the bright light. Gone. All of it. Gone. All that was left was the still clear cold night, and the bright star, still pointing at Bethlehem, and the sheep sounds, and the other shepherds, all sitting up now and starting to breathe again, looking around in the darkness.

Now what? thought Ellie. Did it happen? Did the others hear? Did they see? Or was that stew we had for supper a little too spicy, or did I fall asleep? Or did I stumble and hit my head while I was looking for wood?

No, I did not fall asleep, and I did not hit my head. The most beautiful song in the world! Praise to God. And something about a new baby, a baby that somebody had put in a manger.

Ellie and the other shepherds found themselves running into Bethlehem, bumping along and tripping in the darkness, to look for the baby in a manger. They might have been accused of foolishness or drunkenness or of just behaving like goofy shepherds, but they went and they looked... and they found him, the baby in a manger. There really *was* a baby in a manger.

Ellie's world got larger last night, larger than it had ever been before. What stretched Ellie's world was the God who does things for people. The kind of God you always wanted, the one who pays attention and who gives, gives, gives, not just food and clothes and family and friends and ordinary things like that. The God who gives... God... to ordinary people. And the most beautiful song Ellie had ever heard. But even the song, which he still could not remember, seemed unimportant next to God who comes so close, and cared so much and gave so much God to ordinary people.

God became important to Ellie that night. More important than love or light or songs, more important than anything, ever. It happened because of the bright person and the beautiful song and the baby in a manger. God brought Ellie's whole world together, into one piece, one fine, beautiful piece. That's what it was: Peace! Ellie called it Peace. Had the bright person said something about peace? Maybe! Yes! Peace! The wonderful light. The most beautiful song. And Peace on earth. And a baby in a manger, of all places.

Amen

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What Jesus Doesn't Want for His Birthday

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Currents in Theology and Mission

I had a birthday this year, right on time, and though it came in the middle of summer it started me thinking about Christmas. I'm surprised it never has before, because what I learned this year ought to be obvious to someone who has professed Christianity as long as I have.

I have three children who are no longer babies, nor are they teenagers—yet. They used to ask me what I wanted for my birthday, but they rarely do that anymore, because I always reply that I want them to give me gifts of cheerfulness and cooperation, of caring for their things and keeping their spaces tidy without being reminded, and above all of loving one another (at this stage meaning no fighting or cruelty, respecting each other's property, etc.). Or, I say, they can make me a card, draw me a picture for my office window gallery, or think of ways that they can help with the house and yard work and make coupons for me to cash in when jobs need to be done. These suggestions have never gone over with them very well. They roll their eyes and then—usually the evening before or the morning of—they are busily at work on their presents.

This year they got up before I did, which is not really unusual on birthdays, and before I had set foot in the kitchen it was decorated with balloons and Happy Birthday posters from one end to the other. I was told to stay out, they weren't quite finished, and to close my eyes if I absolutely had to pass through. I did make my way to the bathroom, and by the time I was ready for breakfast the preparations were almost complete. There was a homemade card from my oldest, a store-bought card from my middle child (she had picked it from the supply I keep in my desk), and a jewelry box made of two foam meat trays with tape hinges and lined with cotton balls from the youngest. Never mind that the jewelry I own and wear would fit into a single ring box, or that the store-bought card was for someone on my own birthday list, or that the homemade card was made on the computer in the youngest's bedroom early in the morning with the result that he got less sleep than he needed, or that I would have preferred the balloons to be saved for the children's special days. Of course I appreciated their efforts and thanked them and hugged them and enjoyed seeing their faces beam.

By 10 a.m. it was a normal summer day, with the usual number of spats and messes and grumblings about picking up—

or maybe a few more from their having got up early and being a little short on sleep. And about 11 a.m. I began to think about Christmas—another birthday—and what kinds of gifts are asked of us, and what kind we actually give. Not that all kinds of gifts aren't accepted; God's grace is bountiful, God's heart is as big as they come. But the gifts that are appreciated the most, that are truly gifts of love, are the gifts of service.

And the Lord asked Peter: Do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Then feed my lambs. Faith without works is dead. How much clearer can it get? We Lutherans are so afraid of works-righteousness that we can even ignore our own experiences of what it means to love and give before we will say that works have a central place in the Christian life. I was raised to remember this. But it became clearer to me on my birthday, when I was the recipient: if I were God, what would I want? Maybe I would want the same thing as I want as a human parent of human children: that they love one another as I love them; that they do their part to care for the space we share together; that they refrain from cruel behavior and profane language; that they respect the beauty and balance of creation and all other human beings; that they share their gifts and never stop being thankful for them; that they consider their time a precious gift to be filled and given back.

The birth of God among us is God in each one of us, under our skin, creating the desire to serve and love one another in our own little corner. All the rest is easy giving—the money in the plate, the Christmas decorations, even the high holy liturgies and beautiful music that fill our worship spaces in these festive weeks. We work and give and sacrifice in these also, but they are simply a beginning; what is further requested of us is our lives in service, whatever service we can render, in love, to God's people around us.

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