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1890–1990 The American Lutheran Mission in China

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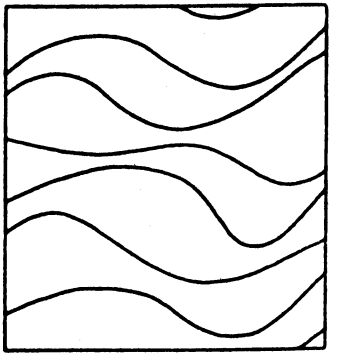
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1890–1990 The American Lutheran Mission in China



In 1949, there were 103,000 baptized members in the Lutheran Church of China, not to mention 737 congregations, 180 pastors, and 1,000 lay evangelists and "Bible women." The LCC was formed in 1920, while its seminary, opened already in 1913, graduated nearly 300 pastors before 1948. Once there were 600 Lutheran missionaries in China. Today the daughters and sons of those Lutherans are a vital, but no longer identifiable part of post-denominational—and growing—Chinese Christianity. At the urging of **James A. Scherer**, who assembled the articles in this issue, we pause to remember the deeds of the American Lutheran pioneers, to thank God for their faithful service, and to reclaim and embrace our historic missionary heritage.

Bishop K. H. Ting introduces the issue by reminding us that the selfhood of any particular church is unthinkable apart from its origin in the church universal and its being a part of it. Every independent church is

y definition interdependent. In his article later in the issue he notes that ıe church in fact lives in China in a highly laicized form. All good ıissionaries, like all good pastors, work hard to make themselves dis-ensable. The church which is trying to be Chinese is not a denial of the /orth of the missionaries' work, but rather its fruition.

James A. Scherer tells the stories of the American Lutheran ioneers by quoting from biographies written in the 30s and 40s that :flect a deeply pietistic theology and a true passion for mission. The ımerican missionaries began their work in China under the lingering hadow of the Opium Wars and the Unequal Treaties, a mere decade efore the anti-foreign violence of the Boxer event, and amid the revolu-onary stirrings which overthrew the last Chinese imperial dynasty and shered in a new republican experiment. The tales of these adventur-rs—Nelson, Ronning, Wold, and Edwins—read like a modern version f the Acts of the Apostles.

David L. Vikner speaks of the spectacular growth in Protestantism, :om 700,000 in 1949 to anywhere between 5 and 50 million today. All ıis happened with an aged and rapidly-dwindling number of clergy. In 'hina it is not a shepherd searching for the sheep, but the sheep search-ıg for a shepherd. The Chinese church shows the importance of family /orship for survival and growth, and it demonstrates that evangelism lows from worship, the example of one's vocation, and the indigeniza-on of the Christian faith. Vikner—and we—can look forward with een anticipation to how the Chinese Christians today will apply the iblical revelation in the changing Chinese context.

Paul Varo Martinson notes the phenomenal resurrection of the hurch in China and the complexity of its diversity. The Three Self lovement stresses self-propagation, self-support, and self-government. ıll of these are essential for survival in the Peoples Republic, and they ontinue themes articulated in China already in the mid 19th century. 'he responses in China to the events of Tiananmen Square range from ıe apolitical (appealing to Romans 13), to the para-political (Three elf), to the theo-political (Bishop Ting). The latter position refrains :om outright affirmation or direct criticism of the government. The

article relates the recent growth in Christianity to the exhaustion of spir following the Cultural Revolution. Our part is to join hands with the Christian community in China at every level possible in a common witness to the gospel.

Christianity first came to China in 635, but then disappeared. Lutherans showed up in 1846, and North American Lutherans in 1890. After 1949, some of these Lutherans fled to tell the story elsewhere while others disappeared like leaven into the churning, bubbling dough of post-denominational Chinese Christianity.

There, on the other side of the world, sisters and brothers born from many strains of Christianity continue to turn the world upside down.

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they ma see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Ralph W. Klein
World-lighter

Greetings to American Christians

Bishop K. H. Ting

Bishop Ting, China's internationally renowned Protestant leader, is President of the China Christian Council, President of the Three Self National Committee, and Principal of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in the People's Republic of China.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It gives me great pleasure to greet you as you commemorate the Centennial of North American missionary work in China.

It is rightly an occasion of thanksgiving—for bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ and his church to China, if for nothing else. Their obedience to Christ's commission to make disciples of all nations is greater than the sum total of all the shortcomings and faults in a movement not above human weaknesses that could be cited. The work of human hands in history with its ambiguities is not thrown into the void. Christ receives it,



The self-hood of any particular church is unthinkable apart from its origin in the church universal and its being a part of it.

blesses it, transfigures it, and makes it acceptable as offering to God. God being God, this is the way he remembers all his children's doings.

In a later stage of the church in China, still for the sake of making disciples of men and women in China, we came to see the importance of de-westernizing Christianity and making it Chinese in government, support, and propagation. We need to earn our right to be heard on the strength of the truth of the gospel, and on that strength alone. We would like our North American Lutheran fellow-Christians to see in this development not a negation of their missionary contribution of the past, but rather its fruition. All good missionaries prayed hard and worked hard for the arrival of the day when the church they planted could stand on its own and they themselves could become dispensable. The church in China has its shortcomings and faults, but Christians abroad have good reason to offer their thanksgiving to God who has answered their prayers in ways more wonderful than they dared to hope.

A Chinese selfhood for our church is important, but more and more Chinese Christians have been led to hear what the Spirit says to us in the last ten years: the selfhood of any particular church is unthinkable apart from its origin in the church universal and its being a part of it. Each particular church finds its sustenance in the historic, world-wide community of Christian discipleship spanning all ages and cultures. That is why we treasure and cherish our relationship with the Lutheran World Federation, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and, indeed, with all churches of Jesus Christ. To seek unity of all Christians in our country and solidarity with all Christians abroad—this is what the China Christian Council stands for. It is this unity and this solidarity which steadies our knees as we face changes and unpredictable turns of events.

As we in China have received strength and support by our being a subject of prayers on the part of very many Christians elsewhere, we also pray for God's guidance as you seek to discern the ways he is calling you to witness in the world today. We look forward to a much closer relation with Lutheran Christians in North America in days and years ahead.

The Lutheran Missionary Pioneers: Who Were They?

James A. Scherer

James A. Scherer worked as a missionary in both China and Japan before becoming Dean of the Lutheran School of Missions, and is now Professor of Missions and Church History at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

In 1890, when the first Lutheran missionary pioneers from North America set sail for China, the American Civil War was barely 25 years past. European immigration to the U.S.—especially German and Scandinavian—was in full swing. Burgeoning new Midwestern towns and cities were populated by the foreign-born and their foreign-speaking children. America was not yet an imperial power but would shortly become one with the defeat of the Spanish Navy by the U.S. Fleet in Manila Bay in 1898. "Manifest destiny" spurred the westward movement of population, while the Homestead Law of 1862 induced impoverished Scandinavian peasants and younger sons, many of them Lutherans, to try their luck at homesteading on the bountiful acreage of American's newly opened Midwestern states.

Paul Martinson, in his essay (pp. 380-388), suggests that the movement of American Lutheran missionaries to China in the 1890s was a migration from one "hinterland" to another—from the upper Midwest of post-bellum America to the newly opened interior provinces of China's middle kingdom. The majority of the first generation of missionaries to China were children of recent Scandinavian immigrants, settled mainly in the farming villages of Iowa and Minnesota, while a considerable minority were born in Norway or Sweden and had scarcely become acculturated to the "new land" of America before moving on to China to test their cross-cultural skills in a third culture. Daniel Nelson, the first of our pioneer missionaries, fits this profile very well. The thriving cultural and spiritual interplay between America and Scandinavia in this period—in particular the blending of Lutheran confessionalism, Haugean pietism, and Nordic ethnicity—is of critical importance for understanding the special religious roots of the early American Lutheran mission to China.

Given this double migration of Lutheran pioneers from marginal places in Scandinavia to the hinterland of the U.S.A. and from thence almost directly to the new hinterland of China around the turn of the century, it is scarcely a matter for surprise that the newcomers to China possessed little in the way of political awareness or knowledge of the momentous events then transpiring in China. The late nineteenth century was a time of turbulent change and incipient revolution in China. During these years China's relations with the outside world, and particularly with its leading imperial powers, were altered more dramatically than in any previous era of China's history. Two wars were fought between China and the western powers in 1839 and 1858 over Britain's attempt to force the unwanted import of opium upon China. China's humiliating defeat at the hands of the West in these wars opened the door to the practice of "gunboat diplomacy" and led to China's reluctant acceptance of the so-called "unequal treaties" of Nanjing (1842) and Tianjin (1858). Through these treaties Britain, France, the United States, and other colonial powers gained the right of residence, first in five Chinese port cities and later in many interior cities as well. Foreigners were granted "extra-territorial" rights in treaty ports, the privilege of travel throughout the Chinese empire, indemnification for damage to foreign life or property, and in some cases even foreign legal protection for Chinese converts to Christianity. While western missionaries consistently protested the opium trade, they nevertheless took advantage of the privileges of travel, work, and residence in China afforded by the "unequal treaties." Not until 1943 were these hateful treaties abolished. It is little wonder that Chinese Christians today seek to rid themselves of the stigma of being foreign puppets.

The period between the initial opening up of the interior treaty port cities in the 1860s and the arrival of the American Lutherans in the Central China region around Wuhan on the Yangtze River in 1890 was one of rapid expansion and "occupation" of the interior by Protestant missions. By 1889, a year before the arrival of the first American Lutherans, all eighteen provinces of China had been "occupied" by missionaries of some connection, with the interdenominational and international China Inland Mission (CIM), organized on the faith principle, leading the way into the interior. A series of anti-foreign reactions occurred in various parts of China during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, culminating in the "Boxer Movement" of 1900 during which 30,000 Chinese Christians and 235 missionaries lost their lives. Lutheran missionaries would be no strangers to these anti-foreign demonstrations at various times.

Another significant historical feature of this period is the beginning of small scale movements for democracy and westernization in China, coinciding with China's political, economic, and military decline as an imperial nation. China's defeat by Japan in the war of 1894-95 precipitated reform efforts by certain members of the Manchu class and touched off an abortive palace revolution in 1898. In 1895 Dr. Sun Yat Sen initiated a movement for the overthrow of the Ching dynasty and for Chinese democracy under the "three principles" of nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood. On October 10, 1911, Dr. Sun's republican movement succeeded, and in 1912 the last Manchu emperor abdicated the throne.

American Lutherans were thus beginning their work in China under the lingering shadow of the "Opium Wars" and the "unequal treaties," a mere decade before the anti-foreign violence of the Boxer event,

and amid the revolutionary stirrings which overthrew the last Chinese imperial dynasty and ushered in a period of civil war and a new republican experiment. Guided by their Lutheran faith principle, and in keeping with their own pietistic understanding of divine providence, they were inclined to regard these momentous changes as God-given invitations and opportunities to preach the Good News to China's lost and perishing unevangelized millions.

Adventurers they were not, at least not in the modern Hollywood sense, and yet hair-raising adventures they did have, always in the line of duty, and only for the sake of the Lord. This gave to their lives a certain storybook quality and made them "folk heroes" in the pre-video age. The tale of their adventures reads like a modern version of the Acts of the Apostles, and can only be hinted at in this collective remembrance: shipwrecks, bandit and mob attacks, lootings, stonings, encounters with wily characters, confrontations with local officials, murders, kidnappings, burials at sea—all of these and more can be found in the records. This does not even begin to take account of the sorrows and hardships endured, the separations from family and loved ones over long years, the death of spouses and children, all accepted as the necessary price of missionary service.

The American Lutheran missionaries who came to China were, in addition to being religiously motivated for the salvation of the heathen, sturdy and self-reliant people well equipped to cope with challenging situations. Few would have thought themselves intellectuals or scholars, though both Wold and Edwins rendered outstanding service as theological educators. Nelson was a merchant seaman, farmer, and skilled carpenter. Edwins, a tinsmith, taught new missionaries how to construct woodburning stoves. Accustomed to life on the



Midwestern prairie, they were not unduly dependent on the amenities of western civilization. Many had at least a rudimentary knowledge of building materials and methods, along with skills in such fields as horticulture and western medicine. They possessed more than a little of the charism of our modern "peace corps" volunteers, being above all practical, capable, and self-reliant people. And yet what made them unique as a group, set them off from most other Christians of their day, and above all determined their sense of divine calling to go to China, was their shared conviction that they were called to preach the gospel to those who did not know Jesus Christ and to lead some Chinese to the knowledge of God and salvation.

Although the American Lutheran mission to China was the beneficiary of late nineteenth century movements for spiritual renewal—one immediately thinks of the founding of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions in 1886 and its subsequent impact on American campus life—we should not minimize the motivational difficulties which the volunteers had to overcome. Virtually all pioneer profiles point to the resistance which these mission volunteers had to overcome from denomi-

national bodies, local clergy, and even their local congregations when they shared with other Lutherans their intention to go to China as missionaries. This resistance necessitated the formation of voluntary mission societies of like-minded friends, both clergy and laity, to advance the interests of foreign mission work. Had the call to go to China not been mediated by a spiritual vision (Daniel Nelson), an oracular sign pointing to a Macedonian call (August Edwins), or some other powerful spiritual experience, it seems unlikely that the pioneers would have found the courage to venture forth.

Early Lutheran mission societies served as essential support groups for fledgling missionaries until the time when Lutheran ecclesial bodies (moved by envy or jealousy?) decided to "adopt" the Lutheran missionaries and to integrate their now successful mission into the structures of the churches. When this happened the Lutheran missionaries in China, eager for the legitimation provided by church sponsorship, happily relinquished their independent societal status and embraced the new designation as missionaries sent by the American Lutheran church. It was after all logical that Lutherans seeking to establish "three-self" churches in China should have the official support of their own church bodies at home.

The biographical profiles of early American Lutheran missionaries to China which follow are designed to call to remembrance the deeds of the pioneers, to prompt prayers of thanksgiving to almighty God for their faithful service, and to motivate the sending church to embrace its historic missionary heritage. The pioneers here presented are chosen because of their special relationship to the origins of Lutheran mission work, or because of their representative character as persons who typify the best of the missionary legacy of the present Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Each is outstanding in his/her own right, but they are in no sense different from the hundreds of missionaries of various Lutheran traditions who followed them. They remind us of missionaries in countless other fields of endeavor, both past and present, who should not be forgotten during this China mission centennial celebration. The present day church desperately needs to reclaim the missionary vision and to recover the faithful commitment of these pioneers and their successors. The flourishing growth and almost miraculous revival of Chinese Christianity in the People's Republic of China today, as described in Bishop K. H. Ting's address, owes something to the costly witness of those American Lutherans who went forth to China a century ago.

The biographies which follow have been excerpted from stirring—and now somewhat quaint—accounts written four or five decades ago.

Daniel Nelson[1]

Daniel Nelson was born near Haugesund, Norway, on April 10, 1853. While yet a little boy he had to leave his childhood home in order to earn his own living. As soon as he was old enough he, like most young men of the community, went to sea. For a period of fourteen years he sailed the seven seas and visited many lands. The first

[1]Based on missionary profile by Edward Sovik, *White Unto Harvest in China*, edited by M. Kulberg and others (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1934), 220-30. Cf. also full biography by Mary Lee Nelson (Latimer), *An Adventurer With God: A Biography of Daniel Nelson* (Minneapolis: Dennison, 1970).

time he saw China he was towed into Shanghai on a wreck. The second time he put foot on Chinese soil he was serving a term in the American Navy, being a member of the crew of the flagship "Hartford," which was then stationed in China waters.

Even at an early age God was dealing with young Daniel Nelson in a very definite way. He relates that at the age of nine God began to speak to his soul and he became conscious of sin. Confirmation at the age of fourteen was a solemn experience. The following year he took sick and was at death's door. He felt that he was not ready to die, and in his distress he cried to God who, in answer, brought assurance and joy into his heart. Now he longed to pass on and be with the Lord, but that was not the holy will and purpose of Him, who had destined him for a long day of labor in His vineyard.

Having been blessed in this way, young Daniel was, as it were, now driven into the desert to be tried in preparation for his life's calling. His fourteen years at sea were by no means an unimportant factor in his missionary preparation. He had to rub shoulders with all kinds of people, and he visited many lands. This life was marked by great hardships, much toil, and many perils. Through it all he was tempered and sharpened as a tool is prepared for a difficult task. However, he did not keep close to the Lord very long after he had started out as a sailor. Little by little he, too, yielded to sin and forgot God. But God did not forget him. He spoke to him both through the storm and the still small voice of conscience. Three times he was shipwrecked but saved, while many of his shipmates were lost. At other times his comrades were stricken with yellow fever, while he himself was spared.

Through all this he could not help but see that God cared for him in a special way, and his heart was touched. From the time Nelson served as a sailor in the American Navy, God reached his heart through human agencies also. A message from the home land, and the witnessing of missionaries who visited the ship when in port in Shanghai, aroused in his heart a longing for peace with God. Thereupon followed contact with pious friends while on a stay at home. Some time later, when his ship was in harbor in London, he went through a fearful spiritual struggle at the end of which he came to possess the blessed assurance that he was a child of God.

> The present day church desperately needs to reclaim the missionary vision and to recover the faithful commitment of these pioneers.

Three years after having married the God-fearing daughter of the man who had been a spiritual father to him, Nelson together with his wife and one small child sailed for America. He was going to give up the sea and become a farmer.

The Nelson family came to join a Norwegian settlement at Eagle Grove, Iowa, where a spiritual awakening was experienced in the Lutheran churches. Spiritual awakening invariably fosters mission interest, and we are not surprised to find that in the near future two missionary societies were to be organized among the Norwegian-American church people in the Middle West. Both of these societies were to carry

on mission work in China. Nelson had been led to go to a place where the ground was already being prepared in the field of work where he was to spend the rest of his life. It was in these farm communities of the Middle West that in subsequent years so much vigorous mission interest was to be found. Much of this interest was linked with the name, Daniel Nelson.

No foreign missionary society had called him, but God had called him. That he knew, and that was to him sufficient guarantee.

About this time Mr. O. Nestegaard, Sr., forerunner among Norwegian missionaries to China, wrote a strong appeal from China. This appeal appeared in Norwegian-American publications and came to Nelson's notice. What Nelson had personally observed in China made an impression that had never left him. The needs of the Chinese people were always before him. And now when this appeal reached him just as he was building a comfortable home for himself and his family, his soul was pierced as with a sword, and a terrible struggle ensued. Could it be the will of God that *he* should go to China as a missionary? Answers to such questions are not given as a result of cold reasoning. Nor was the answer given that way in the case of Daniel Nelson.

One day he was busy shingling a roof. Suddenly his soul was illumined as if by a great light, and he could plainly hear a voice saying, "Sell your farm, take your family, and go to China." He stopped a moment to meditate and then answered in his heart, "Lord, if thou wilt send me a buyer, I will go." Now a great joy filled his heart. He immediately left the roof and went into the house to tell Mrs. Nelson what had taken place. Seeing that this was plainly a call from God, that brave and pious woman at once signified her willingness to accompany her husband to China. A neighbor woman told the writer that she noticed that the shingling was yet unfinished and that the saw was still on the roof two weeks afterwards.

Some time after this incident a circuit convention, or some similar meeting, was held in one of the Story County churches. Nelson went to that convention to plead his cause. His purpose in going was not to solicit financial aid for himself, but to plead that the church take up the cause of China missions. It is said that the plea caused a discussion among the pastors of the convention with the result that Nelson was classed among impractical visionaries. Not a single voice was raised in his support. Privately it was freely held that Nelson "was not all there." That this farmer—who was fast becoming prosperous, who was no longer young, and who had a wife and four children to support—wanted to sell his farm, auction off the rest of his property, and start out with his family for China, did not make good sense.

Our friend returned from that convention very much discouraged because all those earnest and God-fearing pastors failed to understand him, but he still remained firm in his purpose to go to China. After a period of testing Nelson was met with sympathy and understanding even on the

part of those who formerly had discouraged him. He found it possible to study at Augsburg Seminary for one year and to attend summer school at Valparaiso University. His call to become a missionary was recognized by the church, and he was ordained to become a pastor.

A study of Mr. Nelson's life reveals a striking similarity between his life and that of the old-time hero of the seven seas. We note, in the first place, that he was not afraid to cut loose from the old moorings and launch out upon the unknown. He had the courage to sell his new home and farm in order to turn the value into an outfit for a family of six, and traveling money to Central China. Whatever was left, if any, would have to apply to the support of the family and the work in that unknown land. There was no organization to support him as yet, and the few friends he left behind were poor settlers. No foreign missionary society had called him, but God had called him. That he knew, and that was to him sufficient guarantee. These were the circumstances under which Nelson landed with his family in Shanghai on November 30, 1890. They proceeded inland, five days by steamer, to Hankow and Wuchang in time to pass through a period of anti-foreign riots, in which two Swedish missionaries were murdered a short distance below Hankow.

Work was commenced in Hankow, but new missionaries were arriving both from America and Norway, and it was desirable to find a permanent location for these as soon as possible. It was decided that Fancheng should become the base of the mission from America, while the Lutheran mission from Norway was to occupy Laohokow. Trips were also made into Southern Honan, and it was there that Nelson spent the last 25 years of his life. As soon as it was possible to go inland after the Boxer Uprising, the Nelson family and Miss Marie Anderson moved from Hankow to Sinyang, arriving October 3, 1901.

Christmas Day, 1923, may be considered a red-letter day in the annals of mission work in Sinyang. The development of the evangelistic work in the district had by that time reached its peak. The church, built as early as 1906 with a seating capacity of about 600, was now too small. Sinyang had become the home of the mission high schools on the East Field, and a large number of students had to be accommodated. On that particular Christmas morning 52 people were baptized. Pastor Chu Hao-jan, a son of the congregation, who later became president of the Lutheran Church of China, preached the morning sermon. The Reverend M. Saterlie, who for many years was Mission Secretary and who was then on his second trip of inspection of the China field, brought a greeting from the mother church. In the afternoon of the same day there was a Communion service, and about 240 believers partook of the Lord's Supper.

At the time of Nelson's passing, 1900 souls had been baptized in Sinyang District since the beginning of the work. At six of the ten outstations there were organized congregations, and there were 13 other preaching places. The lower primary schools had 550 pupils.

It was Sunday, February 7, 1926. For 13 days the missionary residences at the South Gate in Sinyang had been made the target of attacking forces. The missionary colony, nine adults and three children, had taken refuge in the best-sheltered rooms in the old residence. They barricaded doors and windows, dodged bullets, and awaited developments. On that Sunday, services for the hundreds who had taken refuge in the mission buildings were conducted in the courtyard, as it was unsafe to occupy the church. Everyone felt the seriousness of the occasion. Bullets whizzed in the air, but the

church sheltered the crowd. It was here and under these circumstances that Daniel Nelson preached his last sermon. He reminded the people that life is uncertain at best, and that one can never know when the last hour will come. Were they prepared to meet their Creator?

On the following Monday evening Mr. and Mrs. Nelson and Sister Christine Johnson, who stayed together in one room, had just committed themselves to God's care for the night when a bullet entered the room striking Daniel Nelson in the head. He lingered until after midnight but did not recover consciousness.

There was a lull in the fighting; a coffin was obtained; and Nelson's body was carried into the church where it was placed under the pulpit from which he had witnessed for Christ for 20 years. 40 days and 40 nights he rested there. Finally on March 20 it was possible for fellow workers and the congregation to come together in order to give him a suitable Christian burial.

Nelson had a childlike faith for which he was ever ready to contend. As a friend he was sympathetic and true. His friendship was genuine, but without display. As a companion he was priceless. As a co-worker he was considerate and helpful. He will be remembered and known as the Pioneer Missionary of Norwegian-American China Missions. Yet, he will be remembered longest as: *The hero of faith, who "was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."*

H. N. Ronning and Thea Ronning[2]

Halvor Ronning was born in the parish of Bo in Telemark, Norway, March 3, 1862. After primary school and high school he taught school in his home community of Bo from 1881-83. As a rugged outdoorsman he was an excellent skier, and during the summer months he often spent weeks at a time tending sheep, living in an isolated cabin at the foot of the mountains. The family were pious Christians of Haugean background, and for a time the grandson of Hans Nielsen Hauge was said to have been one of Halvor's teachers. Under the influence of his local pastor, young Halvor came to fuller assurance of faith and began to confess Christ in both his home and community.

A new minister in the Bo parish, the Rev. August Wenaas, had recently returned from America where he had founded Augsburg Seminary in Minneapolis and had just been called as president of the Red Wing (Minnesota) Seminary. Wenaas told Halvor's father about the great need for ministers among Norwegian settlers in America, and suggested that in America it was even possible for the son of a poor tenant farmer to receive pastoral training, something unheard of in Norway. Later Wenaas sent a letter from Red Wing to young Halvor, urging the young man of 21 to come to America for study.

Ronning's four years at Red Wing, during which he taught Norwegian to his American classmates and worked during the summers in a parochial school, were like "paradise on earth." Before graduation in 1887, he received a call to a three-point Hauge Synod parish, the principal congregation being in Faribault, Minnesota, with others at Webster and near Kasson. He had not been long at Faribault before a revival started in all three congregations, followed

[2]Based on H. N. Ronning with N. N. Ronning, *The Gospel at Work* (Minneapolis: N. N. Ronning, 1943), and Gracia Grindal, "Thea Ronning: Missionary to China," n.d.

by intense interest and prayer meetings for foreign missions. Little did young Pastor Ronning or the members of his parish suspect that their prayers to the Lord of the Harvest for laborers for the foreign field would be answered through the sending of their own pastor to China!

Interest in China mission work in Scandinavia was kindled by Norwegian and Swedish missionaries who went to China under the China Inland Mission. In June, 1890, two young Norwegian laymen came to Minnesota on their way to China: S. Netland and O. S. Nestegaard, Jr. Halvor Ronning was one of the first pastors of the Hauge Synod to invite them to his congregation in Faribault. Through their "burning love and zeal," their presentation of the evangelistic need and opportunities in China, and their special appeal for an ordained pastor to help them, Ronning himself began to hear a "Macedonian call." The two Norwegians were invited to attend the annual Hauge Synod convention at Jackson, Minnesota, on June 11, 1890. That convention, however, decided to table the matter of a mission to China until the following year. This came as a great disappointment to pastors and lay delegates who had prayed for such a mission and begun to raise money for it.

There followed an amazing turn of events, not unlike the one described at Antioch in Acts 13:1-3. During the noon lunch-break at the synod convention in Jackson, a rump session of mission supporters went behind the church and organized an independent China Mission Society for the calling and support of Lutheran missionaries to China. O. A. Ostby was elected chair, and Halvor Ronning was chosen secretary pro tem. Ostby, climbing up on a wagon box, called the meeting to order, while Ronning, standing on the ground close to the wagon, used the top of a wagon wheel as a writing table for taking minutes. At a subsequent meeting of the new society held at Goodhue, Minnesota, August 28-30, 1890, the China Missionary Society was formally organized, adopting a constitution and electing permanent officers. Shortly after this Pastor H. N. Ronning of Faribault and his sister, Thea Ronning, were called as the first China missionaries. Both accepted the call, and it was decided that they should leave for China in the fall of 1891.

During the lunch-break at the synod convention, mission supporters organized an independent China Mission Society.

Before leaving for China, Ronning and his sister visited many Hauge Synod congregations and were met everywhere by large crowds eager to see and hear the new missionaries and to contribute their offerings. Just at this time Hannah Rorem of Radcliffe, Iowa, expressed a desire to accompany the two missionaries at her own expense, and her offer was accepted. She too had felt an inner call to share the good news with others. Her "unusually radiating and winsome personality" won the confidence of all she met. On November 3, 1891, this trio sailed from San Francisco, arriving in Shanghai on December 1, 1891. Hannah and Halvor were married in Hankow on Christmas Eve, 1891.

The first task of the three new arrivals was to find a field of labor for the Hauge Synod mission. Halvor Ronning conferred with Dr. Griffith John, legendary missionary pioneer of the London Mission Society based in Hankow. The story goes that Dr. John invited his Lutheran guests to kneel down with him in prayer before a large wall map of China. Cane in hand, John began to study the map, talking at the same time with God. First, he thanked God for "these young and courageous Viking sons" God had sent to China. "Now, dear Lord, Thou must through Thy Holy Spirit point out to me where these brethren ought to find their own field." His hand came to rest over Northwest Hupeh. There, said John, were large and fertile plains with many millions of heathen without God and without a single missionary! Ronning took John's advice as a direct sign from God.

On May 11, 1892, Halvor Ronning, Daniel Nelson, P. Matson of the Swedish American Mission Covenant Society, and J. B. Brandtzaeg of the Norwegian China Mission Society, all dressed in Chinese clothes to make themselves less conspicuous, sailed up the Han River, a tributary of the Yangtze, on a tour of investigation. Coming to the twin cities of Fancheng and Siangyang, the men climbed up a small mountain for a spectacular overview and for a time of prayer. They were filled with thanks for God's guidance, and joyous in their anticipation of the work which could be done in spreading the gospel in this unevangelized area. According to one account they heaped together some stones as a memorial to their first visit to the place of their future labors. Matson chose Siangyang for the Mission Covenant; Brandtzaeg decided on Laohokow; Nelson and Ronning selected Fancheng and its surrounding territory, taking over the work already begun in a small way by the China Inland Mission. Ronning later considered the choice of this field, and the difficulties and hindrances experienced in entering and occupying it, as "something of the greatest and most important which God gave me grace to have a part in."

Ronning and Nelson then returned to Hankow for further language study. Subsequently, Nelson came back to Fancheng to arrange for land purchases and to ship materials for the building of the first permanent Lutheran mission station in China.

Ronning worked as a missionary in Fancheng from 1893-99 and, after a furlough abroad (1899-1901), again from 1901-08, serving 16 years in all as a China missionary. When his beloved wife, Hannah, died in 1907, Ronning decided to bid farewell to the Chinese church and to return to America with his children. At age 46 he embarked on a second pioneering ministry as a frontier missionary in Alberta, Canada. Ronning died in retirement at Valhalla Center, Alberta, in 1950, having dedicated his entire life to missionary service.

Thea Ronning, who accompanied her brother Halvor to China in 1891, was born in Norway on May 18, 1865. She came to Minnesota in 1887 at the age of 22 in the company of her younger brother, Nils, to live with her older brother Halvor in Faribault. She was described as a quiet, contemplative, sympathetic young woman, well-balanced, and deep in her religious life. Traveling about the upper Midwest with her brother Halvor in support of the China mission, she often addressed the women in the congregations, using the text of Ezekiel 37 about the valley of dry bones. Thousands of Norwegian-American women organized bazaars and auctions, and sponsored dinners and free-will offerings to get Thea and her brother on their way. Thea often spoke of her burning desire to help Chinese women whose condition she con-

sidered especially dire. She later would write home about their low status, their high suicide rates, and the painful practice of foot binding.

By 1895, following language study, Thea was flourishing in her work at the mission station in Fancheng. She made home visits around the mission station, taught young girls about the Bible, and engaged in literacy work. That year she married a new missionary arrival, Carl Landahl, and they were sent north from Fancheng to Taipingtien to open a new missionary station. In 1898, following a missionary conference, she died of an attack of meningitis, succumbing to exhaustion and overwork. Her death came too soon to establish a mark in the annals of great missionary women, but she serves as an example of many women who had the courage to answer the call. She and her sister-in-law, Hannah Rorem, were the first single missionaries from among Norwegian-Americans to brave the trip to China. Their witness lives on among hundreds of women who came after them, among women from mission circles in America who supported them with prayers and gifts, and among those Chinese—both women and men—who came to faith because of their lives.

Oscar Rudolph Wold[3]

Oscar Rudolph Wold was born on a farm near St. Peter, Minnesota, August 11, 1874. He was the tenth of twelve children. When he was still a small boy his parents bought a farm near Twin Valley, Minnesota, and it was there that he grew up. His father was an industrious farmer, and it was his ambition that all his sons should be farmers. His mother was a God-fearing woman who witnessed for her Lord both inside and outside of her home. Often when Oscar awakened in the night he would hear his mother praying—usually for her many children, naming them one by one. The boy, who loved his mother very dearly, was much touched when he listened to the petitions following the mention of his name. The mother was eager that her children should get an education above the average of those days. Therefore, when Oscar at the age of 14 said he wished to enter Red Wing Seminary, his mother did all in her power to make this possible.

After Wold had finished high school he taught public school for two years. Then he attended Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, and was graduated from this institution in 1894. He was class orator for that year. It so happened that Dr. Gerberding of Chicago Lutheran Seminary was one of the speakers at the commencement exercises. Being much impressed with the apparent sincerity and ability of young Wold, Dr. Gerberding urged him to enter Chicago Seminary in the fall. To this Wold did not give a definite answer; for not only was he not sure of his life calling, he was not even sure that he was a child of God. He hoped he was. Often when listening to the testimonies of other young people telling of the great joy that was theirs after they had given themselves fully to the Lord, he envied them their joy. Sometimes he felt like throwing himself into worldliness and sin for a while in order that he might have an opportunity to repent and return to God like

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[3]Based on missionary profile by Erik Sovik, *White Unto Harvest in China*, edited by M. Kulberg and others (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1934), 238-47. Cf. also biography of Oscar Rudolph Wold prepared by Mrs. Mabel Sihler (typescript, 116 pages) supplied by Waldo R. Wold, Glendale, Wisconsin.

Mixing with the people, Wold saw their misery, and as soon as he could make himself understood he began to work among them.

some of his comrades had done. But he was saved from doing this. After much inner struggle, that summer he was able to believe that he was a child of God.

As soon as he was clear on this matter he also became clear as to his life work. He felt a distinct call to the ministry of the gospel, and went to the Chicago Seminary in the fall of that year. After finishing his course there he received a call from the Hauge Synod to go as a missionary to China. He was ordained at Red Wing shortly after his graduation from the seminary, and on August 11, 1898, his 24th birthday, he left his home in Twin Valley to go to China. With him was his young bride, Clara Simenson of Moorhead. Before they left the home, his mother came forward and read the 21st Psalm, whereupon she committed the two young people to the Lord.

Rev. and Mrs. Wold arrived in Shanghai December 1 of that year and came to Hankow a few days later. From there they proceeded by houseboat to Taipingtien where they joined Rev. C. W. Landahl in the work. Mrs. Landahl had died the year before, so the presence of the two young people was a great comfort to him.

Wold had fine linguistic abilities and soon became a fluent Chinese speaker. Mixing with the people, he saw their misery, and as soon as he could make himself understood he began to work among them. Below are given a couple of extracts from his diary written that first year in Taipingtien.

"Was asked today to go with Mr. Wang to see his boy. The child showed me his leg. It had three sores as big as the palm of my hand. The sores were open and matter continually flowed out from them. Mrs. Wold and I washed the sores and put on salve."

"We were called by our teacher to see a boy who had frozen both his feet. From one foot the toes had fallen, and the inflamed and decayed stump stood out in a pitiful way. The bones on the other foot were plainly seen. Oh, the misery of the Chinese!"

During their second winter in Taipingtien the Wolds went to Fancheng to attend the annual conference. Upon their return to Taipingtien they found the people of the city in an uproar. Some ill-disposed person had started a rumor that a boy, who had crossed the river without the knowledge of his relatives, had been seized by the foreigners who had made medicine out of the boy's eyes. The people threatened to kill the missionaries and to burn their houses. But the Lord kept His hand over them and they were spared any harm.

That year Mr. and Mrs. Wold moved to Fancheng to take over the work of Mr. Ronning, who then returned to America. They remained in Fancheng only a little over a year, whereupon they were sent to Tsiho to open a new mission station. They had no sooner arrived at Tsiho than they had one scare after the other. It was the year of the Boxer Uprising. Hostility to the foreigner was brewing among the masses. In

July that hostility took on a menacing form. Dr. Hotvedt, Mr. Himle, and Mr. Wold, with Mr. Matson of the Covenant Missionary Society, took counsel together and decided to write to the American Consul in Hankow asking for advice. Just as they were going to mail the letter, a telegram from the Consul came advising all women and children to leave. Since the women refused to leave their husbands behind, it was decided that they should all leave.

During the trip down the Han River to Hankow, a Chinese woman fell overboard. Mr. Wold did not hesitate, but jumped in and managed to save her in spite of the swift current and the unwieldy Chinese clothes in which he was dressed. The Chinese present were deeply impressed with this act of heroism. A foreigner willing to risk his life for a Chinese woman!

The Wold family went to Japan, where they remained till the Boxer trouble had quieted down. They then returned to their station. Upon reaching Tsiho they were met by a large crowd of people led by the magistrate and greeted with fire crackers and music. They were invited to a 36-course dinner given by the magistrate. For days people in large numbers continued to bring presents and sweets.

On Easter Sunday, 1903, the first baptismal service in Tsiho was held. Ten persons were baptized.

Wold was placed in charge of Taipingtien in addition to Tsiho when Mr. Landahl went home on furlough. He spent a week each month at Taipingtien. As the distance is short and travel by boat inexpensive, he took along his family, twelve orphan girls, servants and all. Besides these regular trips, Wold often went on long journeys to distant country districts preaching, teaching, and distributing Christian literature.

Strain and overwork told on Mr. Wold's strength. In June, 1906, he had a nervous collapse which made it necessary for him to go home on furlough. During his stay in America, while recuperating, he accepted a call as teacher at Red Wing Seminary. He remained there for two years. In 1909 he felt strong enough to return to the mission field and resigned from his position at Red Wing. He set out for China, but when he came to the West Coast he had an attack of dysentery. The voyage was delayed, and he did not arrive in Hankow until January, 1910. On the way up the Han River, the family had a very sad experience. Sons Nevius and Rudolph contracted smallpox and died shortly after they reached Fancheng.

In 1911 Wold was asked to give some theological instruction to a group of boys in Fancheng. His work with this class was soon interrupted, however, for in the fall the Chinese revolution broke out and the missionaries had to leave the inland.

Meanwhile a committee representing several Lutheran missions in Central China had been appointed to discuss matters relating to the establishment of a union Lutheran theological seminary. Wold represented the Hauge Synod on this committee. As soon as the seminary had been established he was himself selected to represent the Hauge Synod on the faculty. The Seminary Board of Directors elected him president of the seminary, and this position he held until his death in 1928.

In 1920 his beloved wife died after a prolonged sickness, leaving seven children motherless. Shortly after Mrs. Wold's death, Ann, the eldest daughter in the family, developed her mother's dread disease, tuberculosis. His cup of affliction seemed full, but Wold bore up under it most bravely. Later he married Anne Lee, an intimate friend of the family. She made a splendid mother for the children, and with her cheerful disposition she soon dispelled the awful

gloom. Wold could again devote his energies fully to his duties at the seminary, and from this time on until his death he made, perhaps, his finest contribution to mission work.

When the Lutheran Church of China was organized in 1920 he was elected as its first president. This gave him a great deal of extra work to do. This in addition to his already many duties in connection with the seminary made the burden too heavy for his frail physical constitution. He became aware of some abdominal trouble, at first intermittent but gradually developing into a chronic illness which distressed him very much. But he continued working with his customary zeal until he was advised by his doctor to undergo an operation.

On Sunday, September 18, 1928, he preached in the seminary chapel. He spoke with unusually great power and emotion. He seemed to realize that this sermon was to be his farewell message to the student body and the congregation. After the service was over professors, students, and parishioners looked at each other in astonishment wondering what it could mean. Would this message be the last sermon from his lips? It was.

From now on he felt that his days were numbered. In his wonted unostentatious way he began to set his house in order. When I bade him farewell in Hankow, immediately before he went to Peking for the operation, he told me he had little hope of recovery. He had the seminary account books on his bed, trying to straighten up the accounts and otherwise do all he could to leave things in order after him. Speaking of his spiritual condition he said he was blessed with an unspeakable peace and joy. His face fairly shone. While preparing for his operation he wrote some farewell messages to the seminary faculty, the Lutheran Church of China, the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, and to each one of his children. These messages all breathe the life of a full-orbed Christian for whom death was nothing but an entrance into a fuller life and a higher service.

His premonition came true. Dr. Wold died peacefully in October at the age of 54. I have never seen such a display of memorial scrolls and streamers as were carried at that funeral procession. When they afterwards were hung up they more than covered the walls of the biggest hall in the seminary building. They represented the Lutheran Church of China, individual synods, and schools and organizations of various kinds. Dr. Landahl, his life-long friend and fellow-worker, officiated at the funeral.

In trying to estimate the character and work of Dr. Wold, I would first consider him in the home as husband and father. As such he was exemplary. He was blessed with an even temper. But his eminent success as head of the family had a deeper root than merely the expression of a natural endowment. This endowment was disciplined by careful thinking and prayer. He was careful not to offend, kind and generous. He showed extreme care in everything he said and did. He wanted things done right, and he showed by example how they should be done. The Word of God also "abounded richly" in the family life and was made the standard to which speech and action must conform. He governed his home by the force of his Christian personality. He loved his family dearly, and there was spontaneous response to that love. Perhaps his fine Christian character, forceful in several other directions, showed up to best advantage in his home.

As an educator Dr. Wold was in a large measure self-made. In common with so many others on the mission field he had to do work for which he had no special training. What stood him in good stead in

educational work was his rather keen psychological insight. This helped him to keep his balance in difficult situations. During the 13 years we were colleagues I do not remember a single situation in which he committed a major mistake, and that is saying a great deal, considering that he was doing pioneer work in a foreign land. His self-control and patience seemed to know no bounds. At times I felt that his forbearance went too far, but I am not so sure now that he did not accomplish more in this way than by acting in a sterner and more authoritative manner. His office was always in order and things were done promptly, through not so very quickly. He was too careful to work fast. What he did was done well—sometimes, I thought, too well.

He was without doubt a good teacher. He loved theology and had managed to do quite a bit of theological study even while he was in evangelistic work. His practical sense helped him in selecting his material. Possessing as he did a logical mind and a good command of the Chinese language, his classes were both interesting and instructive. He had a good memory and a rich story of experience to draw from.

Dr. Wold took an active part in union work among Lutherans in China. He was along in founding practically all the union Lutheran institutions, such as Lutheran Theological Seminary, Lutheran Board of Publication, Lutheran Missions Home and Agency, and the Lutheran Church of China. He served on committees and boards connected with most, if not all, of these institutions.

In theological thinking and outlook Wold was a conservative Lutheran. He loved the Lutheran Church with all his heart and strove ardently to further its cause. He was brought up in the Hauge Synod and remained faithful to the best that that synod represented till his death. And yet he was open to views that differed slightly from his own, especially in practical matters. His message in sermon and lecture was first of all addressed to the heart, and had a practical appeal. He was a pious man in the best sense of the term. His spiritual life was simple and direct. He gave the impression that he was in constant communion with God, that he walked with God. For that reason, when the call came to depart from this life, he was ready and glad to leave. For several months before his death, his talks were marked with a fervency of spirit which deeply impressed us all.

August W. Edwins[4]

August William Edwins was born August 12, 1871, on a little riverland farm near Swede Valley, Iowa. Both of his parents were born in Sävsnäs, Dalecarlia, Sweden. They were married in Sweden and migrated to America like so many others in 1868, known in Swedish history as "the year of famine."

The same year that the Edwins family arrived in Swede Valley a Lutheran congregation was organized, and they became charter members. The parents remained as members of this church until both died in 1919.

August William was the fourth of eleven children in this family. At the time of his

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[4]Based on "August W. Edwins: Pioneer to China," by S. Hjalmar Swanson, *Three Missionary Pioneers and Some Who Have Followed* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1945), 59-86. Cf. also S. H. Swanson, "Fifty Years in China," in *Foundations for Tomorrow: A Century of Progress in Augustana World Missions* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1960), 71-172.

confirmation he felt called to become a pastor, but poverty made it impossible to begin studies immediately. He must first earn some money. At sixteen he left home and found employment in a tinshop in Ogden. Thus he learned the tinner's trade and found this knowledge of value during the first years in China where he made stoves and stovepipes and even the first heating stove for the native mud house in which the Edwinses spent their first 18 months on the new field in Honan.

Deeply concerned over his parents whose farm mortgage was coming due, he and his brother Charlie agreed to raise the necessary money with which to pay this mortgage, and thus give their parents a happy surprise. This was done, but now the money laid aside for an education was gone.

When at last he could start out for Rock Island he was 22 years old. He enrolled in the second class at Augustana Academy January 9, 1894, and was valedictorian of his class both in college and in seminary. The question of an Augustana mission in China was often discussed in the seminary while Edwins was a senior. It led to prayer and searching of hearts by the members of this class, not the least by Edwins. Often the question would be asked: "Why should we not begin a mission in that great land, and why should not one of us volunteer for such a service?" If Edwins at that time felt moved to volunteer, we do not know, since he did not indicate it. Edwins did not act quickly, nor did he permit his emotions to carry him away. It took a call which amounted to a "draft" from God to make him decide on this matter.

The synod held its 1902 annual convention at Ishpeming, Michigan, and here Edwins and his 21 classmates were ordained on June 15. Edwins was ordained on a call from the Trinity Lutheran Church of Stillwater, Minnesota. This was one of the leading congregations of the Minnesota Conference and had a membership of 890 and a Sunday School enrollment of 280. Here the young pastor found a warm welcome and congenial environment.

Since the early days of the Augustana Synod many of its pastors and lay members had been interested in foreign missions. Here and there the friends of missions would ask: "Why does not the Augustana Synod carry on some foreign mission work of its own?" Other Lutherans would ask the same question, until, as one Minneapolis pastor stated, "it became embarrassing for us to know what to answer."

In the early '90s the zealous Norwegian missionary Skrevsrud visited America and also attended the meeting of the Augustana Synod. He urged the Synod to launch out in faith, and his message left lasting impressions. Then came another visitor, the Swedish missionary to China, Pastor Erick Folke, who gave a long life of outstanding missionary service and did much to promote missions in Sweden. Pastor J. G. Hultkrans had carried on correspondence with him with the result that Folke attended a missionary prayer service in the Bethlehem parsonage in Minneapolis in 1901. Before those who had assembled for this informal service dispersed, it was decided to issue a call to all who might be interested in missions to meet in a conference where more thought could be given to the matter.

This missionary conference—the first of its kind in the history of the Augustana Synod—was held at Bethlehem Church, Minneapolis, September 3 and 4, 1901, under the leadership of Dr. P. A. Mattson. It was agreed to organize a China Mission Society, and a committee on constitution was elected. Thus the first step was at last taken, but no undue haste was made.

In 1903 the board began to look about for a missionary. Calls were voted first to

The China Mission Society trusted God to give the needed support and overcome any opposition.

Pastor Mattson in Minneapolis and afterwards to S. G. Hägglund, a senior in the seminary, but neither felt himself in position to accept the call. It was then that the Lord directed the board to the pastor in Stillwater, August Edwins, whom God had silently prepared.

It was not an easy matter for him to determine what to do with this call. His first reaction was to answer negatively. He had been pastor at Stillwater only a little over two years, and his ministry there had just made a good start. He was loved by his people, and he loved them. Then, he was also unmarried. He doubted the wisdom of going off to a strange land all alone. The synod was not behind this call but an independent society, and this society and its plans were not in favor with many of the leaders in the synod. Would he not be justified in doing what other good men had already done—answer no?

He did the only thing a Christian can do in such a situation—brought it to God and made it a matter of earnest prayer. Into the late hours of the night, after he had gone to bed, he continued to pray that God would make His will clear to him.

One night he decided to "try God," to ask for a sign. He said: "I will arise, take my Bible and open it in the dark and place it thus face down on my desk. If then in the morning my eyes will be directed at the opened place to some significant statement, I will accept it as God's special message to me at this time regarding this call."

In the morning he discovered that he had opened the Bible at Acts, chapter 16, and his eyes caught immediately its ninth verse: "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: There was a man of Macedonia standing, beseeching him, and saying, Come over to Macedonia, and help us." He was deeply impressed.

February 9, 1905, Edwins wrote his answer which was in part as follows: "After many prayers and after a careful consideration of the matter, I have come to the conviction that I should accept the call to labor, as God gives grace and strength, for the sake of the gospel on the mission field in China."

The China Mission Society held its annual meeting at Center City, February 13 and 14, 1905. At this time Pastor Edwins' answer was read, and there was general rejoicing and thanksgiving. At last the society was making some real progress. God was giving answers to their prayers, and this called them to pray more than ever before. The bigness of the task and its responsibilities now came with new clarity to these men and women who had pledged themselves to launch this work. They had neither large funds nor wealthy supporters to guarantee the venture. They and their pioneer missionary trusted God to give the needed support and overcome any opposition in the assurance that they were walking in obedience to Him.

A large missionary festival was arranged and held in the Twin Cities in connection with Missionary Edwins' departure for China. September 14 they met in the Gustavus Adolphus Church in St. Paul and September 15 in the Augustana Church in

Minneapolis. The highlight of this missionary conference was the commissioning of the new missionary. Pastor C. B. L. Boman of Bernadotte was one of the speakers, and he said: "When we will be told of the first baptism on our new field in China, we will have a day of thanksgiving and rejoicing here at home!"

When the call came to go to China Edwins was not married. He realized that to go to China would be a long and lonesome journey followed by a long stay, and he did not wish to go alone. But what young woman would be willing to accompany him on such a strange and daring adventure? Women might be willing to step into well-cared-for American parsonages, but what about going to the ends of the earth and facing primitive conditions among heathen in a land which only five years before had staged a bloody persecution to uproot every vestige of Christianity? It required courage to ask a young woman to assume such a risk. In God's providence Edwins found a mate who was willing to become a fellow pioneer in this venture in faith to far-off China. It was a young lady whom he had met in the Clayton Church in Wisconsin, Alfreda Anderholm. At once his heart had told him that she was the one for whom he had been waiting. She displayed no hesitancy in leaving home and kindred for this missionary enterprise. They were married September 6, 1905.

Two weeks later the couple sailed from Seattle. They found several missionaries among their fellow travelers. Mrs. Edwins says as she looks back upon this, her first of many long sea voyages: "The trip was very pleasant. On board we met several missionaries among whom were Pastor and Mrs. Trygstad of the Hauge Norwegian Mission (now the United or Norwegian Lutheran) and others who had been in China before and now were returning. From them we learned much about China and the needs of Honan. A Presbyterian couple on the way back to Honan assured us that there was ample room for us to begin work also in that province. Our first stop was in Japan. Here we spent ten lovely days sightseeing. It was here we saw for the first time idols such as the heathen worship, and our hearts were stirred within us at the sight. But Japan was so beautiful, while from fellow passengers we had heard so much about how dirty China and her people were, and we wondered very much as to what conditions we would face when we would arrive there."

They landed in Shanghai October 21. Four days were required to make the trip up the Yangtze River from Shanghai to Hankow. During these days they were given their first China language lessons.

In Hankow the party remained only long enough for Dr. Hotvedt, their guide and travel manager, to hire a river boat which was to be their home for the next 20 days and take them farther on their way up the river. When going up fast-moving waters or rapids the boat would be pulled by Chinese coolies who walked on the bank. One day when they had a long distance of such waters to navigate and consequently were making very slow progress, the men went ashore in search of some wild game for the evening meal. In the meantime the rope by which the coolies were pulling the boat broke. The fast-moving waters carried the boat in a wild rush downstream with the ladies aboard, with rapids and rocks threatening destruction. It was with considerable difficulty that the boat was retrieved after it had been carried with the current several miles.

One night while anchored to the bank of the river they were aroused from sleep and given the information that a robber band was in the neighborhood. They were told to hide all their valuables, and the boat

was moved out into the middle of the stream where they cast anchor and spent the remainder of the night.

This river voyage brought them at last to Fancheng. They arrived there on Thanksgiving Day, 1905. Missionaries of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America (at that time, the Hauge Synod) graciously opened their homes for the new missionaries and gave them every possible assistance. This hospitality was enjoyed until the Edwinses were ready the following year to occupy the chosen field in Honan.

The year at Fancheng was chiefly given over to language studies. Edwins did not have the opportunity to attend a language school as new missionaries now usually do. At Fancheng he engaged a Chinese teacher who knew no English. He could not ask his teacher, in the beginning, any questions—and the teacher could offer no helpful explanations. But Edwins applied himself with the same diligence he had exercised at Augustana and consequently made splendid progress in the difficult language. It is said of Edwins that he eventually spoke Chinese almost like a native.

In the spring of 1906 two of the Norwegian Lutheran missionaries, Landahl and Ronning, and his Chinese teacher, Mr. Lei, accompanied Edwins on a tour to look for a field for the new Augustana mission. It was a long and interesting journey. They left Fancheng April 24th on this northward way to investigate the prospects of Honan. Conditions in many parts of China were far from tranquil at this time. Anti-foreign hatred had not yet calmed down following the Boxer Rebellion.

Edwins told of this historical journey: "Rumors of sedition and anti-foreign movements were rife. Some friends warned us not to venture upon so long a journey at such a time, but those who had planned for the tour had committed the whole matter to God in prayer and counted confidently upon His faithfulness for guidance and protection. To our knowledge no danger threatened us at any time except on the second day of our journey. Then it happened that we were attacked by a mob at a country village where two of the common Chinese open-air theaters had attracted a concourse of about two thousand idle spectators. The village street was crowded to the utmost, and through that crowded street our clumsy mule carts had to make their way. On seeing that we were foreigners many in the crowd began to yell out a kind of unearthly war whoop. Little by little, however, our carts plowed their way through the dense mass of surging humanity and we were soon on the point of leaving the crowd behind us; but then the mob followed us, hooting and yelling and hurling at us and our mules and vehicles whatever missiles were at hand. Our mules were beaten most unmercifully with large, heavy lumps of sun-dried clay. Some of our little company also received heavy blows from flying missiles. The mules pulling the foremost cart stopped, and for some moments it seemed as though we might be surrounded, but fortunately our drivers succeeded in getting their animals started again, and by

Edwins did not have the opportunity to attend a language school as new missionaries now usually do.

rapid driving we managed to outdistance the howling mob."

They now consulted some Chinese officials. They were provided with a military escort and advised to take another route from the one which they had originally intended to follow. Undisturbed, they reached in a few days Hsiang-cheng where the China Inland Mission had one of its main stations.

After brief discussion, the Augustana Synod was given an area reaching from Kaifeng to Loyang—east and west—and from the Yellow River in the north to the borders of the China Inland and the Norwegian Lutheran Missions in the south, with seventeen cities, six hundred villages, and ten thousand towns, and a population estimated at about five million souls. That evening in Hsiang-hsien was of tremendous importance to the Augustana Synod, to the Kingdom of God, and to thousands of Honanese.

This was a crowning moment in Missionary Edwins' life! For this day he had lived and prayed and suffered for many weary months. At last the China Mission Society, which to him always meant the Augustana Synod, had a field in China. This evening became one of the happiest in his life. He wrote: "I am confident that no polar explorer on reaching his goal has experienced a joy so pure and satisfying as that which thrilled my soul when at last I saw before me as a reality that which so many had prayed for during so many years—our dear Synod at last had a mission field all its own in ancient heathen China!"

After locating the field in Honan Edwins returned with his Norwegian friends to Fanghsien and spent the summer there in intensive language studies. On September 2, 1906, the Edwinses said goodbye to the friends in Fancheng where they had received so much kindness and set out for their own field and their new home at Hsuchang. They took their way via Hankow where essential supplies were bought: nails and lumber with which to make their new home a little more comfortable, and some galvanized iron for a stove.

Their first home was a native house built of mud bricks with a thatched roof and a dirt floor.

They arrived in Hsuchang in October. Their first home, Edwins said, could at best be compared to a pioneer settler's home in our western prairie states before the turn of the century. It was a native house built of mud bricks with a thatched roof and a dirt floor. They lived in this house a year and a half. A few weeks after their arrival they had the joy of receiving the first helper in the work: she was Ingeborg Nystul, a deaconess from St. Paul. In March 1908 the Edwinses moved from their mud-brick home to permanent quarters. That year two other missionary families arrived.

Edwins felt that the first duty which confronted him and his new fellow workers would be to occupy the larger field and hold it until recruits could arrive from the homeland. He made it a point to obtain a foothold as soon as possible in some of the cities in the area which he had received as a mission field—Hsuchang, Juchow, Yüchow,

Kiahsien, Loyang. In purchasing land and opening stations in these and other places, he and his companions in the work had many interesting experiences and learned many lessons about the Chinese ways of doing business.

Loyang (at that time known as Honanfu) is an important city. Here Edwins determined to establish a mission station, and so steps were taken to lease grounds for this purpose. Kiahsien was another strategic center, and attempts were made as soon as possible to open a station there. It required much faith in these early days to reach out in this way and claim for the Lord and the church this large area. With trust in God, Edwins and his few fellow workers went about laying a good foundation, even at the risk of being misunderstood by their supporters at home. Could he not have reported, during these pioneer years, better numerical results if he had concentrated on one place and intensively worked there to gain converts? A man with smaller vision may have done so. Instead he set about to preempt the whole field and claim it for the church of God in the belief that God would also supply the necessary men and women to carry on the evangelization. Harvesters would come, and when they came they were to find the groundwork done and the doors open. Later developments have proven that he, in this, was a wise master-builder.

While Pastor Edwins went out as the representative of an independent missionary society, he always felt that he was the missionary of the Augustana Synod, and he entertained the hope that the synod would before long take over the work. In May, 1908, the China Mission Society voted to offer its work to the synod. At the synodical meeting in June this offer was accepted. The synod also elected a board to assume charge, whereupon the China Mission Society turned over to this board its missionaries, field, properties, and funds, and Pastor Edwins and the other missionaries became the synod's missionaries.

In May, 1910, Pastor Edwins had the joy of administering the sacrament of Baptism to nine natives at Hsuchang—the first-fruits of the church of Christ in this part of China. This happy event coincided with the jubilee celebration of the synod. Edwins wrote: "No one at home knew then that the first half century of our history as a church also included the reaping of these first-fruits of Christian Chinese. Out here we were glad to know that our first half-decade in China had resulted in this little earnest of coming harvests." After years of toil the missionaries were permitted to see that the Word of God was able to bear fruit unto eternal life even in China, and it must have given them tremendous encouragement. Prejudices against the foreigners were breaking down. Great numbers could now be gathered for the services. People were curious to know what these foreigners had come to proclaim, but converts were accepted more cautiously and only after a long time of catechumenical preparation.

During the first years very little could be done toward establishing schools. The first venture along this line was begun by Edwins in Hsuchang in 1909, and another in 1913. Neither was long-lived, but through these experiments valuable lessons were learned, so that with additional helpers from the homeland it later became possible to launch a splendid system of primary and secondary schools.

The Edwinses had their first furlough in 1911. Their homecoming was hastened somewhat by the serious illness of one of their children. On their return to China in 1912 a new and busy period began. God was answering their prayers, and new workers were coming for a while in such numbers that it became the chief concern of the

pioneer missionary to prepare them for their missionary tasks. These recruits filled the hearts of Pastor Edwins and his veteran fellow workers with joy and thanksgiving. But their coming also created problems: there was as yet no union language school to which they could be sent to learn Chinese. After deliberation it was decided that Pastor Edwins should leave the mission work and conduct an intensive language school, so as to get the new workers prepared as soon as possible. Other Lutheran missions which had received reinforcements joined in the language school effort until Pastor Edwins found himself conducting a school with an enrollment of 36. This school opened October 21, 1914.

Upon finishing their language course, the new missionaries were assigned to the mission stations to carry on evangelistic work and to establish schools and hospitals. This made it possible for the pioneer missionary to be released from station duties. His linguistic accomplishments and knowledge of Chinese ways and customs, coupled with his general theological scholarship, indicated that from now on he would prove most valuable to the mission in general literary work and in teaching, and to such pursuits he devoted himself. This made his life more secluded and gave him less to do with the administration of the mission's activities, but it also gave him an opportunity to be one of the pioneers in a bigger work and to assist in laying the foundation for the Lutheran Church of China.

In early 1916 Edwins was elected editor of "Hsin I Pao," the union Lutheran church paper, which enjoyed a wide circulation among the members of the various Lutheran missions. In 1920, when the Lutheran Church of China was organized through the agreement of a large number of Lutheran missions, this paper became its official organ.

The last 20 years of Edwins' life were devoted to teaching at the Union Theological Seminary in Shekow near Hankow. The first move toward the establishment of this seminary was made in 1907 by some delegates to a missionary conference in Shanghai. The following year more definite preliminary steps were taken when the missionaries came together on Kikungshan. Pastor Edwins was a member of the committee which was elected to look for a site and prepare other necessary recommendations. The committee unanimously agreed on a place in Shekow, and a site was purchased and plans set in motion to erect a seminary. The school began to function in the spring of 1913. In 1921 Dr. Edwins became a member of its faculty. He held the chair in dogmatics and ethics. At different times he taught various other subjects and even served for a while as president. Most of the pastors of the Lutheran Church of China have sat at his feet. They all esteemed him highly. He gave them a good foundation in Lutheran faith and doctrine, and its soundness is proven in their preaching and teaching.

Edwins also took an active interest in the spread of Lutheran literature which is so sorely needed in China. He was a member of the Lutheran Board of Publication which, like the Lutheran Home and Agency in Hankow, is a union enterprise dedicated to the purpose of serving the emerging Lutheran Church of China.

Mrs. Edwins and the youngest children left China for the homeland in March, 1941. (The Edwins' home was blessed with eleven children, all born in China; two of these died early in life.) For some time the American government had urged all its citizens, especially women and children, to leave China, particularly the area overrun and occupied by the Japanese, and Shekow belonged to the latter category. Since no special danger

seemed to threaten male missionaries with American citizenship, Dr. Edwins remained to pursue his duties. Dr. Gustav Carlberg, the president of the Lutheran seminary, also remained at his post.

The next few months were to be fraught with momentous and tragic events both for the Edwins' family and for the world. Through the Pearl Harbor attack the mission was brought into the great war, and American citizens residing in occupied China were interned. Shekow was in occupied territory, and Edwins and Carlberg were among those who became internees.

During the time which elapsed before arrangements were made for the first exchange of American and Japanese nationals, Dr. Edwins contracted typhus. Fortunately Dr. Carlberg was at hand to give assistance and comfort. When at last he seemingly was on the way to recovery and home, he was overcome by a stroke and died at sea. The place where his body was committed to the sea was about 170 miles off the coast of Indo-China near Phanrang. As the body was lowered to the water, the hymn "Jesus, Savior, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea" was sung.

God used this humble but gifted man to lay the foundation for a church in China. When his work was finished in 1942, the mission he founded had developed into 63 congregations with several thousand members, served by 24 native pastors and more than 200 native evangelists, teachers, and Bible workers. Few men are privileged to see such results on this side of eternity.

Lessons from the Church in China

David L. Vikner

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Looking around the world today, one is confronted with three facts as far as the Christian community is concerned. First, thanks to nearly 2,000 years of missionary activity, the Christian church exists at present in every country on earth, with a total constituency numbering one-third of the world's population. Second, even though Christianity was brought initially to nearly all of these countries by foreigners, the churches around the world are rooted today in their particular soils and are independent of outside control. Third, these particular churches in every continent are increasingly conscious of their interdependence. They need to support each other in every possible way, to learn from each other, and to work together in God's mission to a still needy world. The purpose of this essay is to reflect on what the world Christian community can learn to its benefit from the church in the People's Republic of China.



As the Nestorian monument in Xian attests, the Christian message was first heard in China in 635 C.E. when the Nestorian missionaries arrived by land from the Middle East. The Christian community grew and flourished in many parts of China during the great Tang Dynasty (618-907 C.E.) but disappeared in the early tenth century along with the dynasty itself with which it was closely associated.

Shortly after Marco Polo's historic visit to China in the 13th century, a Catholic mission was launched in China by the arri-

val of Dominican John of Montecorvino in 1294. Under the friendly Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1280-1367), Christianity flourished a second time in China, only to disappear once more when the dynasty ended. With the arrival of Jesuit missionaries late in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the Roman Catholic mission was reestablished in China and continued through all sorts of vicissitudes to the present day.

The first Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society, arrived in China in 1807. In the next 142 years about 150 Protestant mission agencies from Europe and North America fanned out over China as the internal situation allowed. Lutheran work began in 1846 and was in time represented by 16 mission agencies from Germany, Scandinavia, Canada, and the United States.

By 1949 all this mission activity resulted in the existence of a Roman Catholic Church of 3,000,000 members and several Protestant churches numbering a total of 700,000 members, of whom 100,000 were Lutherans. In addition to evangelism and church extension, both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches carried out extensive programs in medicine, education, agriculture, social welfare and relief.

With the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, radical changes were signalled for the Christian community in China, as in practically every area of Chinese society.

In the early '50s nearly all western missionaries left China. In line with government policies, all church-related service institutions, such as schools and hospitals, were nationalized. Initially churches were allowed to carry on their programs within their worship centers but not beyond. The government was clearly atheistic but permissive. Under the direction of the government's Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) and the Christian Patriotic Three Self Movement (TSM), the historic Protestant denominational divisions were superseded and the places of worship reduced and consolidated. For example, in Beijing Protestant church worship centers were reduced from 20 to 4 and in Shanghai from 200 to 26. The churches in China were said to be entering into a post-denominational era.

During the turbulent Cultural Revolution (1966-76) the Christian churches, along with their religious compatriots and other units of Chinese society, went through a period of internal disruption. All church services were banned. Church properties were expropriated and used for a variety of purposes such as living quarters, factories, school classrooms, public meeting halls, and warehouses. Under the pressures of Communist doctrinal purity, intense indoctrinization, and overt anti-religious activities, even family home worship was difficult.

By the late '70s it was realized by many that the ideological Cultural Revolution had failed, and the leadership of China came into the hands of the pragmatists of the Communist party. The primary leader is Deng Xiaoping, who step by step has led China in the direction of becoming a modern state with the support of the diverse elements of its society, including the religious communities. The RAB, which was dormant during the Cultural Revolution, was revitalized in 1979 and gave support to the restoration of religious properties and renewal of worship in Buddhist temples, Muslim mosques, and Christian churches. In this process of renewal in the Protestant community, the RAB worked in cooperation with the TSM. It should be noted that in this pragmatic, permissive period, not only were churches reopened, but Christian house gatherings emerged all over China.

One of the major tasks of the church in China is to train leaders for the present and the future.

What has been achieved within the Chinese Protestant community from 1979 to the present is impressive.

Due primarily to expatriate pressures, only one Protestant church remained open during the Cultural Revolution. That was in Beijing where the foreign diplomats resided. The first church to be restored and reopened after the Cultural Revolution was the Muen Church in Shanghai. On Sunday, September 2, 1979, over a thousand Christians gathered in this former Methodist church, both to worship again as a congregation after years of repression and to signal the renewal of public worship life throughout China. In the past 11 years, approximately 6,000 churches have been restored and built throughout China, and every week there are new openings.

In addition to the church openings, house gatherings have sprung up all over the country. Many of these have their roots in the secret gatherings of the Cultural Revolution. These gatherings are divided between those who relate to the TSM-sponsored, reopened churches and those who do not. It is impossible to know exactly how many house gatherings there are throughout China. Some estimate about 50,000. We do know that the persons gathered in the local settings number from a handful to several hundreds.

The services in both the churches and the house gatherings are simple. They include hymn singing, Scripture readings, prayers, and biblically-based evangelical preaching. Holy Communion is celebrated periodically, and baptisms do occur. The churches are served by pastoral teams, drawn from the pre-1949 resident denominations, who lead the services and participate in pastoral acts among the members.

There has been a remarkable growth in Protestant church membership since 1949. Estimates run from 5 million to 50 million persons. The new members come from two major categories: youth and rural people. With the passing years, the percentage of youth attending services, singing in church choirs, and being baptized in the urban churches is increasing dramatically. As an illustration of rural growth, reports indicate that recently, in an area in central Henan province, over 30,000 persons have been baptized into the Christian community. In Henan province alone, where five Lutheran missions were previously at work, the Protestant church membership now numbers 830,000 persons—130,000 more than in all of China in 1949.

A second major achievement in the Chinese Christian community since the end of the Cultural Revolution is the development of leadership training programs. Due to the passing of the pre-liberation pastors, the inability of the church to train pastors for a number of years before and during the Cultural Revolution, and the demands of a growing Christian community, one of the major tasks of the church in China is to train leaders for the present and the future. Today's Chinese leaders frequently say: "In China at present it is not a shepherd searching for the sheep, but the sheep searching for a shepherd."

In 1980 the prestigious Nanjing Theological Seminary was reopened. In the next few years ten regional seminaries were launched in China's major urban centers. The students are recommended and supported by their home congregations, selected by the seminaries, and upon graduation return to those congregations. The aging faculties are being replaced by able recent graduates, some of whom have studied overseas. Intensive lay training programs are being carried out by several local congregations. Faculty members of the Nanjing Seminary produce a correspondence course for individual students throughout the country. About 40,000 persons are enrolled in this program, 85% from the house gatherings. In 1986 the Nanjing Seminary reduced its number of regular students and admitted 70 lay leaders from the new Christian communities in central Henan for a one-year crash program in biblical studies. It was felt that the best antidote to the religious eclecticism of the mushrooming rural Christian communities is a proper understanding of the biblical revelation.

A third area of achievement since 1980 is in the publication and distribution of printed materials. Though some Bibles were printed on government presses prior to 1987, since then the church-sponsored, worldwide Bible societies supported, Amity Press in Nanjing has printed and distributed about 1,500,000 copies of the Bible, some in the 1919 translation and others in a recently revised version. The monthly English magazine, *Tian Feng (Heavenly Wind)*, a pre-liberation journal banned during the Cultural Revolution, was revived. It includes articles on subjects of concern to the Christian community in China, reports of church happenings around the country, and church-related news from overseas. In 1983, following two years of intense activity, a hymnal called *Hymns of Praise* was completed. It is a collection of 400 hymns, 292 with roots outside of China and 102 from Chinese sources. These 102 hymns were selected from 2,256 hymns submitted by Chinese authors and composers. Another significant publication was released in 1983. Called *Yao Dao Wen Da*, it is a catechism of 50 pages, stating and answering the 100 most asked questions in China concerning the Christian faith. The questions and answers are grouped into seven categories: Bible, God, Christ, Holy Spirit, salvation, church, and Christian life. The pamphlet concludes by stating without explanation the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, our Lord's twofold summary of the Law—love for God and love for neighbor—, the Apostles' Creed, and the Nicene Creed.

Finally, achievements were made in the development of three coordinating agencies for the shared mission of the Protestant congregations across China. The first of these is the *Three Self Movement* (TSM). The twofold purpose of the TSM is to help congregations attain the three objectives of self-support, self-administration, and self-propagation; and to provide a mutually beneficial liaison between the church and the government. The second agency is the *China Christian Council* (CCC). The CCC provides a forum, at both the provincial and the national levels, for representatives of the congregations to share their concerns and insights on the church's life and mission, and to supervise the carrying out of mutually agreed upon programs such as the hymnal and the catechism. The third agency is the *Amity Foundation* (AF). The purpose of the AF is to provide a channel whereby the overseas Christian community can properly participate in serving the church and the people of China. Three illustrative programs are the Amity

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Press, the placement of church-selected English language teachers on several university campuses in China, and the sponsoring of a western, church-related medical team to assist in the development of programs to help physically handicapped persons.

With this background information, for the balance of this essay we will reflect on some learnings from the experience of the church in the People's Republic of China. No importance should be given to the order in which the lessons are raised, nor to the relative amounts of detail in describing them.

The first lesson is the importance of Christian family worship and instruction for nurture, survival, and growth in times of political and religious persecution. Numerous reports have come out of China of Christian families and friends gathering in secret during the Cultural Revolution to worship their Lord and to strengthen each other's faith. With Bibles and hymnals destroyed, they sang softly from memory, recited appropriate Bible passages, and prayed to the One who was with them, as he promised to be, when he said: "Whenever two or three are gathered together in my name I am in their midst" (Mt 8:20). Though a surprising number of Bible passages are directed to people under pressures, Chinese Christians most often turned to Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through a valley dark as death I fear no evil, for thou art with me.... Thou spreadest a table for me in the sight of my enemies..." (Ps 23:4,5 NEB). In the dark days of the Cultural Revolution not only were Christian convictions deepened, but the groundwork was laid for a flourishing of the Christian community in the subsequent years of openness.

The second lesson is in the area of evangelism. When questioned, Chinese leaders point to three effective means of evangelical outreach practiced by today's Chinese Christian community. Many unbelievers are attracted to Christianity by the congregational worship service. They are moved by the singing, the praying, the simple biblical exposition, and friendly warmth of the congregation for fellow members and visitors alike, and the certainties of a loving and forgiving God in the midst of transition and disillusionment. One is reminded that the Orthodox churches, with a liturgical tradition very different from the Chinese, also regard the service as being a means of evangelism.

Secondly, the Chinese believe in the evangelizing power of example. A Christian who carries out his or her vocation with integrity, energy, and joyful service, witnesses to the faith inside. It is no accident that a disproportionately high number of Christians are honored in China as model workers. These include doctors, teachers, factory workers, farmers, and office personnel.

Finally, the fact that the church is Chinese, free from its foreign connection, is a major reason for the recent unprecedented growth of the church in China. There is something attractive about a Chinese Chris-

tian introducing the gospel to fellow citizens with the assurance that it is possible to be both Christian and Chinese.

Third, there are lessons to be learned by the way in which the Chinese church set about the task of leadership development. Given the shortage of church leaders and the rapid growth of the church in the '80s, the training of leadership was determined to be the most pressing task of the church. Though producing a new translation of the Bible in modern Chinese is important, it has had to take second place as aging Bible scholars concentrate on the training of young pastors and theologians for the days ahead. To meet a wide range of needs, a variety of training programs were developed. These include the national seminary in Nanjing, the regional seminaries around the country, the short courses at Nanjing and elsewhere to meet specific needs, and the correspondence course. Most faculty members are pre-1949 trained pastor-theologians from the historic denominations, who have learned to work together in a spirit of mutual respect. Able young graduates of the seminaries are one by one assuming teaching positions in all of the programs listed above. The transition from old to young is not without problems, but it is inevitable. Unfortunately, there is no middle generation.

Fourth, there are lessons to be learned by the way in which the Chinese Christian community acts in the complicated and controversial area of church/state relationships. There is no debating the fact that Protestant Christianity came to China along with western imperialism. The first Opium War in the 1840s opened five treaty ports of China to missionary occupation. The second Opium War in the 1860s extended that occupation to the rest of China. From the viewpoint of the Christian community, this forced opening was both a curse and a blessing: a curse because it identified the Christian movement in China with the evils of western imperialism—a stigma that has receded only recently as the church in China has become Chinese, free of outside domination; and a blessing because, like the Roman empire, it opened roads for the Christian gospel to be proclaimed throughout all of China. In the century-long turmoil, brought on by western imperialism, the decline of the Manchu Xing Dynasty, and the rise of Communism, missionaries pragmatically related to whatever civil authorities were locally in control. They were supportive if the government was friendly to the Christian movement and critical if it was not. For example, most missionaries feared the Nationalist Party when it was allied with the atheistic Communist movement and supportive of the Nationalists when they broke with the Communists and turned to the west. In the 1930s Chinese Christians were largely supportive of the Nationalist government, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-Shek, a baptized member of the Methodist Church. In the 1940s, when the Nationalist Party eroded under external and internal pressures, some Christians turned to the Communist Party for leadership, and others, dissatisfied with both parties, hoped vainly for a third way.

In Communist China, as in other countries where governments regulate persons' total lives from rightist or leftist ideological positions, the Christian community divides between adapters and resisters. In China both Christian groups reject the well-known Communist view of religion being the opiate of the people and destined to wither away in the face of socialist/scientific enlightenment and development. The adapters, however, affirm the achievements the

government has made for the common good, press for increased religious freedom within the system, and accommodate where possible for the sake of the life and mission of the church. The resisters, on the other hand, believe that the ideology is so contrary to the Christian point of view that the only proper position is to be in opposition at whatever the cost. Some house gatherings holding this position have been harassed by the government, and individuals have been disciplined, even imprisoned. As the political ideological and pragmatic lines in China have been blurred since the Tiananmen Square incident in June, 1989, so changes have occurred in the church's adapter/resister bifurcation. On the "democracy movement" the church has split into three positions, with adapters and resisters in all three camps. There are adapters and resisters who support the democracy movement, those who support the government's disciplinary action, and those who choose to be silent and uninvolved. The lesson in all of this is to appreciate the complexity of church/state relationships in China, to support the Christian community in China as it struggles to deal with the issue, to withhold judgment, and to resist outside interference unless such is required—and then only after careful study, broad consultation, and prayer.

Fifth, there are some lessons to be learned by the ways in which the Chinese churches have dealt with the particular and universal church issue. After the establishment of the independent People's Republic of China in 1949, internal and external pressures forced the church in China to accelerate the process of becoming a Chinese church. Of the three foreign initiated religions, Christianity was the least integrated into Chinese society. Buddhism was fully sinified. Islam was the established religion of the minority Hui people on the western fringes of China. Progressive Protestant Christian leaders, using the well-known three-self principles of the mission movement, led the churches to become self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. The positive side of this development was that in the eyes of both the church people and Chinese society at large, Christianity was increasingly being accepted as a Chinese religion. The negative side was the painful separation of the Chinese Christian community from the worldwide Christian fellowship. Even this separation, however, was a helpful step in the maturation of the Chinese church.

After the Cultural Revolution, when the bamboo curtain was raised, relationships slowly developed between the Chinese Christian community and Christians elsewhere. In the early '80s, the first relationship was one of prayer. When well-meaning foreigners asked their Christian friends in China what they could do to help them, the answer always was: "Pray for us." Whereupon the foreigner would respond: "And you please pray for us." Next, two-way international visits developed. Christian individuals and groups from China traveled overseas and met fellow Christians in many parts of the world. Similarly, Christians from overseas visited the emerging Christian communities in China. Amity Foundation was formed to provide a channel for the international Christian community to assist in the mission of the church in China. Carefully selected theological students were sent to Europe and North America to assist in preparing them for teaching positions in the recently opened theological seminaries. Recently, visitors from the church in China have participated in ecumenical meetings around the world. Step by step, the particular church in China is becoming a partner and participant in the universal church. Cooperating churches

around the world need to be both independent and interdependent. The Chinese have shown us one way.

Step by step, the particular church in China is becoming a partner and participant in the universal church.

Sixth, the Protestant Christian community in China has provided a model for ecumenical relationships that may be helpful in some parts of the world. In China, as well as in most of Africa and Asia, the 19th century mission agencies divided the country into defined territories, called mission fields. Generally, only one mission was at work in a field. This practice was a form of embryonic ecumenism. However, as the churches grew and people moved, several denominations were present in most of the urban centers.

After 1949, the pre-liberation denominations were phased out, and the Christians gathered together in thousands of independent congregations. The pastors and members of these local churches were made up of the particular denominational mix on the territory. This merger did not occur after a long debate on theological and ecclesiastical issues. It was encouraged by circumstances in the country and in the Christian community. It was workable for three major reasons: Chinese pragmatism, majority conservative evangelicalism, and mutual respect. Over the years three joint agencies were formed to foster the cooperative life of the independent congregations. These are the Three Self Movement, the China Christian Council, and the Amity Foundation, each with its specific role. The China Christian Council provides leadership in fostering a national unity of the congregations. As one might expect, there are two views on how a Protestant church of China should be formed. The one is to set up a unity commission, which after proper study and negotiations would propose a national church structure for discussion and adoption by the congregations of the church. A beginning was made in this approach by sending a delegation to India to examine the Church of South India model to determine if it is applicable in China. It quickly became evident that if the CSI model, or any other central structure, was pressed at this time, a sizable segment of the Christian community would not join. The second approach to national unity is by moving step by step, hoping that the entire Christian community could be brought along to an acceptable conclusion. Some such steps which already have been taken are the formation of provincial church councils, the coordination of theological education throughout the country, the adoption of standards for the preparation and ordination of pastors, and the consecration of two regional bishops.

Seventh, there are lessons to be learned from developments of theological reflection in China's Protestant Christian community today. There are three major traditions influencing Chinese theological reflection. The first of these came out of the Reformation with the western missionaries: Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism. For example, in the Lutheran Church of China, Luther's *Small Catechism*

was used in preparing converts for baptism, and the church's constitutional statement of faith included the historic Lutheran confessional statements. A second tradition was the modernist/fundamentalist division of the early 20th century, which cut across the historic denominational lines. An illustration of that division was the late forties presence in the Chinese university student community of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, with its personal salvation emphasis, and the Student Christian Movement, with its emphasis on social action. The third tradition was the independent Chinese church movement. Two expressions of this tradition are the Little Flock and the Jesus Home Family, both started by charismatic Chinese leaders, fiercely independent of the mainline churches, and conservative theologically.

What happened theologically when the three traditions met in the post-denominational congregations? By and large, the majority of Chinese Christians regard the Bible as the Word of God, view the gospel primarily in personal terms as a message of forgiveness, comfort, and strength, and believe that the Christian faith does result in exemplary living and sacrificial service in society. In a spirit of mutual respect, controversial theological issues are not discussed. Though Baptism, the Eucharist, and ordination are practiced, their theological underpinnings are not presented. Converts themselves choose whether to be baptized by sprinkling or immersion. When asked how the Eucharist is explained before communing, a pastor said: "We don't talk about it, we just have it."

Theological positions, however, are evolving in two areas. The first is in the theological seminaries. It appears that the aging pre-liberation professors hold to their pre-liberation views, working very hard to understand and respect the differing views of their colleagues. It is inevitable that in time, young theologians—born since the liberation, grown in the People's Republic of China, having no personal experiences of the old church traditions—will theologize in new and relevant ways. They will certainly be influenced by theological thinking going on in our open and interdependent world. Another very different area of theological evolution is through the printed materials sent out to the congregations for their use. These include the hymnal, the catechism, the correspondence course, and the magazine *Tian Feng*. These publications reflect the theological consensus of the present Chinese Christian community and influence the on-going process of theological development.

The Christian world looks forward with keen anticipation to how the Chinese Christian community will apply the biblical revelation in the changing Chinese context.

The Church of Jesus Christ is there in China

Bishop K. H. Ting

The text of the following address, originally given July 12, 1987, at the Vyborg Cathedral in Denmark, is reproduced with the kind permission of Bishop K. H. Ting, President of the China Christian Council. Bishop Ting gave the address at the Lutheran World Federation Executive Committee meeting commemorating the 40th anniversary of the founding of the LWF at Lund, Sweden, in 1947.

Bishop Ting asks that readers of Currents *note the following changes in the situation of Chinese post-denominational Protestant Christianity since 1987: 1) There are now over 6,000 churches open for Protestants in China; 2) there are about 5 million Chinese Protestants today; 3) Chinese Bibles published in China during the last ten years have reached a total of 5,000,000; 4) there are now 770 full-time students in training in 13 Chinese theological schools.*

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,

Thank you first of all for your interest in the church in China and willingness to come this evening. I am exceedingly happy to bring you the greetings in Jesus Christ of your fellow Christians in China. We in China are very conscious of the fact that we are a subject of prayers on the part of Christians in many parts of the world. We feel supported and are impelled to do things in such a way that we may not disappoint so many of you who attach high expectation on us.

The main thing I have to tell you is simply that the Church of Jesus Christ is there in China. This may sound obvious and unexciting to some

of you, but China is not like Denmark where Christian faith has taken root rather deeply. Since the seventh century there have been several previous attempts to make Christianity stay in China, and they all failed. Specially shocking was the fact that Christianity in its Nestorian form which could flourish in China for over 200 years still disappeared completely except in the form of a stone tablet. Thus, that the church is there in China is not anything we can take for granted. That it is there is God's work, and our hearts are full of thanksgiving for what God is doing.

The staying power of the church in China faced a test recently, and the result gives us ground to think that, this time, Christianity is not so likely to be easily displaced by forces hostile to it.

From 1966 to 1976 there was in China a ten-year period of anarchy and disorder, the Cultural Revolution, which turned out to be something thoroughly anti-cultural. "Ultra-leftism" was in control. The "ultra-leftists" persecuted all those whom they disliked—revolutionaries of the previous stage, high government officials, intellectuals, artists, scientists, educators, religious people. Universities suspended their classes, and students went to the street to make revolution. Christian churches all over China were closed down and put to other uses if not dismantled. Our seminary in Nanjing became the headquarters of the red-guards of the city, and we were all driven out of it. Many of our colleagues in the church had to suffer in all sorts of ways. These Christians mostly do not think it is good to take pride in the fact that they have suffered a little for the name of Jesus Christ, so they generally are not eager to describe what they have gone through.

Even in those days Christians did not forget the teaching in the Epistle to the Hebrews that Christians should not cease to meet. We met in homes. We got together once a week, or once in two weeks, or still less often, ten or fifteen or twenty or more of us. We would have tea together, say our prayers together, study the Bible together, and talk over together what we each got out of the passage. Nobody was the minister; we ministered unto each other. Ministers should not insist on their being ministers and be teachy, as they were just members of the group. There was sharing in depth, called "communication," and that was spiritually fulfilling. We all had our Bibles taken away from us, but many Christians could recite various passages from memory and all put them down in our notebooks. We developed simple ways to celebrate the Eucharist, the name given to it was simply thanksgiving, or breaking bread.

All that I want to say is that, although we have church buildings such as this one which is historic and helps us greatly to worship God in the beauty of holiness, the church of Jesus Christ can exist in all sorts of places wherever Jesus Christ himself is with his disciples, particularly as he breaks bread with us. As the New Testament shows, Christians had been meeting in homes long before there were church buildings.

During the Cultural Revolution all our church organizations were disbanded. Like many of my colleagues I was quite isolated and did not know what was going on among the Christians. My assumption in those days was that the number of Christians would have dwindled greatly and that this fourth attempt to land Christianity in China was probably again going to be a failure; all that would remain would be groups of Christians here and there meeting in homes. It was only later that I came to know that Christians had been meeting in homes all over China in growing numbers and that in my own city of Nanjing there were as many

as 25 such groups meeting regularly except in the first few months of the Cultural Revolution.

Today, while we have got thousands of churches back and have built new simple ones, largely in the countryside, we still have tens of thousands of groups worshiping in ordinary houses, many in homes. It is a highly laicized form of Christianity that will remain as a mark of the church in China for many years to come. My mother, who was the one Christian in the world who prayed the hardest for me and who died a year ago at the age of 101, had one of such groups in her house once a week until she was not strong enough to carry it on.

The first few years after the end of the Cultural Revolution were spent in the political and material rehabilitation of our ministers and church leaders. It meant the restoration of their status as good citizens of China and the reimbursement of their financial and material losses. Only then were they in the position to return to the work of the church.

Since 1979 churches are being reopened or built at the rate of at least one per day for the whole of China. It means that for the Protestants there are now over 4,000 churches used for public worship.

The Chinese churches and groups are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, as a result of the Three-Self Movement started early in the 1950s. The missionary movement which began in the 18th century came into being at the time of western colonial expansion and, consequently, there were certain unfortunate associations. But I should not like you to think that Chinese Christians are being anti-missionary. For all the good work missionaries from abroad did we are ever thankful to God and to them. We appreciate the dedication of many missionaries from Denmark who worked mainly in the North



East, formerly Manchuria. I know of one Danish missionary who chose to live in China as a Chinese citizen and who died in her old age some years ago. I am most pleased that this morning I met some of her friends who told me that her name was Ellen Nielson.

The whole point of the Three-Self Movement is to make the church in China Chinese, just as Chinese as the church in Denmark is Danish and the church in Sweden is Swedish. The time came for us to live down the western image Christianity had acquired in China. Christianity needs to be de-westernized for winning the Chinese for Christ just as much as, in the first century, it needed to be de-judaized for winning the Gentiles for Christ, and that was what the conference in Jerusalem was all about, as recorded in Acts 15.

As far as I know, it was Henry Venn, the chief secretary of the Church Missionary Society of England, who in 1850 first put those three things together as the goal of missionary work. We all know that good missionaries always work hard to make themselves dispensable. I like Christians abroad to see that a church which is trying

to be Chinese is not a denial of the worth of the missionaries' work, but rather its fruition.

The number of Protestants has grown in the last 37 years from 700,000 to three or four million. Chinese Christians are bearing witness to Christ with enthusiasm, but aside from this, the Three-Self Movement must be another important factor to account for this growth because a Christianity with a Chinese selfhood is much more likely to make the Chinese people want to know what it is all about.

There are some abroad who like to say that the number of Protestants in China is now 30 or 50 or even 100 million. This assertion has much to do with their aversion to New China, to Three-Self Movement and their need to raise funds for their own purposes. What I have to say is simply that we who work in China have not found conversion to be so easy, that we have good cause to thank God for an increase in the number of Protestants in 37 years—at least twice as fast as the growth of the Chinese population—and that figures must be given carefully and responsibly and only on the basis of facts, and not on any human need for sensationalism to bring about questionable effects.

As we look back we cannot but see how God gave the Chinese Christians the Three-Self Movement not only for the strengthening of the evangelistic potential of the church, but also for preparing us to survive the fire of the Cultural Revolution and to emerge from it ready to build up the church in unity and in full strength.

When we say three-self, we refer only to self-government, self-support, and self-propagation. You will have seen that self-isolation is not one of them. We want to remind ourselves we are a part of the church universal. We read in the book of Revelation of the seven churches in Asia Minor which were all different and, therefore, the seven letters John wrote to them were also different. But all seven letters have the same ending: Let those who have ears hear what the Holy Spirit says to all the churches. So we cannot afford not to hear the messages other churches are getting from the Holy Spirit. We believe in interdependence among churches, but we think an independent Chinese church can enter into this interdependence better than a dependent one.

In China today if you hear Christians making their testimonies to their faith, you will notice that many will dwell on what they call the Resurrection Truth as an event of their own experience as Christian individuals, as Chinese church, and as Chinese nation.

The Cultural Revolution was a time when Chinese Christians with the Chinese people as a whole went through the valley of the shadow of death. After going through and coming out of this valley, Chinese Christians see that the Lord is indeed our shepherd who restores our souls and whose rod and staff do comfort us as much as green pastures. Out of our own experience we feel we know a little better not only the Lord who was crucified for human sin, but also the Lord who has risen and ascended, who sits at the right hand of God, and who is the King of the whole universe. From our own experience we seem to understand better the place of Christ's resurrection after suffering and death, and in the light of Christ's resurrection we seem to have found some substantiation of the Resurrection Truth in our own life. Resurrection is the word most descriptive of what we have gone through.

In the Chinese church during the Cultural Revolution, we had our Thomases, our Peters, and even our Judases, but taking the Christians by and large we find their faith in Christ strengthened, their repentance, forgiveness, and mutual love in Jesus Christ

> Resurrection is the word most descriptive of what we have gone through.

accepted in thanksgiving, and their evangelistic zeal heightened.

Before 1949 we had in China certain Christian intellectuals who took pride in adhering to what they called the social gospel, which taught mainly the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, Jesus as a moral teacher or model, the Sermon on the Mount as the most important part of the Bible, the achievement of the Kingdom of God on earth as the task of Christians. In the course of these 30 or more years, some of them have left the church to join what they consider to be more effective social movements, while the majority have come to take over the Logos and cosmic Christology of St. John's Gospel and St. Paul's epistles, as given for instance in that to the Colossians. This is a very liberating experience—to be engaged in the daily work for a more prosperous, progressive, and humane society and, at the same time, rooted and grounded in a faith which gives us a transcendental perspective and enables us to see the meaning, value, and worth of what our hands do in relation to the Christ who is upholding the universe with his word of power. I do not meet in China one single Christian who still regards himself or herself as a social gospeler.

On the other hand, a very important change on the theological scene is that the theology of those who advocate fundamentalism and evangelicalism has in the last 30 or more years become less harsh and less grim and more loving. They are willing to consider other Christians as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

These changes on both sides have provided a good theological basis for the unity which our China Christian Council represents.

The livelihood and morale of the people have been elevated so remarkably in the last 30 or more years that we Chinese Christians are most of us supporters of New China and her modernization program. But in the territory of the spirit and of conscience, our supreme loyalty and obedience must be to Jesus Christ only.

In the last six years we have produced in China in three cities over two million Bibles, mostly complete ones. With the help of the United Bible Societies to the Amity Foundation, a people's organization initiated by a group of Christian citizens and coopting non-Christian friends in our society, the Amity Printing Press will be operating before long and will give priority to the printing of Bibles and Christian literature. There are ten theological training centers with some 600 young men and women under training. There are three national journals for Protestant Christians. A fourth one, specially for those in rural areas, is now under consideration.

In order that your prayers for Chinese Christians will be more informed, I would like now to tell you some of our problems:

1. The big age gap in leadership caused by our inability to carry on adequate theological training for a number of years. There is a preponderance of older colleagues. This situation is going to get worse in five or ten years' time, before it can turn to be better.

2. Our churches are mostly full on Sundays, but, unfortunately, our work of Christian nurture has to be largely on a massive basis. There is little personalized pastoral care for the building up of Christian spirituality. We need a ministry that can cope with the influx of new converts.

3. We have ten theological schools, but only one of them has a relatively complete full-time teaching staff. We lack trained teachers.

4. Because of the vastness of the country and shortage of workers, a number of groups of Christians meeting in homes are in isolation. This makes for wrong and even heretical teachings.

5. The Peoples' Government on all levels has repeatedly affirmed and is doing much for the implementation of the principle of religious freedom, not because it has a high opinion of religion but because it wishes to unite the whole people, including religious people, in the upbuilding of the nation; but there is still the lingering influence of ultra-leftism which makes for a lack of enthusiasm in correctly implementing religious freedom here and there in some parts of China.

6. Denominational structures are no longer existing, and all non-Roman Catholic Christians are within our China Christian Council. In this sense we are post-denominational. But this council is not yet the future, united church of China. We do not see what the next step which God wants us to take is. We need to wait for God's time and meanwhile avoid any human impulsiveness.

So, the church is there in China in the grace of Jesus Christ and with no lack of problems. Here are at least six problem areas which we would like you to know and to remember when you pray for us.

As I close, may I say that, if there are in this church tonight former missionaries to China or their children, I will be so pleased if they will just let me know at the end of the meeting so that we can at least shake hands!

A Remarkable Decade and the Future Prospect

Paul Varo Martinson

Paul V. Martinson, a third-generation Lutheran missionary working among Chinese people, is Professor of Christian Missions and World Religions at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, and a close observer of Chinese affairs.

This is a sobering time to reflect upon a century since American Lutheran work began in China. My grandparents, Andrew and Anna Martinson, were among that first generation of missionaries.[1] I remember well the story of my father at the age of eight. He stood by his weeping mother who had just lost her young husband to illness (he was 45). "Don't worry, Mother," he comforted, "I will take Daddy's place." Well, he did, and served first in China and then in Hong Kong until 1970. I belong to the third generation, and my children to the fourth. It has been a remarkable century, and if such is possible, an even more remarkable decade, for the church in China.

Yet, it is a sobering time as we write in the shadow of June 4, 1989, and the events of Tiananmen Square. This century has been an unending cascade of change for China, and we can be sure that the cascade has only been momentarily slowed.

The story that begins this decade has been told many times. We were startled to read in the newspapers in September, 1979, that a church had opened in Shanghai. Not only had it opened, but it was packed. The next Sunday there were two services, both packed. This was unprecedented after more than a decade of the Cultural Revolution and the closing down of virtually all religious institutions and the scattering of clergy and priests. This had been the fate of all religions in China. But now we were seeing the fruits of a new policy of religious freedom made by the Chinese government.[2]

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[1]They arrived in Henan in 1903.

[2]That decision was made at the now famous Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress held in December, 1978. For further information see Donald E. MacInnis, *Religion in China Today: Policy & Practice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 7ff.

My wife and I had the privilege of worshipping in that church in Shanghai one month after it had opened. It was full, and it was a moving experience. On a later occasion I asked how it had come about that well over a thousand had come to worship the very first Sunday the church had been opened.

The process was something as follows. The government, through its Religious Affairs Bureau, had contacted a number of pastors and indicated to them the nature of the government decision. They were encouraged to form a committee and go about the task of opening a church. The committee that was formed, composed of both lay and clergy from a variety of Protestant traditions, made the necessary plans for the opening. When the preparations had been made they had to consider how to notify Christians in the area. The only way they could go about that process was to gather as many names of persons as they, the committee members, knew and send out invitations to as many of them for whom they knew addresses. They expected a modest response. In fact, it turned out that those who received the notice informed others whom they knew, and they in turn informed others, and the news spread along an informal network of communication like wildfire, even reaching out into the suburb areas surrounding Shanghai.

Today we witness the growth of a church that dwarfs the scale of growth before 1949—then approximately one million Protestants,[3] 20,000 churches and mission stations. Today there are thousands of open churches, many newly built, and tens of thousands of worshipping groups throughout the country. No one has an accurate count. In 1988 the count was put at 5,000 open churches, with 30,000 registered meeting points and about five million Protestant Christians. This surely does not account for all Protestant Christians. Some put the figures several times higher than this.[4] Whatever figure is adopted, this still leaves the Christian community as a miniscule figure within a vast population.[5] Three provinces lead in numbers of Protestant Christians: Henan with 830,000, Zhejiang with 800,000, and Fujian with 600,000.[6]

Four parallel tracks

In his important book on the meaning of global mission entitled *Translating the Message*, Lamin Sanneh has established an important thesis for understanding missionary history. This thesis is that for whatever failures and theological and cultural blinders under which western missionaries worked, the principle inherent in the gospel and uncovered above all by Paul, has been decisive. This principle was that the gospel had to be translated into the language of a particular culture and people. This process also took place in China—to be sure, more slowly and painfully than should have been

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[3]Donald E. MacInnis gives the figure of 936,000 baptized. See *Religion in China Today*, 313.

[4]One example would be the report in *China Prayer Letter*, No. 82 (June 1987):1, which already then put the figure at 200,000 meeting points and the numbers of Christians at 30 to 50 million. This report is based on a paper given by Jonathan Chao in Pittsburgh, PA, in March, 1987. There is apparently no end to inflation; some even put the figure at 100 million.

[5]The above paragraphs are taken from my article, "The Protestant Church in Post-Mao China: Two paradigms," in *Ching Feng* 31.1 (March 1988):3ff.

[6]According to a 1988 interview with Bishop K. H. Ting. See MacInnis, *Religion in China Today*, 314, and his comments on figures, 313.



the case. But if there is reason to mourn our past, there is cause even more to rejoice in the present. There is no question but that the last decade of the century we celebrate in this issue has witnessed a church once profoundly persecuted step forth in mature fashion against tremendous odds to take its place among other churches throughout the world. Seeds sown throughout the previous century and more, by missionary and national church alike, have borne rich and unexpected fruit in a single decade.

The 19th century missionary theme of "three self" (self-propagation, self-support, self-government) became the preferred self-designation of the Christian leadership in China after 1949 to signal their maturity to the nation and to the world. The activities that currently take place on the national, provincial, and local levels of this church are quite breathtaking. One national seminary and several regional and provincial seminaries have been established, training an indispensable new generation of leadership. An extensive publishing effort is in place, not least involving the reprinting of the Bible, a rare book in China, in a variety of formats. Social service ministries of a considerable variety have been established, some of them in partnership with the international Christian community.

But of course with maturity also comes complexity. Sanneh, in recounting the African experience, demonstrates that with what he terms "vernacular agency," that is, indigenous assumption of responsibility for interpreting and proclaiming the gospel, comes also tremendous variety.[7] This is no less the case in China. It is not just Bishop Ting and the leadership that western Christians meet; neither is it just the open churches that one can visit in the major cities; but it is the host of Christian gatherings throughout the city and countryside, most of whom we know little.

With this variety goes also the complexity of divergent viewpoints. It cannot be denied that there is something like a continental rift that separates large segments of the Christian community from each other. There is doubtless a long history behind this phenomenon reaching back to the old "missionary" days, but it was the post-liberation period in the 1950s when the rift took on clear and definite shape, largely over a difference of attitude towards cooperation with or resistance to the government. To be sure, over time sands have washed over that rift, often obscuring it, but it still exists beneath. Nevertheless, there are also signs that the rift zone is here and there being welded together. The strong signs of this in the year prior to June 4, 1989, have for the moment been hidden from view.[8] But beyond the difference dramati-

[7]See esp. chapter 4 of Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989).

[8]I refer to the rapprochement between an independent Christian leader of the house church movement and Bishop Ting. See *Baixing* 187 (March 1, 1989):17-29.

cally posed by this rift, there is a rich diversity of understandings of the gospel, some mutually compatible, some perhaps not.

These are two lines of development of the past decade: the phenomenal resurrection of a church to new mature life, and the complexity of diversity. A third feature of the past decade, which is only now beginning to take hold, is the interest in Christianity on the part of the Chinese academic world. This is a reality little known in the west, since the activity has been going on within the Chinese ecumene itself without significant western contact. During this decade there was several times more scholarly output on various themes of Christian history (primitive Christianity, medieval Christianity, the Reformation, modern and contemporary Christianity, Scripture and theology, Christian denominationalism and ecclesiology, Christian rites and festivals, the ecumenical movement, and the like) than in the three previous decades of Communist rule. To be sure, the Institute for World Religions in the Academy of Social Sciences once had the hostile thesis of Marx with respect to religion for its initial rationale.[9] But it has moved far beyond those initial self-serving hypotheses. Both undergraduate and graduate courses, even majors and degree programs, were begun in several of the most prestigious universities, beginning with Nankai in Tianjin. Of particular interest to Lutherans are the three national academic conferences on the Reformation in 1983, 1987, and 1988, and the current plans to start a Reformation Research Society with some 30 secular scholars. Two major journals deal exclusively with religious research, and a growing number of books have been published. This crescendo of scholarly research on Christianity bodes some interesting possibilities for the future. An International Conference on Christianity and Chinese Culture is now under preparation by the Academy of Social Sciences to be held in September, 1991. Many leading theologians from around the world will be participating, including Lutherans.

Our principal interest in these reflections is upon the first of these, the open church. It has not been an easy decade. The first order of business was the basic task of giving a minimum of order and direction to the burgeoning Christian community. Under the encouragement of the resurrected parachurch organization, the Three-Self Committee, local committees were established in one city after another, one region after another, as one by one churches opened. This process resulted in the establishment of the China Christian Council in 1980.[10] Though not yet a church body as such, there now was at least a national organization which had as its main task the ordering of the internal life of the Christian community. Under its aegis, needs universally felt by Christians could be met, not least those of publishing and leadership training.

A need felt from the beginning, but always difficult to achieve, was to establish communication links with Christians throughout the country, especially in the light of the sometimes "wild" growth of believers with virtually no knowledge of Scripture, attracted by the ministry of healing and prayer and by the sense of purpose and meaning in the life of Christians. Eventually teams of pastors were to be sent

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[9]Under the ideological dogmatism of Ren Jiyu, who was given this task by Mao just prior to the Cultural Revolution, but was not fully implemented until after the Cultural Revolution.

[10]See Philip L. Wickeri in *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988):188ff.

out to the more remote rural areas, such as in Henan (one of the former major areas of Lutheran work), on preaching and teaching missions. These missions led to many moving accounts of encounters with Christians previously isolated from the mainstream urban church.[11] The recent repression has no doubt put a temporary stop to these missions.

During these years the church leadership kept its ear closely tuned to the political winds of change. Many clergy and lay people, of course, served on various political committees, local, regional, and national, so they had ample opportunity to be informed of these winds. Attunement with the directions set by Deng in the program of the Four Modernizations led to at least two interesting developments. The first, somewhat controversial and perhaps of short term significance, was the energetic encouragement of Christians to take advantage of the new economic freedoms and seek wealth for the sake of the nation. For a period of time the pages of *Tian Feng*, the national church periodical, were filled with testimonies of persons who had become legitimately "wealthy" by dint of personal industry.[12] Of course, the current economic slowdown has put a stop to these concerns.

The second development, closer to the purpose of the church and of more long term significance, is the development of agencies to foster social services of one kind or another. On the national level Amity, established in 1985, is the prime example. But there are also local agencies, such as Agape Social Center in Canton. Through these agencies monies and ministries are made available to persons in need—the handicapped, victims of natural disaster, the sick, and the poorly educated, among others.

During a visit to this country shortly before the June 4 incident, Bishop Shen Yifan from Shanghai spoke with a group of us at Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary. He identified three marked features of the church in China today. It was a growing church, a uniting church, and a witnessing church. By "uniting" he meant that it was not yet a united church, but one in which many different traditional commitments (theological, liturgical, organizational) coexisted. Differences were allowed so long as they did not disrupt, and all were held together by a single fundamental faith. It will take another generation to bring this process into the fullness of a truly united church.

> The church in China today is a growing church, a uniting church, and a witnessing church.

He identified five major problems. These were the shortage of pastors (only 850 ordained pastors); the great need for better Christian nurture, requiring trained lay leaders as well as published materials; the need to reflect upon their contemporary experience and develop a theology that meets the needs for modern China; a fuller unity among all Protestant Christians; the need to protest abuses by leftist oriented persons in Party and State who continue to obstruct the policy of religious freedom.

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[11]See, for instance, *Tian Feng* 68 (8.1988).

[12]See, for instance, the 1985 issues.

Symptomatic of the current indecision of the church are the diverging responses to the June 4 incident.

Between the times

The church in China lives between the times. Even as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of American Lutheran mission to China, China "celebrates" the 150th anniversary of the Opium War. This war resulted in the ceding of Hong Kong to the British and began the process of the Unequal Treaty system under whose protection missionaries came to China. On June 3, 1990, Chinese leaders gathered in the Great Hall of the People to commemorate this event. In 1997 Hong Kong will revert back to China, thus giving formal closure to China's era of humiliation before the west.

The church also lives between the time of the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the reversion to authoritarian tactics of June 4. Deng's goal of economic liberalization could not abide political liberalization. Whatever capital the Chinese Communist Party had after the 1949 Liberation, it has now all been spent, and its credibility with the people is essentially unrecoverable. The aged leadership of China has not yet realized this, and in its futile and befuddled way is trying to repair the irreparable. So China flounders between the times.

Symptomatic of the current indecision of the church in this time of uncertainty are the diverging responses to the June 4 incident and its aftermath. We might characterize them roughly as three tendencies: the a-political, the para-political, and the theo-political.

Perhaps the most widespread is the first. It is closely associated with the biblical literalism of much of "folk protestantism"[13] in China and espoused as a matter of biblical principle by independent leaders in the house church movement. One of these, Lin Xiangao, expressed it to me personally in December of 1989. He discourages all participation in political activity since "all authority is given by God" (Rom 13), and so Christians are obligated to full cooperation with the government except when affairs of church or matters of faith are concerned.[14]

A second response we have termed the para-political. This is the response of church leaders who seem to follow closely every twist and turn of the government, whether to right or to left. No doubt this accommodation is well motivated, seeking the long term security of religious freedom. This stance is well exemplified by the submissive statement of the Three-Self Committee in Shanghai issued on June 27, 1989. It begins: "We resolutely endorse every decision made by the Fourth Plenum of the

[13]A term used by Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground*, 285.

[14]This attitude has by no means insulated them from repressive acts by the government. In fact, it may even appear as more of a threat since it appeals so explicitly to a standard of judgment outside the state. In any case, Lin Xiangao and numerous other independents have suffered in the wake of this new repression. On Lin Xiangao see, for example, my essay "What Now?" to be published in 1990 in the *Bulletin of the Lutheran Literature Society for the Chinese.*

Thirteenth Chinese Communist Party Central Committee," referring to a meeting held after the June 4 incident. It continues in part: "We call upon people from Christian circles throughout China and the masses of believers to conscientiously study Comrade Deng Xiaoping's important speech... in order to raise the patriotic and socialist consciousness, and together with the broad masses of the people, struggle for the construction of a strong and prosperous motherland."[15] The statement speaks for itself.

The third response, which we term theo-political, is much more nuanced in its approach. Bishop K. H. Ting is the chief proponent of this view. Here the concern is to respond to political realities out of a theological stance that undergirds a positive participation by Christians within the social and political life of the nation without identification with it. In this case it maintains a necessary distance between church and state by refraining from outright affirmation of political actions as well as from direct criticism. In a letter also dated June 27, Bishop Ting writes to church leaders around the world: "The turn of events in China has been most tragic and shocking. We grieve over those who died.... We pray for the faith which assures us that the visions of the young and the dreams of the aged are not lost to God's memory, and will in his good time come to fruition."[16]

In a speech subsequent to this, Bishop Ting spoke of the "Church... [as] a school for the democratic spirit." But what does this mean? He goes on: "The democratic spirit consists not only of majority rule in voting, but also of respect for other people's opinion and giving them due authority if they are given their offices.... On major issues, we must seek consensus in charity... after full consultation and discussion, having taken into serious consideration the desires and aspirations of others." But the ambiguities here are deep going. Does this mean, "Centralization [in] the exercise of leadership"? That sounds like Mao and Li Peng. Does it mean, "to let the people be masters in their own house"?[17] But that is what June 4 was all about. Is democracy a right or a permission? Is the leadership subordinate to democracy, or is democracy subordinate to leadership? How will the church be "a school"? From outside it is not easy to answer these questions.

Towards the future

There are theological convictions that underlie the way the church has responded to opportunity during this past decade, and carried forward by Bishop Ting into the period following the June 4 crisis. These convictions are in continuity with, yet not identical to, those that informed the pages of *Tian Feng* during the 1950s. Philip Wickeri speaks about the "Nanjing theologians."[18] Perhaps the term "theology of reconciliation" best characterizes the contemporary shape of this current. The concern is to relate gospel and world to each other rather than counterpose gospel to world. It is a theology that seeks reconciliation of the Christian community with the Chinese people, for whom it has been con-

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[15]This statement was dated June 27, 1989, and has been published in many places. See, for instance, *Bridge* 37 (Sept-Oct 1989):3.

[16]For the fuller statement see *Bridge* 37 (Sept-Oct 1989):3.

[17]From an undated copy of a manuscript entitled, "What to Learn from Y. T. Wu Today?", 8.

[18]Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground*, chapter 8.

sidered a foreign body. It is a theology that argues for social and political engagement as the arena where faith works out love. More so than in the earlier period of the '50s, these convictions have been held in close relationship to a biblically based faith that returns again and again to Scripture as its source. Chen Zemin, for one, speaks of a "cosmic Christology."[19] Ephesians and Colossians are dear to these theologians. In Chinese the term for cosmos is *yuzhou. Yu* means space, above, below, and the four directions. All is spatially included. *Zhou* means time, past, present, and future, and points to all possible times. The Christ who reconciles is the Christ of all space and time. God's will is that all things be united in Christ, for all things, already today are held together "in him."[20] This conviction will direct the church as it faces the future.[21]

With this compass in mind we will draw some tentative conclusions. First, the legacy of history will continue to influence the church, whatever the socio-political context. On the one hand, there is the history of its missionary past. To a considerable degree the debits of this past have been overcome, and the Christian community is recognized as a genuine Chinese community. Not even this has been reversed by the renewed oppression. Nevertheless, the issue of autonomy *vis-a-vis* the rich and powerful western church will continue to be important.

But there is also the history of internal Chinese divergences. These divisions will continue to shape the future. Should something comparable to what has happened in Eastern Europe take place, and governmental restrictions that still circumscribe religion be removed, there is sure to rise a richly variegated church that will range from Pentecostal and healing type groups on the one hand to a united church on the other, with any number of possibilities in between. The dream of a single Protestant church in China will not be realized.

A "theology of reconciliation" argues for social and political engagement as the arena where faith works out love.

Second, with the reversion of Hong Kong to China, a whole new chapter for the church in China will commence. Here two parallel strands will come into a single national house. For the foreseeable future, however, their identities will remain distinct, although they will have increasing influence upon each other. This will nevertheless encourage more intensive relations with the rest of the diaspora Chinese church as well as the church in Taiwan. Vigorous Lutheran communities in Taiwan and Hong Kong will share significantly in those relations.

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[19]For example on page 6 of the *Jinlling Xiehe Shenxue Zhi* NS 2 (6.1985).

[20]Colossians 1:17.

[21]There are inherent dangers in this position if the theme of unity is so overstressed that the difference between gospel and society or state is ignored. Wickeri shows that this danger was not entirely avoided by the church in the '50s *(Seeking the Common Ground*, 257, 289). Neither, as we have seen, has it been avoided by the Three-Self Committee today.

Third, we have spoken of the exhaustion of spirit brought about by the Cultural Revolution. Nothing has filled that vacuum. Whether a renewed democracy movement will partially fill that vacuum remains to be seen. In any case, the phenomenal growth of the Christian church during the past decade is closely related to the fact of that desolation of spirit. The church will continue to grow and bring its influence to bear within society. At the same time the Chinese intellectual community will pursue a reassessment of past Chinese tradition, religious and secular, as well as reconsideration of Christianity and western intellectual traditions. It will truly be a period of a hundred schools.

There have been three uniquely creative periods in Chinese religious and philosophical thought. The first was the solidifying of indigenous lines of thought at the time of Confucius, the Daoists, Mozi, and many others in the centuries before Christ. The other two periods were stimulated by outside influences. The first of these was Buddhism that came from India. During the 5th to 12th century it had a profound impact upon Chinese religion and thought, stimulating among other things the rise of neo-Confucianism. Now in our time we are in the early stages of the third creative age, as China begins to take account of western traditions, including the Christian faith, in a way it has not until now. We are conceivably at the threshold of significant new initiatives.

The political context is not all determining. The options are not many. There can be continued authoritarian rule. However, as we have seen in Eastern Europe, in the long run this will be self-defeating. China, as the world's most populous nation, cannot afford to march backwards into economic decline. Another option is radical and sudden change leading to chaos. This is unacceptable. I hope change will take a more evolutionary process, in which China, driven by internal economic and societal pressures, will begin to moderate till the day a person (or persons) of sufficient stature is able to give direction to a nation at sea.

It seems clear that the policy of religious freedom cannot be reversed on a national scale, though in a number of locations the independent churches have suffered considerably. Fruitful relations with the international Christian community, slowed down though they be, will continue. Our part is to join hands with the Christian community in China at every level possible in a common witness to the gospel. Who knows what the next century will bring?

Lutheran Church in China: A Brief History[1]

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Shortly after the Boxer event (1900) Lutheran missionaries related to various mission societies working in Central China began meeting for annual conferences, and these conferences rather quickly fostered the idea of united Lutheran activity. In 1906 a circular letter was sent out with an invitation to attend a Lutheran conference to be held in connection with the Centennial Missionary Conference in Shanghai, May, 1907. It was signed by representatives of the Norwegian, Finnish, American Lutheran, and Berlin Missionary Societies.

The 1906 circular letter suggested the following plan for union work among Lutherans: 1) a common name, "Hsin I Hui" (Justification by Faith Church); 2) union literary work; and 3) union educational work. These points were discussed in fine detail by Lutherans at the 1907 Centennial Conference, which was attended by representatives of seven Lutheran bodies in Central China in addition to delegates from two German societies working in South China (Basel and Rhenish) and from the Berlin Mission in Shantung. Enthusiasm ran high over the prospect of closer Lutheran cooperation.

The following year, 1908, Lutheran missionaries from Hunan, Hupeh, and Honan provinces gathered at Kikungshan to make plans for future cooperation and to consider the establishment of a united Lutheran theological seminary which could act as a "strong pulsating heart" for all the Lutheran synods in China. This intention was realized with the opening on March 29, 1913, of the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) at Shekow, Hupeh, twelve miles north of Hankow. It was originally founded by the Norwegian Missionary Society, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, the Hauge Evangelical Lutheran Synod of America, and the Finnish Missionary Society. Prof. O. R. Wold, Hauge

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[1]Composite sketch prepared on the basis of A. S. Burgess, *Peng Fu from Junan* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1939); E. Theodore Bachmann and Mercia Brenne Bachmann, *Lutheran Churches in the World: A Handbook* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); and Gustav Carlberg, *The Changing China Scene* (Hongkong: Lutheran Literature Society, 1959).

Synod missionary and 1898 graduate of the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary (LSTC predecessor school), was elected by the China seminary board as its first president and continued in that capacity until his death in 1928. He also taught dogmatics. The first seminary class was graduated in 1916. In 1921 the Augustana Synod mission joined in the cooperative work, and Dr. August W. Edwins (LSTC-Rock Island 1899 class valedictorian) began his work as Professor of New Testament at the Shekow Seminary, continuing in that capacity until his untimely death in 1942. Edwins had previously edited the union Lutheran newspaper, *Hsin I Bao* ("faith-righteousness paper"). By 1948 the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Shekow had graduated 287 students who served in many geographical synods of the Chinese Lutheran church.

At a meeting of 26 representatives of eight Lutheran mission bodies at Kikungshan in August 1917, a draft constitution for the new Lutheran Church of China (LCC) was prepared, with membership in the LCC open to church bodies, missions, or synods accepting the constitution. The general assembly was to meet every three years, its delegates elected by the constituent synods. A church council was provided for, with the requirement that at least half its members be Chinese. Chinese and missionaries were equally eligible to hold office in local congregations, synods, or the general church body. The Chinese text of the LCC constitution became the official document, and the official language of the general assembly was to be Chinese. Control of union enterprises was vested in special boards responsible to the LCC church council and general assembly. Thus by 1917 the foundations for a single Lutheran church for all of China had been firmly laid.

The first general assembly of the LCC was held at Kikungshan in August, 1920, with the five following synods (missions) joining: Augustana Synod Mission (Central Honan Synod); Finnish Missionary Society (Western Hunan Synod); Lutheran United Mission (Honan-Hupeh Synod);

By 1917 the foundations for a single Lutheran church for all of China had been firmly laid.

Norwegian Mission Society (Central Hunan Synod); and Church of Sweden Mission (North Human Synod). Eight other mission groups were present but did not then join; some did in later years. Rev. O. R. Wold, already President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, was elected the LCC's first president, and the two vice-presidents were the Rev. Liang Chia-Shih and the Rev. Chu Hao-Jan. An offer by the Church of Sweden Mission to establish a Lutheran college in Hunan was welcomed. Subsequent LCC general assemblies were held in 1924, 1928, 1931, 1934, and 1937 (the next assembly could not be held until 1946, due to wartime conditions). At the 1931 general assembly, Rev. Chu Hao-Jan was elected LCC president, succeeded in 1937 by Rev. Peng Fu. By 1949 the LCC consisted of 15 regional synods with a total constituency of 103,000 baptized members, 727 congregations, 180 ordained pastors, and more than 1,000 lay evangelists and Bible women. At the peak of foreign missionary activity in the 1930s, more than 600 Lutheran missionaries were at work in China.

The precise details of the termination of the Lutheran Church in China are not available. In November of 1948 the Lutheran Theological Seminary was relocated from Shekow, Hupeh to Tao Fong Shan, Shatin, Hong Kong. It continues in Hong Kong to this day. A number of Chinese Lutheran pastors and many laity chose to become refugees in Hong Kong or Taiwan at the time of the Chinese liberation in 1949. Students and faculty members from the Shekow campus who did not relocate to Hong Kong became part of the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, a consolidation of 11 denominational schools, of which Bishop K. H. Ting is currently principal. Chinese church authorities are currently seeking the return of the Shekow campus for religious use. Between 1949 and 1951, virtually all Lutheran missionaries left or were expelled from China, and foreign mission agencies ceased to function. In 1955, the last president of the LCC, Rev. Peng Fu, became president of the newly organized Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hongkong.

In 1951 the continuing Chinese leadership of the Lutheran Church of China identified itself with the Chinese Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Sometime in the latter part of the 1950s it is presumed that the synods, congregations, pastors, and members of the former LCC, like those of other forms of Chinese denominational Christianity, were integrated into the newly emerging form of "post-denominational" Christianity where they remain to this day. As a vital but no longer identifiable part of the life of the congregations and institutions which make up the China Christian Council, they continue to give their witness to this day. A definitive history of the Lutheran Church of China, and of its closing years, remains to be written.

Book Reviews

PHARISEES, SCRIBES AND SADDUCEES IN PALESTINIAN SOCIETY: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH. By Anthony J. Saldarini. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988. 325 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Relying heavily on Gerhard E. Lenski's analysis of social stratification, Saldarini seeks to describe the groups in the title sociologically, that is, in terms of their positions and roles in the class structure of the first-century Palestinian society. His major conclusion is: while most of the Sadducees belonged to the ruling class, Pharisees and Scribes fit into what can be termed a "retainer class" (Lenski's term), composed of all those individuals and groups who largely served the needs of the small, yet powerful governing class and whose power and prestige were dependent on that governing class.

Saldarini's final conclusions, however, recognize the complexity of the first century world. He suggests that "Scribes" did not represent a unified group; they were persons who left peasant status to take up bureaucratic or educational tasks which depended on the wealthy ruling class. The village scribe whose function was to copy letters and documents was in the lowest social status. The Pharisees changed over time, and in the first century they had a clearer social and political agenda than many scholars surmise. He argues that Pharisees were not "sectarians" if that term indicates a separation from social life, both political and religious. Instead, they were concerned to reform Judaism so that all Jews lived in conformity with the covenant. Saldarini concludes that Pharisees, though based in Jerusalem as part of the retainer class, were probably also present in Galilee. As well, he thinks that Sadducees were part of the ruling aristocracy in Jerusalem, yet their political and social circumstances sometimes changed.

Saldarini's interpretations of the literary sources, coupled with his application of sociological analysis, yield reasoned and nuanced conclusions. His book is readable and extremely illuminating, particularly in its sociological description of social classes and relations in Palestinian society.

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MOMENTS OF CRISIS IN JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS. By Marc Saperstein. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989. xii and 84 pages. Paper. $6.95.

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: EXPLORING THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE. Edited by James H. Charlesworth. New York: Crossroad, 1990. 258 pages. Cloth. $19.95.

At first glance, Saperstein's book might not seem to be very significant, brief as it is and with a rather off-putting title. Who wants to read just about the bad side of the story? Perusal of the book, however—which represents lectures delivered in 1988 at the Chatauqua Institution in Chatauqua, New York—reveals that it is a gem of historical analysis.

True, the author does focus on negative moments: the period of the initial split between Christianity and Judaism; the High Middle Ages, especially the time of the Crusades; the Age of the Reformation (subtitle: "New Hopes and Disillusions"); and the Nazi period, culminating in the Holocaust. His aim, however, is not simply to describe these conflicts, but to "reconstruct the range of options" facing the decision-makers and opinion-leaders of the time. His conviction is that things could have worked out differently; he rejects the thought that "conflict and enmity are the natural paradigm for the relationship between Jews and Christians."

The chapter on the Reformation, dealing largely with Luther, will be disconcerting to

Lutherans who do not know the story of Luther's diatribes against the Jews, and distressing once again for those who do. He reviews how high the early hopes had been—on Luther's part, for new bonds of amity with Jews, leading eventually, as he hoped, to their conversion. On the part of the Jews, contrariwise, the hope was for an end to such conversionary efforts and other coercive tactics by a medieval church whose monopoly they now saw being broken by Luther's efforts. Misunderstood intentions, misplaced hopes, trains that passed in the night—and great was Luther's wrath when he realized what was happening.

Saperstein, who formerly taught Jewish Studies at Harvard and is now at Washington University in St. Louis, is very fair in evaluating Luther, yet very blunt. "It is not pleasant," he writes, "to witness Martin Luther, who was undoubtedly a spiritual giant and a religious genius, mobilizing his powerful intellect and considerable rhetorical skill for one of the most scurrilous displays of anti-Jewish venom ever written."

Jews and Christians is a collection of papers on the subject delivered at a conference in Philadelphia in 1987. The editor, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary, is joined by a distinguished panel of contributors. Inclusion of a summary of the discussion that followed each lecture gives the reader a sense of participating in the conference and shows how the lecturers reacted to one another.

Among the most valuable essays are those by Charlesworth himself, J. Christian Beker (also of Princeton), and D. Moody Smith (Duke) on various aspects of the New Testament materials. All agree on the model that sees Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity as "twin offspring of the same religion," namely, Biblical and Intertestamental Judaism. Beker refers to them as "the way of wisdom and Torah" and "the way of eschatological Messianism," respectively. This model preserves the differentia between the faiths, and the fatefulness of the choice between them, while avoiding the supersessionist motif.

Also in this volume, the figure of Luther is unavoidable. The essay by Hans Hillerbrand, Reformation scholar at Southern Methodist University (Perkins School of Theology), offers a sympathetic yet candid view of the Reformer. Tackling also the topic of Luther's legacy, including the sensitive question of whether a line can be drawn from Luther to modern antisemitism, he concludes: "When all is said about Luther and his flagrant anti-Judaic pronouncements, it remains that the real failure was not so much that of the reformer of the sixteenth century as that of his followers in the twentieth century."

Surely, however, Hillerbrand in so saying lets Luther off the hook too easily. Allowing the gospel of grace to degenerate into vitriolic hatred is inexcusable in any age, and in this respect Luther had a worse, not better, record than almost any of his successors. With regard to this question, at least, we may be glad that Lutheranism is not wholly Luther, and that the whole Luther is not Lutheranism.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS. By Harold W. Attridge. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1989. xxviii and 437 pages. Cloth. $49.95.

It is now many decades since the last genuinely critical commentary on Hebrews was published. While outstanding commentaries appeared in German, there was no commentary to do for our generation what James Moffatt's ICC commentary did for our fathers. Now this commentary by Attridge, Professor of New Testament at Notre Dame University, fills that void. It follows the excellent format of the Hermeneia series. Attridge, recognizing the limits of historical knowledge, argues that we cannot identify the author by name; but we can say he was well educated, including training in Greek rhetoric, had some knowledge of Greek philosophy, and extensive experience in Hellenistic Jewish exegesis of the Old Testament.

Ethnically Jewish, he stands in the ecclesiastical tradition of the "radical Gentile-oriented wing of the early church," to which Paul also belonged. Written sometime between 60-100 C.E., the writer addressed second generation Christians losing their early commitment to the confessed faith of the community under pressure from outsiders. He writes to encourage fidelity, which gives shape to the book.

Attridge identifies Hebrews as an epideictic oration, possibly an early Christian homily, with an epistolary conclusion. His most original contribution is his analysis of the structure. He does not follow the usual division into three major blocks of material (1:1–4:13; 4:14–10:31; 10:32–12:29, with chapter 13 as a form of appendix), but divides the book into five major sections (1:5–2:18; 3:1–5:10; 5:11–10:25; 10:26–12:13; 12:14–13:21, with exordium and concluding benediction and greetings). While his comments defending this structure are often penetrating and useful, I am not persuaded that it is superior to the more traditional threefold division of Wolfgang Nauck. Attridge gives an extensive list of rhetorical figures used in Hebrews but does not use them or the structural devises of Greek rhetoric in determining the structure. It is, in my opinion, the weakest section of an outstanding commentary.

The commentary proper fills 375 closely packed pages. Each section of the commentary begins with Attridge's original translation, with extensive text-critical notes. A section titled "Analysis" considers the rhetorical and literary aspects of the section and provides a general theological analysis. The "Comment" section which follows offers a detailed examination of the original text, provides and evaluates parallels from the contemporaneous world, and lists and evaluates the extensive modern bibliography. That bibliography is gathered on pages 413-424. Finally, four indexes provide a list of passages cited, Greek words discussed, subjects treated, and a selection of the modern writers cited in the text.

A series of excurses discuss significant motifs or topic in Hebrews: Sonship in Hebrews, The Christological Pattern of 2:10-18; The Language of "Perfection"; The Antecedents and Development of the High-Priestly Christology; The Image of Entry into Rest; Priesthood and Sonship; The Impossibility of Repentance for Apostates; The Veil and Its Symbolism; Melchizedek; Hebrews, Paul, and the Law; The Heavenly Temple and Its Significance; The Anomalies of Hebrews 9:2-4 and numbers; Faith in Hebrews and Contemporary Literature; Strange Teachings and Foods. Preachers will find these extremely useful in stimulating reflection on this most unusual and difficult New Testament text.

This magnificent commentary is a major achievement, a worthy addition to the Hermeneia series. I hope hundreds of copies end up in pastoral libraries. This most pastoral epistle has much to contribute to contemporary preaching in an age that often seems to lack strong, enduring commitment. Attridge will help one to grasp that contribution and use it.

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THE ETHICS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. By Wolfgang Schrage. Translated by David E. Green. Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1988. xiv and 369 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Prof. Schrage of Bonn University, who has studied New Testament for over thirty years, offers the result of that intense investigation in this volume. He underscores the significance of his work in a twelve-page introduction. The subject matter of New Testament ethics is the "question of how life was lived in the earliest Christian communities: what were its foundations, the support for, and the criteria and principles for [its] way of acting and living." Schrage contends that in correlating faith and action the New Testament "must still be taken as an absolute standard if the conduct required of Christians today is still to be Christian conduct, grounded in the name of Jesus Christ."

The New Testament contains no philosophic ethic or interest in universal moral principles; rather one hears a repeated call for appro-

priate conduct, including both individual morality and patterns for social relations and structures. It shows us communities in which "nearly everything is still in flux," so that one must listen to each individual voice from the texts, look for the theological motivation and justification of ethical action, and seek basic criteria and concrete requirements. It places a high value on reason and rational knowledge, yet its ethics is entirely concrete, exemplary, situational, fragmentary, directed to Christians only, without any consideration of political responsibility, though it drew on and incorporated the heritage of classical ethics.

Jesus, the Synoptics, Paul, and John share a primary theological or christological foundation, God's saving action in Jesus Christ. Given this heritage the "real task of Christian ethics today should be to emphasize its awkward and difficult aspects" while recognizing the priority of theological affirmations. But today also we must search for the criteria and concrete substance of ethics, since love implies specific content and criteria. The danger today is that Christian ethics "often scarcely dares to say anything that does not agree with the dominant morality of society or is not considered 'realistic,' 'effective,' and 'practical.'" The historical study of New Testament ethics makes a contribution to our ethics as it points to the gospel itself and love encountered in past ages.

Schrage has written a historical study, not a guidebook for contemporary life; but the implications of his research are open for appropriation. He divides his work into the following major sections: "Jesus' Eschatological Ethics (13-115), Ethical Beginnings in the Earliest Congregations (117-133), Ethical Accents in the Synoptic Gospels (135-161), The Christological Ethics of Paul (163-239), The Ethics of Responsibility in the Deutero-Pauline Epistles (241-278), Parenesis in the Epistle of James (279-293), The Commandment of Brotherly Love in the Johannine Writings (295-319), Exhortations Addressed to the Pilgrim People in the Epistle to the Hebrews (321-327), Eschatological Exhortation in the Book of Revelation (329-348). He documents his work with copious reference to New Testament texts and engages in ongoing dialogue with modern literature. A general bibliography and special bibliographies for each section are a guide for additional reading in modern scholarship.

Schrage's investigation of New Testament ethics deserves careful study by New Testament students, by teachers of Christian ethics, and by all interested in the relation of their faith commitment to their daily life. Schrage is sympathetic to the varying strands of the New Testament, thinks his way into each writer's mode of thought, and presents his results clearly and coherently. This book is a valuable addition to any theological library.

Edgar Krentz

Briefly Noted

NIV ATLAS OF THE BIBLE. By Carl G. Rasmussen (Zondervan, $39.95). The title links the atlas to the New International Version, a linkage echoed in the generally conservative tone of this attractive book. The Exodus is placed in the 15th century, and other dates from early Israel follow a similar literalistic understanding of the text (the tribal allotments by Joshua, for example, are taken at face value). The four-color maps, the fine photographs, and the easily understandable text will make the biblical story—and the Bible itself—accessible to many. RWK

1 AND 2 CHRONICLES. By Simon J. De Vries (Eerdmans, $27.95). Seven volumes have now been published in The Forms of the Old Testament Literature [FOTL] commentary series, all dealing with issues of structure, genre, intention, and setting rather than with the broader

issues usually discussed in a commentary. D. brings great sophistication to the understanding of Chronicles though he presupposes—and needs to be supplemented by—other commentaries. He dates Chronicles to the fourth century and separates it totally from Ezra-Nehemiah. Here is how he sums up its message: "The combination of genealogies and narratives is more than a 'history'—it is a confession, an affirmation of faith, and a call to unswerving piety. [The biblical author's] final dictum would be: Israel may yet be what it is." RWK

James Barr's book **THE BIBLE IN THE MODERN WORLD** has been reissued (Trinity Press International, $12.95), unaltered but of a one-page introduction in paperback. It is surprisingly current, even though such recent developments as canonical criticism, feminist hermeneutics, and liberation theology get scant attention. Barr makes a good case for critical interpretation being congruent with biblically based theology. He writes clearly and engages the reader. Still worth reading. Edgar Krentz

Professional exegetes often denigrate the biblical interpretation of Liberation Theology as simplistic. They hold that it disregards the original sense and has no real criteria of meaning. Two British scholars, Christopher Rowland and Mark Corner, seek to redress that evaluation in **LIBERATING EXEGESIS: THE CHALLENGE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY TO BIBLICAL STUDIES** (Westminster/John Knox Press, $14.95). They present examples of such exegesis, suggest that it correlates the biblical view of the poor with the modern world, and suggest that it challenges First World biblical interpretation to cease domesticating the Bible, using Mark and the Apocalypse as test cases. They finally look at British capitalism in the light of *The Kairos Document* and suggest that Liberation Theology has learned much from the academic theology of the First World; it is time for the First World to learn from Liberation Theology to confront the issues of poverty, peace, justice, and reconciliation as Christians. A powerful book well worth the reading—even when it hurts. Edgar Krentz

GENDER AND DIFFERENCE IN ANCIENT ISRAEL. Edited by Peggy L. Day (Augsburg Fortress, $12.95). What distinguishes this anthology of 12 feminist essays is that it is primarily non-theological. The contributors apply methods and insights gleaned from sociology, anthropology, psychology, literary criticism, folklore, and women's studies to the biblical text, and they present concrete examples of the kinds of questions that need to be asked when attention is paid to gender. While the biblical text presents us with an androcentric perspective on Israelite culture, women were nevertheless part of that culture and experienced it from a different perspective. This book intends to inquire into women's activities in biblical times without adopting the text's perspectives on these activities. One essay investigates worship of the Queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 7 and 44) and underlines the disparity between religion as it was popularly practiced and the theological "imperialism" that characterizes many of the biblical texts. According to another chapter, Jael, the woman who offered sustenance to Sisera and then killed him, functions as the womb that devours and kills and the protecting originator and sustainer of life. Another essay argues that the exploits of the powerful women in the book of Exodus were muted in later retellings. RWK

JOSHUA 24 AS POETIC NARRATIVE. By William T. Koopmans (Sheffield Academic Press, $52.50). After an exhaustive, clear, and interesting analysis of the modern history of research on Joshua 24 (163 pages!), K. conducts his own structural investigation and decides that the chapter is a type of poetry which shows internal parallelism and which divides itself into poetic units (strophes, canticles, cantos, etc.). He locates the passage later than the J/E traditions in the Pentateuch and earlier than the main Deuteronomic movement, and he denies that the passage was written by, or radically reshaped by, Deuteronomistic hands. His own historical conclusions are strikingly conservative: Joshua did hold a national gathering at Shechem, and he did advocate exclusive worship of Yahweh as an alternative to Canaanite polytheism. The proposal that Joshua 24 is poetry is clearly the most

original part of this doctoral dissertation and depends finally on what one decides poetry to be. I for one am not convinced. But what a welcome addition this critical history of research is in the ongoing quest for the meaning of a most critical chapter. RWK

EXODUS. By W. Johnstone (Sheffield Academic Press, $7.95). As part of the Old Testament Guides series, this book provides an introduction to or update on the central exegetical issues in the book of Exodus (historical, institutional [passover, covenant, law, etc.], literary, and theological) and identifies the positions of leading contemporary scholars. J. discusses objectively such notions as a 15th versus a 13th century date for the Exodus, the location of Mt. Sinai, the comparison between the OT covenant and ancient treaties, the meaning of the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy, and the figure of Moses (the quest for the historical Moses runs counter to the theological purpose of the biblical source). J. distinguishes between a penultimate, Deuteronomistic version and a final priestly edition. RWK

THE BOOK OF JOB. By John E. Hartley (Eerdmans, $27.95); **THE BOOKS OF NAHUM, HABAKKUK, AND ZEPHANIAH.** By O. Palmer Robertson (Eerdmans, $28.95). Both of these commentaries are part of the New International Commentary on the Old Testament. H. dates the book of Job to the 7th century, largely on the basis of contacts with [Second] Isaiah, and suggests that Job prepared the people to understand [Second] Isaiah's new message that God was going to redeem his people and the world through the innocent suffering of his obedient Servant (so?). He identifies the Redeemer of Job 19:25 as God and asserts that the book of Job teaches that a person may serve God faithfully, whether his circumstances are bleak or filled with promise, for he or she has the assurance that God seeks humanity's ultimate good. He also suggests that a person will triumph over suffering through faith in God. While conservative on many introductory and theological questions, H. provides clear elucidation of the text and has read widely in the modern literature (Walter Michel's philological commentary appeared too late to be considered). R. puzzles over the lack of messianism in the 7th century prophets on which he comments and laces his comments with pejorative remarks about the OT: "Characteristic of all old covenant revelation is its limited, conditional shape that perforce cannot say everything all at once." Many of his judgments ignore the current scholarly consensus and make too facile links to the New Testament. He proposes that once the idea of the new covenant had been formulated in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the term *covenant* was revived fully as a priceless tool for linking the old covenant with the new (evidence?). He also believes that all the words attributed to these prophets are authentic. While Wilhelm Rudolph's excellent commentaries are cited quite often, there are a surprising number of references to Calvin, Keil, and J. M. P. Smith. RWK

TEMPLE SCROLL STUDIES. Edited by George J. Brooke (Sheffield Academic Press, $45). The papers in this anthology were delivered at a conference in Manchester marking the tenth anniversary (in 1987) of Yadin's first edition of the Temple Scroll. This enigmatic document cannot be associated directly with the Qumran community although two copies of the manuscript were preserved there. The scroll may have been a kind of blueprint for the near future. A consensus position on many controverted issues is at least a decade away. RWK

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Preaching Helps

First Sunday in Advent—Third Sunday after Epiphany, Series B

Read Mark! Learn and Inwardly Digest!

The prayer in its older garb (different from the bland version offered by LBW, page 47) asked God, "who has caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning," to grant that we might "hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them" in such a way, that we might lay hold of "the blessed hope of everlasting life."

We could do worse than remove the comma between "read" and "mark" and then throw in a capital to give us "Read Mark!" "Learn Mark, and inwardly digest Mark!" Like the little scroll which John took from the hand of the angel straddling earth and sea, it may be sweet as honey in the mouth but may cause us to burp from time to time (Revelation 10).

The Gospel of Mark is no porridge or thin soup. It is solid stuff, rich fare. Cut it and chew it thoroughly, and it is deeply satisfying.

It will give us a taste for real life, and that in turn may churn up our stomachs at what passes for living in our culture. As we develop a taste for "the sovereignty of God" as offered in the Servant-Christ, the petty sovereignties of human traditions with all their double standards will stick in our throats more and more.

Mark holds before our eyes the vision of the Christ who came and who comes and who will come, to sweep the world clean of all demons and to establish the reign of God's unconquerable love.

Helping us to "read Mark" are Walter Pilgrim, Richard Rollefson, and Don Prange. Author of the First Readings is Walt Pilgrim, professor at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. He also serves as Director of the Lutheran Institute for Theological Education (LITE), and he is the author of *Rich and Poor in Luke's Gospel* (1981).

Richard Rollefson is a pastor with experience both in traditional and in student congregations and in social agencies serving the homeless. He is currently at the dissertation stage in a Ph.D. program at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. He offers Pastoral Reflections on the lessons.

Don Prange works with the people of Appalachia out of his headquarters in Winchester, Virginia. He offers Prophetic Voice from the vantage point of long experience with people in that economically oppressed region.

These three and I wish all of you great joy, as you work in your place to lay hold of the "blessed hope."

This once I think it is a proper use of the much misused word to sign off, saying,

Hopefully,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

First Sunday in Advent December 2, 1990

Psalm 80:1-7
Isaiah 63:16b-17, 64:1-8
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:33-37 or 11:1-10

FIRST READING

Preachers have two Gospel options for Advent 1. We chose Mark 13 to awaken both preachers and hearers (and weary exegetes) to new possibilities. If you prefer Mark 11, we suggest reflections around the theme of the coming king, whose reality took flesh in the One who came in the Lord's name.

Year B concentrates on Mark's action-packed Gospel. However, the Advent/Christmas/Epiphany cycle does not permit any sustained development of the Markan story. So wait.

Advent sets the mood for the celebration of God's gracious visitation. Advent prepares us to see and believe that the Creator of the cosmos is not somewhere out there, but very near. The Incarnation is the earth-shaking miracle of God with us. In Jesus, God's new creation has begun. God and sinner, heaven and earth are reconciled.

Paul's opening thanksgiving to the Corinthians affirms that God's grace in Christ has been at work among them. They "are not lacking in any spiritual gift," despite their abuse of some. Encouraged by these grace/charismata, they are able to do God's work. Yet there remains the note of "not yet," of "waiting for the revealing of our Lord Jesus" (1:7). But God is faithful.

So the Gospel. It presupposes the visitation of the son. Jesus embodied the grace of the kingdom in word and deed. That grace is now alive in the community of faithful disciples. Each has been given a task. "When he leaves home, he puts his servants in charge, each with his work" (13:34). But it is hard to keep going. The "not yet" can overtake the community and produce weariness, frustration, forgetfulness, and carelessness. Hence the reminder: the Master will return. Unexpectedly so. Watch and pray (four times). But God is utterly faithful. WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The coming of Advent always unleashes a flood of childhood memories in me. Although it might simply be a kind of sentimental nostalgia—the sort that says "Christmas is for children"—I sense that these unsolicited memories are trying to remind me of a truth about this season that I, as an adult, am in danger of forgetting.

As a child Advent meant simply the time of waiting and getting ready for Christmas. Although this is not the whole meaning of the season for the church, it is a good place to start.

With the first Sunday in Advent came the lighting of the Advent wreath. If the concept of one month or even four weeks were abstractions of time beyond a child's reckoning, the visual concreteness of "four candles 'til Christmas" was not. The lighting of each candle marked a counting-down of the days until Christmas and simultaneously sparked a mounting-up of excitement.

But this positive sense of anticipation also had a negative counterpart; it is best described as "dread." Each Sunday of Advent was preceded by a Saturday afternoon of Advent when we rehearsed for the Christmas program.

The degree of dread varied from year to year depending upon the part I was assigned in the program. If I was lucky I might get cast in a crowd scene—the heavenly host, for example—where I could count on the other angels to cover for me. Even better was to be a cow or donkey where a little lowing or braying was all that was required.

But from early on I had been typecast as a mere human, and a vaguely rural type at that, which meant being a shepherd with a speaking part. I remember in particular having to memorize the tongue-twisting, syntax-stretching line that goes: "Let us go down to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known unto us." Through four weeks of practice I could never seem to get the grammar right, and I knew with increasing certainty that on the night of the program I would flub my lines.

Advent was a paradoxical combination of excitement and dread, hope and despair.

Yet perhaps even this childish sense of foreboding suggests something of the deeper meaning of Advent. This year of readings from Mark's Gospel begins with the end of the story, "the "little apocalypse" (Mk 13), warning us to be watchful and alert. For this is the other meaning of advent in this season: Christ's second coming when, revealed in power and glory, he comes to judge the world. This message of judgment and radical transformation is one which might rightly produce a sense of dread and foreboding.

Yet because of the identity of the One who is to come, both the meaning and the mode of our waiting is transformed. Because it is Christ whom we await—the One who comes as both Judge and Savior—the commands to "watch" and "be alert" are not so much dreadful imperatives, as invitations to a life formed by a deep and abiding hope.

In this and all the seasons of our lives, hope is faith's future tense. And in the grammar of the Gospel, it is always in the active voice: "Watch and wait with hope." RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

Jerusalem was a first world reality in the context of Palestinian poverty and oppression on the eastern border of the Roman Empire. But there was talk of a new Christ, and signs of "good news" suggested that the "strength" of the "Shepherd of Israel" was being raised (Ps 80:1,2) and that a breakthrough out of "the heavens" (Is 64:1) was in process. Revolutionary change was in the air! How will our preaching today carry forward God's winds of change in our contemporary context? The Spirit says, "Stay awake!" (Mk 13:33,37). DP

Second Sunday in Advent December 9, 1990

Psalm 85
Isaiah 40:1-11
2 Peter 3:8-14
Mark 1:1-8

FIRST READING

Mark launches his story of the divine visitation with the preaching of John and the call to repentance.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, there are no birth narratives; unlike John, no pre-existent Word made flesh. Simply this stark announcement: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Yet each word bursts with meaning: good news (*euaggelion*) for the world in the advent of Jesus, the Christ (Messiah) and Son (Servant) of God. Mark leaves no doubt whose gospel story it really is. Thus following his baptism (1:9-11), the Spirit empowers Jesus to inaugurate the reign of God (1:14-15).

But the coming of God's kingdom had its predecessors. There is the unknown prophet of Deutero-Isaiah, called to speak divine words of comfort to a broken and exiled people (Handel's "Comfort Ye, My People," Is 40:1-11). And there is John, raised up to issue divine warnings of imminent judgment to a dulled and indifferent people.

The early church recognized John's role as the end-time prophet (Elijah to come, Mal 3:1; food and clothing, Mk 1:6). So they proclaimed John's message as their own: repentance, confession of sin, the coming wrath, baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Mark says John's preaching caused quite a stir ("all the country of Judea and Jerusalem went out," 1:5). People were moved to confession and baptism in the waters of the Jordan. Christians ever since have embraced John's message within the totality of the word we need to hear: "turn from evil, do justice, seek the Lord that you may live!" We ignore this word at our peril. Evil does reap its inevitable consequences,

both to individuals and to peoples. Take heed! Repent!

Yet John's message is not the gospel. It prepares the way, it straightens the path. But the gospel takes flesh in the one who comes after John, the mightier one who baptizes with water and the Spirit. "Are you the one who is to come or do we look for another?" (Lk 7:18-23). Jesus' reply to John is his messianic deeds of love and mercy! This is the gospel word by which we live and move and have our being. Repent, yes... for the kingdom of mercy is at hand. WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

At its heart the gospel is a story, and like all stories it has a beginning. "This is the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." That's how Mark begins. Although it sounds more like a conclusion than a beginning, it is still a good way to start the story.

In beginning the way he does, Mark is giving us the clue for understanding all the rest that follows. Given that the story ends with Jesus dying on a cross and women fleeing in terror from an empty tomb, perhaps Mark wanted to make sure that we understand that despite all this—or precisely because of this—his story is indeed the "Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Sometimes it's important to have an idea of where things are going if we are going to keep on going ourselves. God's promises functioned in this way for the people of Israel. "Even though things look bad right now," Isaiah said, "God will come to rescue us and restore our fortunes." The words were about the future, but the promise itself was meant for the present. Isaiah's words from God brought comfort and consolation in the midst of sadness and suffering.

You might say that a promise makes a kind of life possible in the present that would otherwise not be possible. Although it speaks of things yet to happen, it also makes something happen when we live in light of it. Just as a child fearing an uncertain performance of the Christmas story may lose perspective on the real meaning of Advent expectation, we adults also need to remember God's promises in the dark and troubled seasons of our lives. For the promises of God are meant to make possible a life of joy.

As Mark says, the Christian story from beginning to end, despite all signs to the contrary, is good news. And the same is true for those whose lives are based upon that story and its promise. Joy, like hope, is God's gift to us in Christ. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

First world churches must answer a fundamental question: What is it about our preparations to celebrate and act on the Advent of God's reign in history (Mk 1:2,3) that gives consolation (Is 40:1ff) to the poor and disenfranchised of the earth, especially those whose situations cry out for revolutionary change? Are the poor and oppressed even our primary concern? or are we caught up in the "folly" (Ps 85:8) of only consoling ourselves with religious experiences which never touch on issues of justice and peace (Ps 85:10)? Peter suggests that the preparation God wants is a changing of our ways (2 Pet 3:9) to move toward "the place where justice will be at home (2 Pet 3:13). DP

Third Sunday in Advent December 16, 1990

Luke 1:46b-55
Isaiah 61:1-3,10-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8,19-28

FIRST READING

Once again the Advent Gospel focuses on the figure of John. Why these similar texts occur on consecutive Sundays is unclear. But the Fourth Gospel does develop its own distinct presentation of John.

Historically, John's movement did not end with his death. At the time the Gospel was written (Ephesus, 80-90?) the Baptist still had followers, some who claimed *he* was the Messiah, others a great prophet (cf. Acts 19:1-5 for confusion over baptism). Later historians mention Baptist groups and the Mandaeans, a Baptist sect. Against all such inflated claims, the evangelist depicts John himself repeatedly declaring, "I am not the Messiah, or the Prophet, or Elijah" (cf. Mk 9:9-13 on Elijah). Instead, John's role is to bear witness to the One greater than he, the One who was from the beginning with God (1:19-28).

John's witness begins already in the magnificent prologue (1:1-18). In the midst of this profound meditation on the origin of Jesus, the Word made flesh, we find John's testimony (1:6-8,15). Perhaps this is the place where we can gain some new perspectives for preaching. Last Sunday we heard the call to repentance as a prefatory word for receiving the gospel. This Sunday listen to John as the one sent "to bear witness to the light."

Notice the legal language of these verses: "He came for testimony, to bear witness to, to confess" (*matyria, homologein*). To an unbelieving, hostile world, John acts as God's advocate on behalf of Jesus. (Later the Spirit becomes Christ's advocate in the community.)

But most significant is John's witness to the light. Throughout the prologue, we find this tension between the world of darkness and light. Darkness is reality apart from God. It is life without hope. It is despair, emptiness. Its fruits are all manner of demons: instant gratification, moral anarchy, escape from reality. Darkness is always there. But there is a light that shines in the darkness. Jesus is that Light. "I am the Light of the world" (8:12). And the gospel truth is that the darkness cannot overcome this light. WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Like Mark, John says that the story of the good news of Jesus Christ really begins before Jesus arrives on the scene. As the prophet Isaiah had foretold, God would first send a messenger to get things ready. The one shouting in the wilderness to clear the way was John the Baptist. The Baptist's message was one of repentance, of turning around and getting oriented in the right direction to see what is coming. As John put it, he came to point to "the light." And John did his job so well that when Jesus showed up, even John recognized who he was.

Advent is, in a sense, the season shouting in the wilderness to prepare the way for Christmas. It's the beginning of the story: the stage is set, the main characters and themes make their first appearance, and the events which are to unfold are introduced. Advent—that beginning before the beginning—has a role like the Baptist's: we're told to turn in the right direction, to pay attention, and to get ready for what's about to happen.

And like John the Baptist, Advent does its job when it points beyond itself to the One who is yet to come. Because as both Mark and John tell it, the gospel story isn't over until the One who came to us at Christmas comes to be with us once more.

When you stop to think of it, this is also the role of the church: its mission is to point beyond itself to the One who is its Lord from beginning to end. Its task is to tell the gospel story in such a way that it awakens faith in the God whose promises have been fulfilled and encourages hope in the future that God will bring to pass.

And if the church is to fulfil its mission, it needs to live the gospel as well as speak it. As

Isaiah prophesied, the coming Messiah would "bring good news to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, announce release to the captives, and to all proclaim the time of God's salvation." As embodied in the life and ministry of the child whose birth we await this season, the gospel is fully communicated only through words and actions together. One way of saying it is that as Christ's disciples we are called to live the gospel and proclaim it through deeds of compassion and service. Another is to say that, along with joy and hope, love is a big part of the gospel story and its telling.

Perhaps this time between the beginning and the end of the story is a bit like those weeks of Advent rehearsals I remember as a child. Our calling is to keep on practicing our part until we get the words and actions right—practice hope and joy and love—so that all that we say and do points to Christ our Lord. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

Do first world Christians have an identity crisis? The biblical witness (Jn 1:7,8) clearly proclaims a God of justice (Isa 61:8) and mercy (Lk 1:50,54). The people of God are recognized by their integrity and praise (Isa 61:11), by an authentic and consistent way of life and worship which witness to justice and mercy. John, Isaiah, Mary, and Paul had no identity crisis (cf. Jn 1:19-23), because their lives and worship were clearly rooted in a God of justice and mercy. Many third world Christians are closer to those witnesses than most first world Christians. Those third world Christians are "voices that cry in the wilderness" to us. DP

Fourth Sunday in Advent December 23, 1990

Psalm 89:1-4,14-18
2 Samuel 7:(1-7) 8-11,16
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

FIRST READING

No scene has so captured the imagination of Christian art through the centuries as the Annunciation. In our home hangs one of Fra Angelica's masterpieces, glowing with subdued blues and gold, radiant with the glory of God. Luke's own matchless portrait brings us to the brink of Christmas Day. Something momentous is about to happen; you can see and feel it in the air. The divine visitation, the Incarnation, has begun.

Luke firmly anchors this moment in human history. Galilee and Nazareth; Mary engaged to Joseph of Davidic descent (2 Sam 7); Elizabeth six months pregnant. But the heart of it all is the interaction between divine initiative and human response.

The divine initiative declares the birth of a son. Name him "Jesus." In this Jesus all the hopes and promises to God's people are met: the throne of his father David, the house of Jacob, a Kingdom without end. And when Mary puzzles over her role the answer comes, "the Holy Spirit will overshadow you." Divine miracles abound, even for once-barren Elizabeth. "With God nothing is impossible" (Lk 1:37). What confidence!

Then there is human response. Luke concentrates on Mary. It is striking how both the beginning and end of the Jesus story features the role of women in the divine plan. Marian piety through the ages has rightly recognized this, despite its excesses. Mary is a virgin, a woman of wholeness. Twice she is addressed as "favored one," that is, "graced one" (*charis*, 1:28,30), graced to be the human agent of the Son's birth. Above all, Mary is the first believer and the symbol of all true believers. Her final words represent one of the great statements of faith in

Scripture: "Behold, the servant (*doule*) of the Lord, let it happen according to your word" (literal, 1:38).

This is the prayer of the believing community for all time. We are recipients of the divine favor in Jesus, a sheer miracle of divine grace. As servants redeemed in Christ, now live according to that word. WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

John is often called the major character of the Advent season. But there is at least one other person who is also central to the story. Her name is Mary.

An angel came to Mary with a message beyond belief. And Mary said, "Amen, let it be with me as you have said."

The Christmas story could not have begun and none of the good news ever taken place if Mary had not said yes to it. As Luther recognized, the real miracle wasn't the angel or the way the birth was going to happen, but the fact that Mary said, "Amen, let it be so."

Now, "Amen" is what you're supposed to say when an angel brings you a message from God, but it's not as easy as it sounds. As Luke tells it, even Mary had some doubts about it all. And of course she couldn't yet know all that her answer would mean, like the part that comes later about a sword which will pierce her heart.

But then, that's what living by faith is all about: saying "so be it," even when you don't know the whole story. Faith, like hope and love and joy, is crucial to the Christmas story and to our own stories as Christ's followers.

And as in Mary's case, so it is in our own lives: sometimes saying yes to what is still a mystery, sometimes trusting despite all evidence to the contrary, is what makes the rest of the story possible in the first place. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

Establishing the reign of God does not happen with the building of houses for God (2 Sam 7:1ff). God is glorified (Rom 16:25,27) when the Spirit gives us "the strength to *live* according to the Good News" (Rom 16:25). And the Advent biblical witness makes it abundantly clear that the Spirit's "Good News" is built around the substance of justice and mercy for all, especially for the poor and the marginalized (Isa 61:1-3).

That is the exciting "new" thing (cf. Mk 1:27) that Mary and others understood so clearly (cf. Lk 1:4b-55). But it is also exciting good news that God chooses us, just as God chose David and Mary (Ps 89:3, Lk 1:28), to "broadcast" (Rom 16:26) with our lives that the reign of God is in the process of giving birth to the "righteousness, justice, love and faithfulness" of God (Ps 89:14). In "the obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26) we have become part of all of the possibilities of a new age conceived by the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35). Let it happen, God! "Let what you have said be done to *us*" (Lk 1:38)! DP

A MEDITATION ON THE CANDLES

Finally all of the candles on the Advent wreath are lit. Each one serves as a reminder of some part of the Christmas story.

The first candle is sometimes called the "Prophet candle." The prophets were people who told of God's promises. Although they didn't always speak about a distant future, one of them, Isaiah, was a bit of a dreamer. He had a vision of a kingdom where peace would prevail and justice would reign forever. The dream he dreamed was God's dream, too.

The second candle is often linked to the small town of Bethlehem. The name "Bethlehem" means "house of bread," and although it was known as the City of David, its real claim to fame was that it was here that the "Bread of Life" was born.

The third candle might be called the "Shepherd candle." Shepherds are people who hang around sheep a lot. Being a shepherd isn't glamorous, and shepherds aren't known to be sophis-

ticated. Still, it was to shepherds that the angels first announced Christ's birth. Maybe they were the only ones who would have believed the story of a king being born in a barn. But they did believe it. Maybe hanging around sheep isn't such bad work after all.

The last candle on the wreath is sometimes called the "Angel candle." Angels, as God's special messengers, play an important role in the Christmas story. People don't seem to hear much from angels anymore. But since God is still sending us messages all the time, it probably has more to do with the people not listening than with the angels not speaking. RGR

Christmas Eve
December 24, 1990

Now we come to the heart of the story. The lights go down in the sanctuary as we wait for the start of the program. Candles and Christmas tree lights glow in the darkness and, for a moment, all is quiet.

The narrator begins: "At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census...." Mary and Joseph make their way down the center aisle as we hear of their journey to Bethlehem. The girl playing Mary has glasses, and Joseph wears a robe with a tartan plaid. As though looking for a place to stop—probably just a familiar face—they look from pew to pew. But there is no more room there than in the inn that first Christmas eve. And so they make their way to a place just beneath the altar where a bit of hay is spread and some two-legged cows and donkeys stand silent. Almost as Luke reports it, we see no struggle of the birth itself. The baby simply appears in the wooden box. Like his mother, he has blond hair; and Joseph, more like a real father than he knows, stands awkward and uncertain.

From the rear, the shepherds enter. A little girl appears in white with a garland of aluminum around her head and wings of cheesecloth. She is an angel. And though she couldn't scare a soul, she tells the shepherds not to be afraid. One shepherd in particular looks to me to be in need of some words of comfort.

And then the angel speaks the gospel: "I bring you good news which will bring great joy to all people. Tonight in Bethlehem a Savior is born." The shepherds seem to believe her, for they immediately set off for the front of the sanctuary. But suddenly an adult hand shoots out from the front pew and, in a stage whisper audible in the balcony, hisses, "Wait till the angels finish!" Then more angels in white, and more or less in unison, enter shouting: "Glory to God in the highest and peace to all God's people."

And now I tense for the dreaded line I had to learn as a child. But I've forgotten this is the age of the *Living Bible* and *Reader's Digest* condensed version. All the shepherd says is, "Let's go." Three boys in Burger King crowns dressed in what looks like the old curtains from the church library enter from the choir pews. After they drop their gifts, they push in around Mary and Joseph. And together—angels, cows, shepherds, donkeys, wise men, and Mary and Joseph—they sing: "Away in a manger...."

The story, at least on this one night, tells itself. Perhaps as preachers we can do no more than try to get out of the way. Perhaps the birth of the Word made flesh is a night for few words. Certainly there can be no explaining the story or reducing its mystery. Instead, at least on this one night, we can trust the glow of the candles and colored lights, the smell of evergreen and hay, the laughter and songs of children, to carry the story. Through sight and sound and smell and touch—with just a few words—perhaps even adults may perceive the great wonder and deep mystery of Emmanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh. RGR

The Nativity of Our Lord December 25, 1990

Psalm 96
Isaiah 9:2-7
Titus 2:11-14 (3:4-7)
Luke 2:1-20

FIRST READING

"For to us a child is born" (Isa 9:6). Isaiah's oracle foresees a coming messianic king, whose rule will bring lasting peace and prosperity. The birth of Jesus marks the advent of this promised "Prince of Peace."

The Lukan birth narrative sets the birth of Jesus within the wider context of world history. Luke is the first church historian, whose two volumes trace the rise of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome. He finds it important to name those in charge: Caesar Augustus, Emperor of Rome ("all the world," 2:1); Quirinius, legate of Syria; census. But his interest is more theological than historical. The tension underlying the story is that between two ways to rule the world.

By Caesar's edict, Joseph and Mary go up to Bethlehem. Joseph's lineage with the house of David is duly noted (2:4). Otherwise Mary occupies center stage as she gives birth to her "first-born" son (2:23). Much has been made of "no room in the inn" (what would a Christmas play be without it?). Rightly understood, it does convey a major theme in both the birth narrative and the entire Gospel. This is the divine friendship on behalf of the marginalized and forgotten. Mary's *Magnificat* already praised the God who "puts down the mighty and exalts the lowly" (1:52-53). Jesus' birth in divine simplicity echoes this, too, and coheres with his later ministry among outcasts and sinners. Recall Paul, "for our sake he became poor" (2 Cor 8:9).

The announcement to the shepherds likewise illustrates this tension. The shepherds have been romanticized endlessly. In fact, they are named on every ancient list of "least favored" occupations. Yet the Christmas gospel is announced first to these nobodies; "born today... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (2:11). These titles sum up the Christian claims about Jesus.

Who is the ruler of this world? Who is the "Prince of Peace"? Caesar with his legions? Or Jesus with his Good Word? Mary's first-born is our Savior, through whom God and humankind are reconciled in peace! WP

PROPHETIC VOICE

Celebrating the Incarnation means being fully engaged in processes which break down oppression (Isa 9:3) and bring justice and truth to the world (Ps 96:13). Authentic Christmas worship means involvement in concrete strategies and actions through which we "give up everything that does not lead to God... all our worldly ambitions (Titus 2:12) and live with "no ambition except to do good" (Titus 2:14). "Glory to God and Peace on Earth" is a liturgy of hope for the poor and marginalized of the world. DP

First Sunday after Christmas December 30, 1990

Psalm 111
Isaiah 45:22-25
Colossians 3:12-17
Luke 2:25-40

FIRST READING

The presentation of Jesus continues the cycle of Lukan infancy stories which conclude with the 12-year-old Jesus among the teachers in the Temple. In part Luke wants to show Jesus' growth toward maturity, "in favor with God and humans" (2:40,52). More profoundly, he seeks to demonstrate Jesus as the one in whom all the promises of God reach fruition.

Obedience to the Law brings the holy family to the Temple (2:22-24,39). In this context, we are introduced to Simeon and Anna, saints of Israel. They belong to the *anawim*, the pious poor, who await the promised salvation time. Note how Luke keeps both genders in view, here and elsewhere (Elizabeth/Zechariah, Mary/Joseph, man with his lost sheep, woman with her lost coin, Priscilla/Aquila).

Simeon is presented as a model of authentic piety—righteous and devout, above all looking for the "consolation of Israel" (2:25). This latter refers to Israel's future liberation, the expected Messianic Age (cf. Anna, 2:38). Simeon also is said to possess the Holy Spirit, a bold statement given its pre-Pentecostal setting. But Luke is not timid about the faithful in Israel. Their hope is being fulfilled in this child.

Accordingly, Simeon utters two inspired oracles. The *Nunc Dimittis* has found its way into Christian liturgy. It is a profound expression of gratitude that in Jesus God has kept his promises. These promises belong both to Israel and to the Gentiles (2:32). To Mary, however, is revealed the deep division this child will cause in Israel, and the cross she too will bear.

Similarly, there is Anna, a prophetess (cf 1 Cor 11:5, Acts 21:8-9), whose family history i noted (2:36). Aged saint of 84 years, married 7 60+ widowed, daily worshiper in fasting an prayer. "At that hour" she appears and the departs thanking God with all those who look fo the "redemption of Israel" (2:38). The eschato logical hope of the world has now appeared.

Luke has shown that the coming of Jesus ha its roots deep in the covenant history of God wit Israel. In Jesus that covenant stands renewed, s that both faithful Israel and the Gentiles are heir of the promised consolation. WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"The child grew and became strong; he wa full of wisdom, and God's blessings were upo him." That's how Luke continues the story of th baby born in a stable. But in the midst of this tal of light there have been shadows present all alon the way. What is said about the child growin strong with God's blessings stands in sharp con trast to the children "who are no more," thos "holy innocents" killed by Herod. From the ver start, the new thing that God is seeking to brin about is resisted by those whose power is fuele by fear.

Even the words of blessing that old Simeo speaks are tinged with darkness: "This child is sign from God which many will speak against." And then his words to Mary: "And sorrow, lik a sharp sword, will break your heart." What ar the depths to be plumbed in a meditation upo these words? This mother's love for her chil must carry with it the knowledge that in living ou his destiny her own heart will be broken.

But then, what was true for Mary is true fo all mothers, for all parents. The awesome joy o the birth is succeeded by the more practical task of nurture and care. Attention is given to emo tional and spiritual needs as well as physica ones, that the child may know the blessings o love and acceptance. Parents cajole and caress pester and prod, worry and wrestle, all in orde that the child may become wise enough to discer right from wrong and strong enough to act ac cordingly.

Yet, for all that the parents do, they cannot protect their children from every danger. They cannot prevent the pains and sorrows that are an inevitable part of life in a broken world. Nor can they predict the future.

Child-rearing is a lot like the answer that the maiden Mary first gave to the angel's message: it's something that can only be done by faith. And, of course, with the help of God's grace. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

Mary's pondering (Lk 2:19) suggests struggle in company with the oppressed. "Salvation" (Lk 2:30) and "deliverance" (2:38) mean fundamental changes in all the social, economic, and political arrangements among peoples. We have received new wisdom (Ps 111:10; Lk 2:40; Col 3:16) to build new relations around "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience," with all of it held together and perfected in "love" and in "the peace of Christ" (Col 1:12-15). Christmas calls us to work for communities of fresh wisdom in the strength of God (Is 45:24-25). DP

The Epiphany of our Lord January 6, 1991

Psalm 72
Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-12
Matthew 2:1-12

FIRST READING

All three lessons sound the Epiphany theme of God's graciousness reaching out to embrace the world. Isaiah 60 declares that one day God's rule will extend from Jerusalem over all the earth. Ephesians marvels at the mystery now revealed in Christ of how Gentiles are fellow heirs of grace. Now the old "walls of hostility" have come tumbling down (Eph 2:14).

The story of the wise men dramatically symbolizes this truth. Gentile outsiders seek the "King of the Jews." The unity of the human race in Christ begins.

This cycle of Matthean infancy stories is notoriously difficult historically. Thankfully, their theological meaning seems transparent.

The coming of the magi initiates a struggle between the powerful monarch and the powerless child. Herod the Great (37–4 B.C.E.) is the villain. His fears of a rival king end in the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem (2:16-18). He schemes to use both the religious leaders and the magi to preserve his power. Yet divine protection via dreams thwarts his plot against God's messiah/king (2:12,13,19,22).

The magi are the heroes. Astrologers from Persia, they literally live by the stars. A star leads them to Jerusalem and Bethlehem; their goal is a child, the true "King of the Jews." Before him, they kneel and worship and offer gifts worthy of royalty (Isa 60:6). In that worship, we catch a foretaste of the new humanity in Christ, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal 3:28).

Finally, one might observe the role of Scripture in this story: The star (Num 24:17) and the Messianic prophecy which leads to the child (Micah 5:2). Matthew delights in claiming repeatedly that all happens as "it is written." That means God is at work among us, especially in this child. Take note. WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Matthew's version of the Christmas story is the only one that includes the part about some visitors from the east who followed a star to Jesus' birthplace in Bethlehem. He doesn't say how many there were or just where they came from, but from what he does say, you can tell that they are foreigners and that they studied the stars. In other words, they probably weren't Jewish.

It might seem odd that Matthew should be the one to tell about foreigners following stars. Matthew's version is usually considered to be the most "Jewish" of all the Gospels, written for a largely Jewish-Christian community. This community was not always known for its acceptance

of foreigners and Gentiles, let alone foreigners and Gentiles following stars. But what this characterization of Matthew's Gospel means, in part, is that Matthew takes seriously the "particularity" of Jesus and his continuity with the Jewish tradition: the fact that Jesus was a Jew, for example; that his ancestry goes all the way back through David to Abraham; and that, like Moses, Jesus was a law-giver and interpreter of the Torah.

Maybe it's because such a concern with the particularity of a people and a tradition can sometimes lead to exclusivity—as it did for some of the Jewish religious leaders in Jesus' day—that Matthew includes this part of the story about foreigners following stars. It's really in keeping with the whole movement and scope of the gospel as Matthew presents it. For in telling of God's special promises to a particular people and of Jesus "the king of the Jews," Matthew takes the story all the way from Abraham to the extension of God's covenant with Israel, through Christ, to all creation.

The movement of the gospel of Jesus Christ is from the particular to the universal: in Christ, the love of God is made manifest to and for all people. Even Gentile astrologers. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

The Epiphany of the good news of the Christ is an assault on all narrow religious exclusiveness. And it is an offense to Herod and all those who would dominate and control the social, economic, political realities of the world. The appearance of the Christ breaks through the hard boundaries of class and culture, race and sex, embracing high and low in a new community of light. DP

The Baptism of Our Lord First Sunday after the Epiphany January 13, 1991

Psalm 45:7-9
Isaiah 42:1-7
Acts 10:34-38
Mark 1:4-11

FIRST READING

The Old Testament lesson announces the raising up of a Spirit-anointed servant to carry out God's healing rule (Isa 42, first of the "servant songs"). Early Christians recognized Jesus as its fulfillment. Peter's sermon to the Gentile Cornelius opens with this striking statement, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power..." (Acts 10:38).

The baptism is the moment of Jesus' divine empowerment. Despite minor differences, an authentic call experience lies behind the Gospel descriptions.

Mark's version is the simplest. There is no explanation about why, or any hint of others present (Mt 3), no prayer setting or bodily form of the dove (Lk 3:21-22), no pre-knowledge of who Jesus is (Jn 1). Everything concentrates on Jesus' personal theophany and commission.

"In those days" provides a clue that something momentous, something cosmic, is about to happen. The voice of prophecy, long silent, has returned with a vengeance. When Jesus appears, all heaven breaks loose. As John foresaw, one "mightier than I" has come.

Accordingly, Jesus' baptism is followed by the opening of the heavens, now ripe for divine action. It happens. First, the Spirit descends like a dove. The dove image is uncertain, but not the Spirit. From now on, Jesus possesses the Spirit to preach, to teach, to heal, to exorcise. The Spirit-led Jesus inaugurates the kingdom. Second, the divine voice designates Jesus as "my beloved Son." Both the messianic son of Psalm 2:7 and

the servant of Isaiah 42:1 are evoked. The evangelist here captures the vocational identity of Jesus: God's beloved Son/Servant. Jesus is now equipped for his kingdom ministry.

And you and I? We are heirs of the Spirit-empowered servant ministry of this Jesus. From our baptism on we too are called to "do good and to heal all the oppressed." WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Justice is a word that stands out in the lessons for today. Isaiah tells of God's servant who will bring lasting justice to all peoples and nations. Peter speaks of God's justice wherein all are treated equally by God, and everyone who believes will receive the forgiveness of sins through the power of Christ's name. These two concerns, what might be termed "justice" and "justification," are incarnate in the servant of whom Isaiah speaks, the one whose name is the Christ.

In his baptism, Jesus is equipped by God for his ministry. Anointed with the Holy Spirit, Jesus is given what Isaiah calls "the power to see that justice is done on the earth." Isaiah also says that through this servant God will make a covenant with all peoples.

In his sermon, Peter says that Jesus "went everywhere, doing good, and healing all who were under the power of the devil." As sermons go, it's a short one; but it says what needs to be said.

"Jesus went everywhere, doing good...." What Peter means, I think, is that Jesus went wherever the people were. Another way to put it is that Jesus went to "everyone." That is to say, Jesus went to all sorts of people, even those considered outside the scope of God's salvation. Human divisions, whether those of nationality, race, and sex, or the religiously-sanctioned separations of clean versus unclean, sinner versus saint, were consistently bridged by Jesus. Samaritan, leper, woman, child, Roman, Jew, and Gentile all received equally from Jesus' "doing good." It was one way he did "God's justice."

Peter also says that Jesus "healed all those who were under the power of the devil." In Isaiah's words, the work of God's servant would be "to open the eyes of the blind and free those who sit in dark prisons." What this suggests is that Jesus' ministry was one of liberation. And though this liberation took different forms, all of them can also be gathered under Isaiah's phrase of bringing God's justice.

In Jesus' ministry there is an essential connection, then, between God's justice and the overcoming of divisions separating people, between healing and liberation. But if we agree with all this too readily we should remember that Jesus' ministry of going out to everyone with a healing that brings liberation is one that continues even today—even in the church.

The truth is that we who understand ourselves to be justified in Christ do not always live in light of God's justice. The "justified" are sometimes the ones most in need of God's justice; for it has the power to heal and liberate not only those who have known oppression, but also those who do the oppressing. To be forgiven and justified through the power of Jesus' name means to be healed and liberated to do God's justice. Justice and justification come together in the person of Jesus Christ and in the witness of those who follow him. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

To be "anointed with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:38) as an authentic child of God (Mk 1:11), and to see others on those terms because "God does not have favorites" (Acts 10:34), is what makes "true justice" possible because it brings a spiritual dimension of equality into all relationships. To be immersed in the Spirit leads to "doing good" and bringing healing where "the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38) seems to have taken over. DP

Second Sunday after the Epiphany January 20, 1991

Psalm 67
1 Samuel 3:1-10
1 Corinthians 6:12-20
John 1:43-51

FIRST READING

There are some interesting parallels between the call of Samuel and the Johannine version of the call of the first disciples. Samuel is called to be a prophet and responds, "Speak Lord, for thy servant hears" (1 Sam 3:10). Likewise Jesus is called to be the messianic son/servant at his baptism and takes up his prophetic mission. In today's Gospel, Johannine-like, the Father has called the Son, and now the Son calls his followers. And they respond.

Readers need to be aware of John's symbolic use of language with its two levels of meaning, literal and spiritual. Also, the evangelist is "telescoping" events that historically took much longer. Particularly is this true of the Christological titles placed on the disciples' lips. When this opening chapter is complete, all the church's titles for Jesus are confessed. In reality, these titles are the end-product of Jesus' total ministry, from baptism to Peter's confession to Easter.

In the previous section (1:35-42), John witnesses to Jesus as "the Lamb of God," and two disciples immediately follow Jesus. "We have found the Messiah" (1:41). Now two more disciples find Jesus as they *come, see, follow*. First, Philip. A simple "Follow me" (cf. Mk 1:17) and Philip *finds* Nathaniel and confesses, "We have found him of whom Moses... prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, son of Joseph" (1:45). Nathaniel is tougher, an Israelite without guile. To his question, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" he is told, "*Come and see.*" And when he comes, Jesus' supernatural knowledge persuades him to confess, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the King of Israel" (1:49). Jesus promises a faith "greater" than that based on signs.

And what is that? Verse 51 says it is faith based on who Jesus really is, the incarnate revelation of God. Jesus is the place, the person of divine revelation.

To "come and see" is the call to faith in this Jesus. The mystery of who he is is discovered in the "coming" and "seeing" and "following." WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In the verses preceding our Gospel reading for today, some of John the Baptist's disciples begin to tag along with Jesus. When he sees them hanging around, Jesus asks them, "What are you looking for?" But they're caught off guard, and all they say in response is, "Where do you live?" From their startled reply you get the feeling that they don't really know just what it is they're looking for. Or who it is they're looking for.

Perhaps that's often how it is with us, too. We have a vague feeling of something missing in our lives, a premonition of the possibility of something more, the hazy memory of a dream we once dreamed. But somehow, we aren't really certain what it is that's missing.

In his letters to the early Christian communities, Paul talks about how those who have faith in God revealed in the story of Jesus Christ are now supposed to live. He emphasizes that we are to use our whole selves to serve God. And if you boil down all the particulars of his ethical concerns and admonitions, what he says, in effect, is that we don't belong to ourselves but to God.

If knowing that we belong to God is what the life of faith is all about, then sin, as faith's opposite, can be understood as a kind of lostness. What this suggests is that when we have that restless feeling that something is lost or missing, we, ourselves, are what's missing. Unless we know to whom we belong, we're what's lost.

"Our hearts are restless until they rest in God," was how Augustine described the kind of longing that, until it is named, is liable to remain no more than a vague feeling and set us looking in the wrong places. But as C. S. Lewis once put it, our search for God is like the mouse's search for

the cat. If it's true that we belong to God, then it means that God is searching, too. In other words, we will not find that which will calm our restless spirit until we are found by God.

But if our searching is often uncertain and misdirected, perhaps it is a necessary prelude to being found. Karl Barth once described saints as "disturbed sinners." Whether he meant disturbed about their sins or just plain disturbed, I'm not sure. But either way, until we have some sense of dis-ease with our lives as they are, we aren't likely to really hear the gospel of acceptance, forgiveness, and new life. Until we sense that we are lost, we may not be open to the God who has been searching for us all along. But because in Christ we do belong to God, the promise of the gospel is that God in Christ will keep on searching until we are found. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

In all corners of the earth where authentic godliness and authentic humanity are being denied, people are yearning "to see heaven laid open" (Jn 1:51). The Spirit calls each of us by name and is waiting for our response: "Speak... your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:10). When the church awakens in obedience, then the nations will "shout and sing for joy" (Ps 67:4). DP

Third Sunday after the Epiphany January 27, 1991

Psalm 62:6-14
Jonah 3:1-5,10
1 Corinthians 7:29-31
Mark 1:14-20

FIRST READING

The prophet Jonah brought a vigorous challenge to the narrow nationalism of postexilic Judaism. In chapter 3, the prophet finally accepts Yahweh's call to preach repentance to the wicked Ninevites. Jesus alludes to Jonah as a type of his preaching of repentance (Q=Luke 11:29-30; Matthew 12:39-41 differs).

The epistle argues for a spirit of detachment from the structures of human life, since "the form of this world" is passing away. Live "as though" (*hos me*) another reality exists (i.e., God's coming rule).

Both themes are found in the Markan pericope. Vs. 14-15 summarize concisely Jesus' whole ministry in the Gospel. Each phrase is packed with meaning. Though Markan, it captures the essence of Jesus' teaching: "The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe!" That is, the time is up: God's rule has begun and will soon be consummated.

The call to repentance involves much more than to be sorry for individual sins. Beyond moralisms, it demands a reorientation (Hebrew, *shubh*) of one's whole life before God in view of the coming Kingdom. God's rule is near! This is the gospel (cf. 1:1). And the inauguration of God's rule is the work of this Jesus about whom Mark writes, including his way to the cross (Mk 8:27–10:52) and his passion and resurrection (11:1–16:8).

The call of the disciples illustrates what it means to repent and believe in the gospel. Above all, it involves attachment to the person of Jesus. This means readiness to go with him on his way, a way that will lead to the cross. "'Follow me!'

And immediately... they did."

Likewise the spirit of detachment Paul advocates becomes true to life as the disciples leave their earthly avocations to follow Jesus. For some, Jesus' call is literal; for others, discipleship is "getting free" from the world to put one's life in Kingdom service. WP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In the way that he tells Jesus' story, Mark's primary emphasis is on the things Jesus does rather than on his message or teachings. According to Mark, Jesus began his ministry by preaching. But all Mark records of what Jesus said is: "The right time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!" Because he says so little, it's as if Mark is suggesting that it's the rest of the story—the things that Jesus does—that will tell us just what this "good news" is.

That's how the part about the calling of the disciples—Simon, Andrew, James, and John—reads, too. Right after Jesus has preached his succinct message, he calls out to Simon and Andrew, "Follow me and I'll make you fishers of men." Jesus' first word is "follow." Before anything else Jesus sets his disciples in motion and gives them a task. What is implied is that it will only be by following Jesus and carrying out their task that they will come to understand the meaning of the "good news" of which Jesus spoke.

Whether or not he intended it, by putting the stress on action, Mark exhibits one of the characteristics of good story telling. Because Jesus doesn't reveal everything in words, it is what he does that holds our attention and leads us on to find out what will happen next. And because he's known by what he does, it's only by following the story that we will find out who this Jesus is. Mark doesn't always have the smoothest transitions, and he might be accused of overuse of the phrase "at once," but he does know how to keep things moving and how to get us to follow along.

Although Jesus makes no claims for himself, through his healings, his casting out of devils, his signs and miracles, and his teaching, Jesus not only speaks about the good news of God but enacts it. What Jesus does reveals who he is. As the narrative progresses and we come to the point of Jesus' death and resurrection, we come to see that Jesus himself is this good news whose time has come.

Like those first disciples, we too are called, first and foremost, to follow Jesus. We too are given a task: in words and deeds to bear witness to the one we follow. And it is only in following Christ that we will come to understand the real and deepest meaning of the good news. For just as Mark tells it, "the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" is a story meant to hold not only our interest but our very lives until the very end. And because, in the end, the good news is Jesus Christ himself—the One who makes known the God of all creations—following is a lifelong calling where there is always more to learn. RGR

PROPHETIC VOICE

If we are willing to listen and to learn, then we might hear the voice of God saying in a variety of ways and in unexpected places (Jn 1:46): "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent (be ready to change) and believe the Good News" (Mk 1:15). It is a time for leaving attachments to individual and personal securities behind. "Our time is growing short... the world as we know it is passing away" (1 Cor 7:29,31). DP

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Membership to Discipleship

Jerry L. Schmalenberger
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In an address given by Bishop Herbert Chilstrom to the Academy of Evangelists gathered at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary on July 16, 1990, he expressed some relief that the membership of the ELCA in 1989 "remained almost stable." He told us how we had received 240,000 new members in 1989 but had lost 250,000. He explained that part of the reason for this was that we are a graying church and there are many deaths in our ranks.

Our bishop was trying his best to put a good face on the fact that many of our congregations are in a state of passivity or have reached a plateau in their membership growth.

Here in the West, we especially witness little gatherings of Scandinavian and German Lutherans who have relocated from the Midwest and are still trying to maintain their congregation by telling "Olie and Lena" jokes and recruiting any new Midwestern Lutherans who come into the community (maybe).

In addition to our struggle to be an inclusive and growing church in obedience to our Lord's command, we also suffer from a congregational stewardship which wants to see the result of our giving and keep most of the financial contributions at home.

In response to the above dilemmas, we have evangelism partners in our new ELCA, a *Mission90* emphasis which will eventually work on enabling Lutherans to tell about their faith to others, some proponents of entertainment evangelism, and those who would like to go the Schuller route of church growth. We have deployed staff of our new church throughout the regions and synods teaching good stewardship and evangelism practices.

Here at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary we have established a Center for Lutheran Church Growth and Mission which was funded by Lutheran Brotherhood Foundation. As we do research into what will get our congregations out of their passivity and non-growth and move them into a "mission outpost" mentality, we have discovered some interesting possibilities.

One of the things that will help our congregations and new church is to concentrate on moving our membership to discipleship. We are discovering that in many of our congregations there is a minimal pastor's class in preparing the new member to

join. It often is about the same as required of new members in Kiwanis or Rotary service clubs. We need to learn how to take this new Christian or transferred member beyond simply a loyalty to the local congregation, even beyond commitment to this good cause called the Lutheran Church, and even beyond changing their lifestyle, to responding faithfully to the call of Christ to be a disciple in the work of the Kingdom.

This will mean that we will want to spend at least as much money and effort working with the new Christians after they join the congregation as we do in getting them there. It means that we will become spiritual directors and teach the stewardship concept of being caretakers of all of God's creation. We will share all that God has given us not so much because the institution needs it, but because that's the way a disciple responds in a life of service and sharing with others.

Discipling will mean that we will follow the lead of our Pentecostal brothers and sisters and do good gift identification helping the new person to use however God has blessed them, in a ministry of the laity every day of the week where they work, play, and live. We will want to teach witness skills and a stewardship lifestyle and set the example ourselves as congregational leaders.

If we can do effective discipling, we may cut dramatically the number of people who leave our church for lack of interest or who have been disappointed by the preacher or congregational members. In addition, we will be faithful to our call to be disciples of Christ and, as recorded in the last paragraph of Matthew's Gospel: "Therefore, go and make disciples...."

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