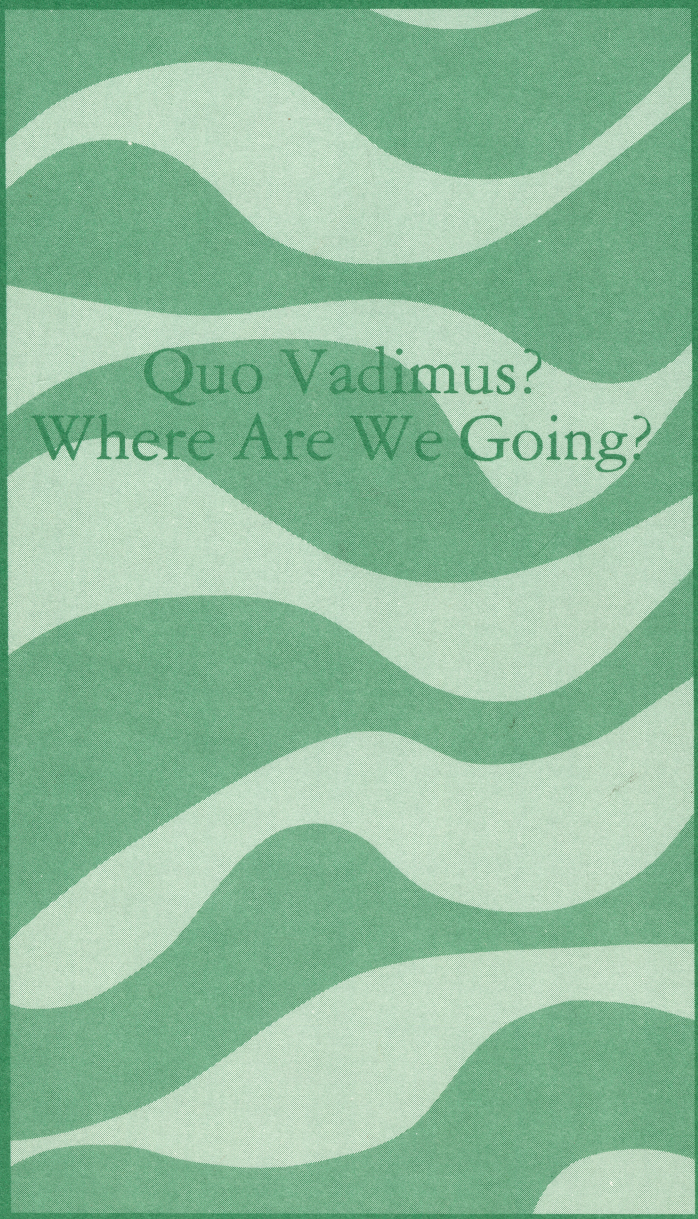
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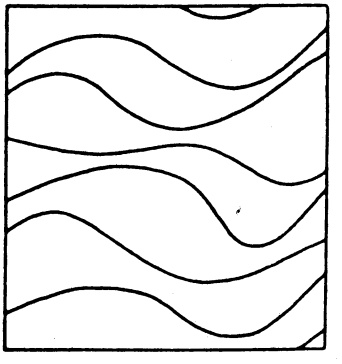
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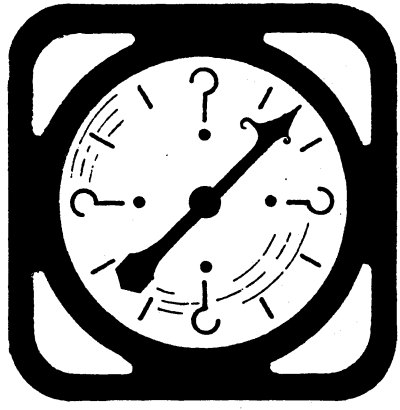
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Quo Vadimus? Where Are We Going?



The flight attendant gave me the usual canned greeting as we landed at O'Hare: "Have a pleasant evening in Chicago or wherever your final destination may be." She was probably thinking of Peoria, Sheboygan, or Gary. No offense, but none of these cities—nor even Chicago—is my final destination.

So where are we going in this year after 1989, the year when everything changed? No more Berlin wall. No more Ceausescu. No more Noriega. 1990 has already seen the release of Nelson Mandela, the promise of a reunited Germany, and the calls for independence from Lithuania. Will democracy win everywhere, or will the Russians be the old Russians in Eastern Europe, the Americans be the old Americans in Latin America, and the South African minority be the same old South African minority?

At LSTC's 1990 Professional Leadership Conference, **Robert N. Bellah** warned of the dangers of unbridled individualism and of savage capitalism. He held up the church as the most important institution in society to carry a fuller understanding of human life. Without such an institution and without role models and exemplary stories, few people are able to withstand the pressures of consumerism and competition. The role of the church is to reinvigorate Christian education so that we might learn together what our faith calls us to do with respect to our neighbors and the world.

Tamara C. Eskenazi reflects on the experience of exile: to have a home and know that it has been taken over by enemies; to know where home is and also know that you cannot go back. Israel dreamed of a return to God and to the land; it longed for place, related to God and to community. Such place is a protest against the unpromising pursuit of space. The Hebrew Bible ends with 2 Chronicles, with Israel dreaming on the brink of the return. Exile had shattered basic security. Jews knew they could go back, but that they would never be fully at home again.

Winston D. Persaud notes that those who proclaim good news boldly embrace humanity because the Triune God has first lovingly embraced humanity in creation and redemption. Jesus died outside the city walls, thereby opening up access to God for the despised, the sinner, the rejected. The life offered in Jesus Christ says No to the many independent worlds we selfishly try to maintain. Love for the neighbor and for all of humanity has its source in God, not in ourselves.

Deena Borchers advocates that we move expressively, in liturgical dance, as part of our worship life. Dance died out in Christian history because of the dangers of syncretism, because of a dualistic distinction between body and soul, and because of the clericalization of worship. She describes many forms of liturgical dancing, ranging from common presiding at a Eucharist to fine art dance and drama. Since our worship is to incorporate all of ourselves, shall we not dance also for our God?

Duane Mehl expresses his disappointment in a recent novel by Jay McInerney. This contemporary author paints the danger and depravity

of the new pagan age so compellingly that it becomes all the more important for him and his readers that he discover the will and the means to depict a reasonable alternative: life in the presence of God. Mehl longs for the novelist to pay attention to those religious and philosophical concerns that made his earlier works shine like lights in a great darkness.

Robert J. Grosch seeks models to interpret the relationship of pastor and congregation. At first pastors and congregations may relate as new spouses, complete with all the insecurities of young lovers. Perhaps a step-parent/step-children model might be a more helpful one. The stages of interaction in a parish resemble in some ways the stages that participants in psychotherapy groups go through. Parish groups seek to establish boundaries and set limits. Parishes try to delegate everything to the pastor, whereas she or he needs to function as a true facilitator. When pastors leave, they are not divorcing their congregations, but they are going through the same painful separations that occur as families grow and mature and as children move out into independence, for the good and welfare of everyone.

Where are we going? By faith Sarah and Abraham settled as aliens in the land which had been promised them, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, ready to move where God would lead. They were looking forward to a city with firm foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Have a pleasant day in your non-continuing city and wherever your final destination may be.

Faith gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of realities we do not see.

Keep the faith!

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Role of the Church in a Changing Society

Robert N. Bellah
Berkeley, California

1989 was one of the most remarkable years in modern history. It saw the collapse of Communism, which just a few years ago many in the West believed had a real possibility of dominating the world. Communism collapsed because, ironically, it did not bring the liberation envisaged by its prophet Karl Marx, but rather a backward barbarous and oppressive state.

In the Western world and the United States in particular we are faced with some historic ironies of our own that we overlook at our peril. In spite of widespread unease about many aspects of our own society the collapse of Communism, which began so suddenly and unexpectedly last year, has tempted Americans to indulge in triumphalism. What more visible expression of the fact that we have "won" the cold war than the fact that there is a new McDonald's on Pushkin Square in Moscow! But as Fritz Stern has pointed out, it would be the final and unconscious victory of Stalinism "to induce complacency in the United States, to make us think that because they have failed we have succeeded or because they are sick we are healthy. I believe that we deserve to be measured not by the failure of a brutal system in a backward country but by our own standards, by the standards of the American political tradition...."[1]

Important though that lesson is, there is more to learn from what has happened in the last few months. Some of what we have been hearing has an all too familiar ring. This bell tolls for us as well. For instance:

> The worst of it is that we live in a spoiled moral environment. We have become morally ill because we are used to saying one thing and thinking another. We have learned not to believe in anything, not to care about each other, to worry only about ourselves. The concepts of

---

[1]Fritz Stern, "The Common House of Europe," *New York Review of Books* 36:19 (December 7, 1989), 6-8.

> love, friendship, mercy, humility or forgiveness have lost their depths and dimensions, and for many of us they represent only some sort of psychological curiosity or they appear as long-lost wanderers from faraway times, somewhat ludicrous in the era of computers and space ships...
>
> Let us teach both ourselves and others that politics ought to be a reflection of the aspiration to contribute to the happiness of the community and not of the need to deceive or pillage the community. Let us teach both ourselves and others that politics does not have to be the art of the possible, especially if this means the art of speculating, calculating, secret agreements, and pragmatic maneuvering, but that it also can be the art of the impossible, that is the art of making both ourselves and the world better.

The words are those of Vaclav Havel in his 1990 New Year's address as President of Czechoslovakia, but they apply with uncomfortable directness to us as much as to Eastern Europeans. Timothy Garton Asch has commented, as others have, on the extraordinary moral maturity of the new leaders. He quotes Havel as speaking of the worst thing as "the contaminated moral environment":

> All of us have become accustomed to the totalitarian system, accepted it as an unalterable fact and therefore kept it running.... None of us is merely a victim of it, because all of us helped to create it together.

Asch comments:

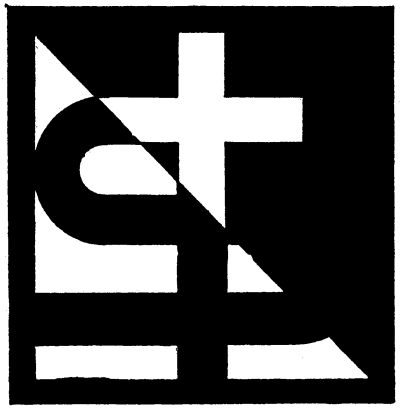
> The crucial "line of conflict," [Havel] wrote earlier, did not run between the people and State, but rather through the middle of each person, "for everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system." A banner I saw above the altar in an East Berlin [probably Lutheran] church vividly expressed the same basic thought. It said, "I am Cain *and* Abel."

That of course is a fundamental Christian insight which the Lutheran tradition has understood better than most, but it is one Americans, with our great proclivity for blaming someone (sometimes even ourselves) as the exclusive cause of the world's troubles, have not learned very well.

I want to bring you one last chilling quote from this essay which Asch wrote less than a month ago: "As a Hungarian friend wryly remarked: 'I have survived forty years of communism, but I'm not sure that I'll survive one year of capitalism.'" So that if we are exhilarated by what is happening as the triumph of capitalism rather than the triumph of democracy we are showing a singular lack of self-critical awareness. Anyway, as Wallace Katz has pointed out in the most recent issue of *Commonweal*, what we are really seeing is not the triumph of capitalism, but the triumph of social democracy, which is quite another thing, though hardly unproblematic either.

I want to concentrate on a danger to the survival of community in America, one we are much less aware of than the danger from the state such as we have seen in Eastern Europe, and so one we need to be especially vigilant about. That is the danger from the market economy. Czeslaw Milosz has spoken of the state, in such societies as Poland, as eating up the substance of society. I want to suggest that the market economy can also "eat up the substance of society." Jürgen Habermas puts the danger in another striking phrase, saying that the administrative state and the market economy can "colonize the lifeworld." Like some 19th century imperialists, they can invade the life-world as though it were a primitive society and subject its moral life to the constraints of power and money.

So I will take the unpopular position that the triumph of capitalism should lead us not to triumphalism but to self-reflec-



tion. Indeed, I will argue that the greatest threat to our genuine human happiness, to real community, and to the creation of a good society comes not only from a state whose power becomes too coercive (we can never underestimate that danger), but from market forces that become too coercive, that invade our private and group lives and tempt us to a shallow competitive individualism that undermines all our connections to other people. Let me say at once that we need a good government and a good economy. It is not a question of abolishing them, but of organizing them in ways that enhance our human possibilities and our capacity to sustain enriching relationships with one another. We know that we need to limit the state. I want to argue that we need to limit market forces as well when they become imperialistic and threaten to dominate our lives. Indeed, I would argue that there is such a thing as market totalitarianism that parallels state totalitarianism and is a real threat to us in America today.

Freedom, for most Americans, is an essential ingredient in a definition of a good society. But, as with all great moral terms, we need to probe more deeply what freedom really means. For many of us, freedom still has the old meaning of the right to be left alone. In an older America—where one could spend most of one's life on one's own homestead—that kind of freedom had a certain plausibility. But in the great society of today freedom cannot mean simply getting away from other people. Freedom must exist within and be guaranteed by institutions, such as the right to participate in the economic and political decisions that affect our lives. Indeed, I believe that the great classic criteria of a good society—peace, prosperity, freedom, justice—all depend today on a new experiment in democratic community, a newly extended and enhanced set of democratic institutions, within which we as citizens can learn to discern better what we really want and what we ought to want if we are to sustain a good life on this planet for ourselves and the generations to come. Such an understanding would show us that our identity as persons is constituted through our participation in a variety of communities and that we are fulfilled as persons only in and through the institutions that link us to others.

In short, we are not self-created atoms manipulating or being manipulated by "objective" institutions. We form institutions and they form us every time we engage in a conversation that matters, and certainly every time we act as parent or child, student or teacher, citizen or official, in each case calling on models and metaphors for the rightness and wrongness of action. What individualism tends to forget is that institutions are not only constraining but also enabling. They are not just neutral mechanisms but the substantial forms of communities through which we understand our own identity and the identity of others as we seek cooperatively to achieve a decent society. Indeed, institutions are the social embodiment of what we called moral

ecology in *Habits of the Heart*. Only by reforming our institutions can we strengthen our moral ecology.

The idea that institutions are objective mechanisms that are essentially separate from the lives of the individuals inhabiting them is not only mistaken; it is an ideology which, to the extent that we believe it, exacts a high moral and political price. The classical individualist view has elevated one virtue—autonomy—as almost the only good, but it has failed to recognize that even its vaunted individual autonomy is dependent on a particular kind of institutional structure and community rather than on an escape from institutions altogether. Furthermore, by imagining a world in which individuals can be autonomous not only from institutions, but from each other, it has forgotten that autonomy, valuable as it is in itself, is only one virtue among others, and that without such virtues as responsibility and care, which can only be exercised through institutions and in communities, autonomy itself becomes (as we argued in *Habits of the Heart*) an empty form without substance. In all these respects, I and my co-authors believe that the church—though certainly not unaffected by the culture of radical individualism—remains the most important institution in our society that carries this fuller understanding of human life, more adequate morally because it understands the transcendent source of grace without which human morality is impossible.

One powerfully influential version of autonomy as our central virtue in our society today comes from the teachings of Milton Friedman and the school of economics he founded, teachings that claim descent from Adam Smith but have lost the moral consciousness that Smith, who spent most of his life as a professor of moral philosophy in Edinburgh, brought to his subject. In the view of Friedman and his successors, human beings are exclusively self-interest maximizers, and the primary measure of self-interest is money. Economics becomes a total science that explains everything. As so-called "rational choice theory," this has invaded all the social sciences—especially sociology. Alan Wolfe in his new book, *Whose Keeper?*, describes the "Chicago school" (I weep for the fact that today the "Chicago school" means the more extreme and influential successors of Milton Friedman rather than the circle around John Dewey, as it did in the early years of this distinguished university), suggesting how in its teachings economics is attempting to become our new moral philosophy or even our new religion:

> When neither religion, tradition, nor literature is capable of serving as a common moral language, it may be that the one moral code all modern people can understand is self-interest. If social scientists are secular priests, Chicago school economists have become missionaries. They have an idea about how the world works. This idea seems to apply in some areas of life. It therefore follows, they believe, that it ought to apply in all....
>
> Chicago school theorists insist that the tools of economic analysis can be used not just to decide whether production should be increased or wages decreased, but in every kind of decision-making situation. Thus we have been told... that marriage is not so much about love as about supply and demand as regulated through markets for spouses... and a man commits suicide "when the total discounted lifetime utility remaining to him reaches zero." From the perspective of the Chicago school, there is no behavior that is *not* interpretable as economic, however altruistic, emotional, disinterested, and compassionate it may seem to others....
>
> How far Chicago theorists are willing to take their arguments... can be illustrated by Elizabeth Landes and

Richard Posner's argument for a free market in babies. At the present time, they suggest, revulsion against the buying and selling of babies, combined with ineffective legal efforts to regulate such activities, has caused a massive number of social problems.... If women were allowed to sell their babies on the market [these problems would decrease].... Problems of racial discrimination would be taken care of by the market, for blacks would buy black babies and whites would buy white ones: "Were baby prices quoted as prices of soybean futures were quoted, a racial ranking of these prices would be evident, with white baby prices higher than nonwhite baby prices."[2]

We know that an increasing number of American families never have a meal together.

We may not be surprised that the French speak of American capitalism as *le capitalisme sauvage*, savage capitalism. "Were baby prices quoted as prices of soybean futures...." These bizarre ideas are not, unfortunately, just theoretical. They influence many aspects of our lives. They have a powerful influence, for example, on government. Ann Swidler, one of my co-authors in *Habits of the Heart*, when doing interviews for our new book, *The Good Society*, talked to an expert at the Environmental Protection Agency about how they figured the trade-offs in the costs of human lives saved versus the costs of the safety devices that would save them. Ann suggested: "Some people believe human life is priceless." The government expert replied, "We have no data on that."

Robert Heilbroner in another recent article suggested how the market is invading our private lives when he spoke of "the implosion of capitalism":

> From this point of view, "economic growth" means the introduction of capitalist social relations into new social terrain.... For example, the enlargement of the proportion of the population engaged in wage labor, dramatically evidenced in the case of women in all capitalist nations, testifies to the implosion of capitalism, just as the imperialist extension of power during the late nineteenth century testified to its explosion. No less important is the "commodification" of life, the extension of commodity production to areas previously outside the ambit of the market. The rise of prepared foods, laundry services, home entertainment, and the pharmaceutical industry are instances of how the accumulation implodes capitalist relations, just as the transformation of peasant agriculture into plantation agriculture is an example of its explosion.[3]

As an example of what Heilbroner is talking about we might cite a recent poll showing that the one thing affluent Americans said they could least do without was—not their BMW nor their vacation in Europe—but their microwave oven. We know that an increasing number of American families never have a meal together. One by one, family members drift into the kitchen and stick something in the microwave. (This is called grazing rather than having a meal.)

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[2]Wolfe, *Whose Keeper?*, 36, 32, 37-8.

Then it's, "So long, I gotta go," as each family member departs for his or her separate pursuits. If, as I believe, the family meal is the family sacrament, and if it is also the place where children learn the terms of civil discourse, what happens to the family when commodification, the colonization of the family by the economy, reaches this extent?

No sphere is immune to these pressures. A student of mine who is a Lutheran minister brought me a story from a suburban newspaper in the Bay Area:

> WALNUT CREEK — The members of St. Luke's Lutheran Church have a money-back guarantee.
>
> They can donate to the church for 90 days, then if they think they made a mistake, or did not receive a blessing, they can have their money back.
>
> The program is called "God's Guarantee" and the Rev. Scott Dunfee is confident it will work.
>
> "We trust God to keep his promises so much that we are offering this money back policy," Dunfee said....
>
> The program is modeled on a similar program at Skyline Wesleyan Church in San Diego.

When my student called this pastor to remonstrate that there was nothing in the Bible compatible with a 90-day money-back guarantee, the pastor's only comment was that the program seemed to be popular.

For those of us in the university these pressures are also very evident. I don't know what explains the extraordinary popular resonance of Allen Bloom's bitter critique of our best universities in *The Closing of the American Mind* (Simon and Schuster, 1987). Much, though certainly not all, that Bloom says about the undergraduate student culture and the soullessness, if not nihilism, of the education those students receive, is accurate. One must question, however, rather sharply the story he tells of where we have come from and how we got here, and thus of where we have to go. The rise of the modern research university as a response to the needs of a growing economy and state, in which the disinterested pursuit of truth has never had a particularly easy time, remains veiled in his account.

The church in America has an indispensable role to play in the renewal of community.

The real source of the soullessness of American higher education Bloom alludes to only glancingly, if amusingly. He refers to the emergence of the MBA program as a major influence on undergraduate education as "a great disaster" (p. 372). "Liberal education," he writes, "puts everything at risk and requires students who are able to risk everything. Otherwise it can only touch what is uncommitted in the essentially committed. The effect of the MBA is to corral a horde of students who want to get into business school and put the blinders on them, to legislate an illiberal, officially approved undergraduate program for them at the outset.... Getting into those elite professional schools is an obsessive concern that tethers the mind" (p. 373). He points out that whereas pre-med students learn to have a respect for biology and physics, pre-business students not only tend to ignore sociology, anthropology, and political science while they concentrate on their economics major; even there it is not the discipline itself that is of interest:

> [The pre-business student] is not motivated by love of the science of economics but by love of what it is concerned with—money. Economists' concern with wealth, an undeniably real and solid thing, gives them a certain impressive intellectual solidity not provided by, say, culture. One can be sure that they are not talking about nothing. But wealth, as opposed to the science of wealth, is not the noblest of motivations, and there is nothing else quite like this perfect coincidence between science and cupidity elsewhere in the university. The only parallel would be if there were a science of sexology, with earnest and truly scholarly professors, which would ensure its students lavish sexual satisfactions (p. 374).

Unfortunately for Bloom's idyllic picture of the university of old, the notion of education as a means for the acquisition of wealth, the wedding of science and cupidity, was present from the beginning of the research university and did not by any means have to wait for the emergence of the pre-business major in recent years, however clearly that emergence illustrates the long-term trend. Even more unfortunately, the trend that Bloom would connect only with the influence of the MBA program is much more general. The research university has grown in tandem with the business corporation, yet for all the interpenetration there has always been a difference in structure and a difference in aims. Now that difference itself is under attack. The prospectus of Stanford University's new Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research states:

> Advances in economic theory and empirical analysis methods, developments in organizational behavior, and refinements of managerial technique have reached the point where we can hope to understand the complexities of non-profit institutions—including colleges and universities—to a degree approaching that for business firms.

William Massy, Stanford's vice president for finance and a member of the School of Business, is the chief instigator of this new institute and holds a professorship in the School of Education as well. Massy said in a recent interview: "Ever since I joined the central administration in the early 70s, I have become really fascinated with higher education as an industry where institutions with many interconnections interact in a kind of marketplace."

Massy's new institute has placed high on its list of research questions "an examination of the productivity and cost effectiveness at universities. Are universities delivering the product that the public expects?" Central to this concern is the question of, in Massy's words, "the effectiveness of teaching and learning. What is a good set of measures for each of those?" Much of the public, Massy recognizes, sees university education as primarily "job preparation," and he feels the university is obliged to meet that concern. For him the university is just one more element in the market system:

> It's hard to deny that when students come for a particular service, someone will supply it. Tastes have changed: people used to be interested in the classics; now they are interested in making money. In the end, we have fundamental and deep social changes—and they are what they are. I do believe in the market. If there is a demand, we have an obligation to meet it.
>
> We need to provide an interesting menu at the university—a menu of where we think the world is going—but we can't dictate what people are going to want. If they don't like the menu, we have an obligation to change it.[3]

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[3]All these Stanford quotes are from *Stanford School of Education*, a supplement to the *Stanford Observer*, January 1989, p. 2.

Community turns out to be a stronger basis for an effective economy than the individualistic pursuit of self-interest.

In Professor Massy's view the education industry should be responsive to market demand. If people used to be interested in the classics but now are interested in making money, so be it. Not only does Massy implicitly reject Allen Bloom's conception of liberal education, he rejects any notion of the university as a community of discourse which might prepare citizens for participation in our common world. In this market model, students are seen as consumers with fixed preferences to which teachers are passively to respond. In this conception of the university there is no room for the idea that teachers might have anything to say that would surprise the students, perhaps challenge them to think more deeply about themselves and the world. Instead, education is merely a market for the skills and methods to get ahead in the world.

Clearly, this economic ideology which turns human beings into relentless market maximizers is destructive to everything we can call community, to family, to church, to neighborhood, to school, and ultimately to the world. In *Habits of the Heart* we documented what this kind of thinking does to our capacity to sustain relationships in every sphere, private as well as public. But the final irony is that this apparently economic conception of human life turns out to be profoundly destructive to our economy! If community would make us poorer I would still advocate it. But the embarrassing fact is that community turns out to be a much stronger basis for an effective economy than the individualistic pursuit of self-interest. We have only to look at the Japanese case to see that.

Let me give you an illustration of what I mean, one that applies particularly to our high-tech industries. The old neo-classical categories of capital and labor no longer apply. The productivity of a high-tech company resides in the quality of its workforce, in the competence and responsibility of individuals, but also, critically, in the trust and confidence they have in each other so that they can nurture and support creativity and innovation. What is required today is not "hands," labor in the old sense of routine manual performance. What is required is brains, but not just brains, persons—persons who trust each other and genuinely enjoy working together. A company that has this sense of community will outperform many times over another with the same amount of financing and the same physical equipment, but where the workers are not responsible and where no one trusts anyone or is willing to take any risks.

But what is happening to our companies under the logic of interest-maximization? We have over the last ten years seen an advance of what is called the commodification of the corporation. Any effective company will be looked at hungrily by those who would make an immediate profit by buying it, stripping it of its assets, firing managers and employees, and reorganizing for immediate gain. What the commodification of the corporation does is to destroy the corporation as a community. People become suspicious and get ready to bail out,

looking out for number one, trying to make the next quarterly statement look good at whatever cost so that they can get another job. By stripmining our most valuable economic asset—namely, the creative interaction of people who have grown to understand and trust each other—we sink our long-term economic viability.

The principle that cripples our economy weakens every aspect of our lives together. I know that you in Chicago are worried about the high cost of housing and the problem of clogged transportation arteries. But if every affluent person is simply intent on buying the best possible house for his or her family with no concern for the provision of low- and middle- income housing in the community, then the cost of housing will soon go out of sight and even the affluent will become indentured servants of their mortgages. If we all think only of our own convenience in driving our individual cars to work, then we all spend ever more time on the freeway breathing the polluted air our cars are creating, rather than working on better public transportation that would serve the good of all.

In short, our individualistic heritage has taught us that there is no such thing as the common good except as the sum of individual goods. But in the complex interdependent world in which we live, the sum of our individual goods produces a common bad that eventually erodes our individual satisfactions as well.

I could go on giving you examples of market imperialism—but surely you can come up with examples from your own lives. If I am right about the danger, then we need to use all the resources we have to confine the economy to its own proper sphere and keep it from devouring the whole of our lives.

Many Americans are beginning to see the danger. There are encouraging signs that the tide may be turning. Here are some of them: voluntarism and charitable giving are up; social work schools, after a long dearth of applications, are suddenly being flooded by applicants; there is even a *New York Times* story about successful young professionals who, having found the fast track meaningless, have decided to become high school teachers in order to find work that is more intrinsically meaningful.

It is easy to see these reactions against the domination of our lives by the market economy as purely individual decisions based on personal reasons. We know, however, that without institutional support, without role models and exemplary stories, few people are able to withstand the pressures of consumerism and competition all alone. It is here that all the institutions that embody moral standards are important, and the church in my opinion is chief among them.

In a period when the pressures of economic competition are increasing to an unprecedented degree, we need, in each institutional sphere, to think about those things that are literally priceless, which cannot be calculated in terms of any bottom line. Those of us in higher education are subject to these pressures as much as anyone. There is, then, no more gratifying moment for a teacher than the moment when a student realizes, perhaps for the first time, that his or her education is not just a means to career and success, but is about those things that are good in themselves, about who we are as persons, as a society, as a world. It is in those moments that students understand that they will fulfill themselves only *with* other people, not against them. Albert Borgmann has said that education can enable or disable for life. That is true for all the institutions which nurture our capacity to seek the good in common with other people. If we are to prevent the market

economy and the administrative state from, as Milosz put it, eating up society, then we must strengthen all those life-enabling institutions upon which our life as a community depends.

So what is the solution? It is right before our eyes. It is in the renewal of community, and of those institutions that make community possible and vital. I am not talking about a return to some nostalgic community of the past, where custom was king and nothing could be questioned, but a community in which individual and group diversity is valued as long as it is accompanied by competent and responsible contribution to the common good. Here I believe the church in America has an indispensable role to play in the renewal of community and in the effort to create an institutional structure that will support community. There is a long history of the church as the rallying ground for new moral advances in our society. Today we can learn from what our sister churches in East Germany and elsewhere in Eastern Europe have been doing to provide the space to question the current order and to imagine—in a civil and civic form, but also in a form rooted in a Christian understanding of sin and forgiveness—new alternatives.

Here I return to the point made by Wallace Katz I alluded to earlier. The drift in Europe is toward social democracy and not toward savage capitalism. Most of the European nations are governed by social democrats or have strong social democratic parties waiting in the wings. Even in Britain, which has seen the only European experiment with savage capitalism so far, an election today would produce an overwhelming victory for the Labor Party. A reunited Germany will in all probability produce a Social Democratic government. Even though, after the experience of the last ten years, a return to the American version of social democracy, namely a renewal of the New Deal effort to create a more just and caring society, may seem both unexpected and deeply gratifying, it is an eventuality for which we should prepare with both hope and a degree of prophetic distance.

> Before we can preach to the world we must to some degree exemplify what we believe.

I think it may soon be possible to say that the great war of the twentieth century that began in 1914 finally ended in 1989. That opens up enormous possibilities for us as well as many new dangers. In this new world into which we are moving, with all its demanding complexities, education is the key. Even George Bush has spoken of the need for an "education society" (although he proposes to spend more money on Star Wars and MX Missiles but not on education). But most people think our need to understand is primarily technical: we need to improve our math scores and our computer literacy in order to compete effectively in the world economy.

A few people see that the problem is not just technical competence but *moral* competence, the capacity to understand the obligations of democratic citizenship. I believe that the church has a central role to play in education for citizenship, and that, as in Eastern Europe, the church can bring a different perspective to our common social and political problems that will open up

new possibilities that others may not see. But for Christians, citizenship is rooted in discipleship (here I speak as an Episcopalian, but I would hope to persuade Lutherans as well of the validity of that argument). For us the most fundamental education is a Christian *paideia* through which we come to understand who we are as individual believers who are part of the body of Christ. Here I agree with Stanley Hauerwas and others that the first obligation of the church today, certainly in America, is to find out who we are as Christians, to regain our biblical literacy, to find out what Christian community really means. Before we can preach to the world we must to some degree exemplify what we believe, in the words of the great Anglican collect, "to show forth in our lives what we profess by our faith."

But biblical literacy cannot exist outside of a larger conversation, and Christian community cannot flourish in a vacuum (as I sometimes think Stanley imagines it can). Knowing who we are, what it is to be a holy people and a priestly nation, we must speak to our neighbors with humility and with an open heart, ready to learn as well as to teach, about the kind of world that we must build in the face of the possibilities and dangers that lie ahead. So, obvious as it might sound, I would say that the role of the church today is above all to reinvigorate Christian education, in our understanding of the world, in our participation in the sacraments, in what our faith calls us to do with respect to our neighbors in America and the world. We need not be hesitant and certainly not ashamed. The world today needs us very much if we find the right way to address it. Our faith places us under great demand, but it is also the source of our greatest joy.

Exile and the Dreams of Return[1]

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> There are said to be Moroccan Jews who have kept the keys to their ancestral homes in fifteenth-century Spain and Portugal. When, in the 1950s, the exiles dispersed yet again—to France, Quebec, and Israel—these metal relics from Seville and Granada, Lisbon and Barcelona, became perhaps their most tangible link to their great Sepharadic past. Such keys may not in fact exist; but even so, they intrigue as metaphors.[2]

Twenty-five hundred years ago the Babylonian Empire crushed the revolt by the small kingdom of Judah. The invading Babylonian armies had ravaged the holy Temple in Jerusalem. The city had been burned and left in ruins. Most of the inhabitants of Zion or Jerusalem were either slaughtered or deported to Babylon. One of the survivors wrote these haunting words:

> By the waters of Babylon
> There we sat down and wept,
> when we remembered Zion....
> How shall we sing the Lord's song
> in a foreign land?
> If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
> let my right hand wither!
> Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
> if I do not remember you,
> if I do not set Jerusalem
> above my highest Joy! (Ps 137:1-6)

Exile. It is not simply being homeless. Rather, it is knowing that you do have a home, but that your home has been taken over by enemies.

Exile. It is not being without roots. On the contrary, it is having deep roots which have now been plucked up, and there you are, with roots dangling, writhing in pain, exposed to a cold or jeering world, longing to be restored to native and nurturing soil. Exile is knowing precisely where home is,

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[1]This paper was first delivered at the Fifth Interfaith Conference on Biblical Studies, April 11-12, 1989, at the Warner Pacific College, Portland, Oregon. I thank Professor John Stanley and the Conference's sponsoring organizations for the invitation. I also thank Professor J. W. Whedbee for the many suggestions that helped enhance this paper.

[2]D. G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Harvard University Press, 1984), 1.

precisely where you belong, but knowing that you can't go back, not yet.

The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), from beginning to end, is suffused with the consciousness of the experience of exile. The opening chapters describe how humanity had been expelled from its first home in the garden of Eden. The closing chapter, 2 Chronicles 36, issues a call to the Judean exiles in Babylon to return home, concluding with the anticipation of the end to exile. The many pages between portray a pervasive preoccupation with exile and with the dreams of return. Biblical scholars know that at the core of such pervasive awareness of exile and hope stands an actual event: the unforgettable Babylonian exile of 587/6 B.C.E.

This paper examines the nature of this formative event of exile and the dreams that it helped shape. In particular, it focuses on one of the major shapers of the dreams: Jeremiah.

Historical survey

Jeremiah's life and message are woven into the drama of his day and the history of the plunge into chaos and exile. He is an unwilling witness to Israel's descent into disaster throughout his long and tragic life.[3] The drama (recounted in 2 Kings 23:28–25:28 and in sections of Jeremiah) begins when the righteous Judean king Josiah dies young—in a foolhardy attempt to exert Judean military force in order to forestall the changing power balance in the ancient Near East. His son Jehoiakim continues a disastrous foreign policy by playing the dangerous "game of 'international roulette' between Egypt and Babylon, eventually evoking Babylon's first excursion into Jerusalem in 598 [B.C.E.]."[4]

Upon the sudden death of Jehoiakim, his 18-year-old son Jehoiachin briefly sits on the throne (for a mere three months), only to be exiled to Babylon. Young king Jehoiachin is not deported alone. With him go the elite of the nation, approximately 10,000 people. This first deportation in 597 sets the scene for the inner and outer struggles that erupt in Judah as different persons and groups seek to determine which way history is moving and which path they ought to pursue. The power vacuum accounts for the growing chaos and confusion that follow. Another son of King Josiah, Zedekiah, rules in Judah and continues to waver in his policies, uncertain whether to cast his and his nation's fate with their Babylonian overlords or whether to hope for liberation with the help of Egypt, the other, competing superpower.

Divided loyalties in Judah continued to plague the nation as Judeans sought to determine not only which superpower had history on its side but also which Judean ruler did. Should the community support wholeheartedly Zedekiah (presently in Jerusalem) or his nephew, king Jehoiachin (presently in exile)?

In these trying times, Jeremiah's pained poetry urged quiet submission to Babylon. Whereas other prophets proclaimed that the deportees would soon return, that Babylon would lose in the global power struggle, and that peace for Judah would ensue, Jeremiah announced in no uncertain terms that the exile would last 70 years, and he called for submission to Babylon (Jer 27-29). He warned repeatedly against alliance with Egypt and urged the people to reform and accept the Babylonian yoke as a temporary

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[3]His dates are not altogether certain. His ministry lasted from approximately 627-586 B.C.E.

[4]Walter Brueggemann, *The Land*. Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 1-2.

punishment for their social and religious transgressions. His words went unheeded. Judean alliances with Egypt took place and unleashed the Babylonian might against Judah. One by one, fortified cities fell before the marching Babylonian armies until only Jerusalem remained. The city was placed under siege. Food supplies vanished. Hunger was within and armies without. Terror surrounded terror. Horror followed horror as starving mothers devoured their babies in order to survive yet another day. Jeremiah continued to preach surrender. "Surrender and survive" is his message. "The Babylonians are God's chastening and chastising instrument." The nation's leaders saw Jeremiah as a deserter, a traitor, dangerous to public morale and undermining the war effort. They attempted to silence him by periodically jailing him or throwing him into the pit to die.

In the summer of 587, the walls of Jerusalem were breached, and the Babylonians sacked the city. King Zedekiah was captured as he tried to escape. The Bible reports: "The king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes; and the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. He put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon. The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the house of the people, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. Then Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, carried into exile to Babylon the rest of the people who were left in the city, those who had deserted to him and those who remained" (Jer 39:6-10). Thus we come to phase two of the Babylonian exile.

The nightmare continued. Babylon appointed a Judean governor who reorganized the survivors in Judah and restored a semblance of normalcy to the devastated land. Soon, however, a Judean patriot with royal claims assassinated the new governor in protest against cooperation with the Babylonians and plunged the land of Judah into yet another, deeper stage of chaos and dread. The assassin also killed some Babylonian soldiers. Another Judean faction, supporting the slain governor, captured the assassin and killed him. Fearing Babylonian reprisals, the avenging supporters of the dead governor fled to Egypt, despite Jeremiah's warnings. In a conclusion that befits the cruel irony that marks Jeremiah's life, they also took Jeremiah with them, clearly against his will.

As this historical background to the Babylonian exile shows, exile in the Hebrew Bible is concrete, rooted in the reality of land and nations. Its meanings do not lie simply in a psychological malaise or individual alienation from society that mark some contemporary imagining of exile;[5] they grow out of a communal struggle to adapt, to survive in the face of physical as well as psychological displacement. The biblical account depicts exile as the state of a people who have just lost everything. The Babylonian exile meant to the Judeans—or the Jews—that the ground from under their feet was taken away, both literally and metaphorically.

Unfortunately, the political confusion that culminates in such exile is not unique to the Judah on the eve of destruction. This fate continues to plague exiles throughout history, as they find themselves helplessly trapped—either in the terrible battleground of nations at war or in the power struggle of conspirators and factions within. The Babylonian exile was traumatic not only because of the fate of the people in exile, but

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[5]Contrast, for example, Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

also because of the events that led to the destruction and deportation. As a matter of fact, the Bible is relatively reticent about the actual life of the exiles in Babylon. Instead, it focuses on the meanings and theological responses to the very fact of exile.

The nature of the crisis

The Babylonian exile forced the reexamination of everything that went before. This was a crisis on all fronts: psychological, political, economic, social, theological. Exile meant deportation, destruction, and death. Some died from starvation during the siege, others in battle, others on the 1,000-mile trek to a strange land. The trauma was not only physical, though it was first of all that. It was also psychological and spiritual, since destruction and exile undermined everything the survivors held secure and trustworthy. A stunned people wrestled with the meaning of their experience. Many no doubt simply gave up; they died in despair or blended with the surrounding peoples. Some, however, turned to the prophets for explanation and direction.

First, the destruction of the temple challenged the traditional faith in God, now that the holy place had been demolished. The two possible explanations for such destruction only deepened the crisis: either other gods were mightier than the God of Israel, or Israel's God had willfully abandoned the people. The former position naturally led to assimilation with other nations or to a reaffirmation of old pagan practices (see, e.g., Jer 44:15-18, where refugees claim that things were better when they worshipped the Queen of Heaven); the latter to the unbearable agony that the book of Lamentations reflects.

Second, the death of legitimate members of the royal family challenged the



divine promise of an eternal Davidic throne. What hope could that promise still hold?

Third, there was the promised land, guaranteed to the patriarchs and matriarchs from the earliest time, and now given over to another. "It is hard enough for landed people to believe land will be lost. It is harder to imagine Yahweh will do it."[6]

Fourth, worship and sacrifices—so essential to the maintaining the relations between God and the people, so vital for sustaining identity of the community in relation to each other and to God—were no longer possible.

And finally, the covenant itself has become a curse instead of blessing.[7] As Ralph Klein writes,

> ...almost all of the old symbol systems had been rendered useless. Almost all of the old institutions no longer functioned. What kind of future was possible for a people which traced its unique election to a God who had just lost a war

[6]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 113.

[7]For a fuller discussion, see Ralph W. Klein's excellent book, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation*. Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), especially 1-8.

> to other deities? What kind of a future was possible for a people who had so alienated their God that categorical rejection was his necessary response?[8]

The Babylonian exile meant "the breaking of what had been promised forever, the collapse of what was eternally guaranteed."[9] Everything the Jews held dear had been destroyed. The holy city lay in ruins, smoldering. Their loved ones had been slain. Foreigners and enemies now roamed through what was home. The trauma was collective and individual; the devastation was inner and outer. But as one writer notes,

> Inner and outer dimensions of sacrilege are very hard to separate. The public record usually lists the battles and defeats, the casualties and property damage, while the victims are left to nurse wounds that no one else can see.[10]

Yet, as this writer also observes, "it is often the subjective reality, not the verifiable acts of destruction, that sets the norm and gives rise to new responses."[11]

Jeremiah's response

How does Jeremiah respond to all this?[12] Like other classical prophets, Jeremiah preaches both destruction and salvation. He denounces the people when the nation is smugly indifferent to God and to the sufferings of its poorer members. When disaster comes, however, Jeremiah brings hope. When Judah falls, Jeremiah turns to comfort and to tender promises of healing and restoration.

Both destruction and restoration for Jeremiah center upon the land. Jeremiah had been called "the poet of the land *par excellence*.... None treasured the land more than he and none understood more clearly than he the flow of royal history toward exile."[13]

Jeremiah is aware that exile is not simply a loss of space, but loss of place. Land, in the Hebrew Bible in general and Jeremiah in particular, refers to "*actual earthly turf* where people can be safe and secure, where meaning and well-being are enjoyed without pressure or coercion...."[14] Land also expresses "the wholeness of joy and well-being characterized by social coherence and personal ease in prosperity, security, and freedom."[15]

For Jeremiah, and the Hebrew Bible in general, land is always "fully historical but always bearer of over-pluses of meaning known only to those who lose and yearn for it."[16] Jeremiah understands what the loss of land means; exile is worse than death:

> Weep not for him who is dead
> nor bemoan him;
> but weep bitterly for him who
> goes away,
> for he shall return no more to see
> his native land (Jer 22:10).

To the agonizing question, "Why?" Jeremiah has an answer. The destruction is God's response to the people's faithlessness. God is indeed the actor who brings

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[8]Klein, *Israel in Exile*, 5.
[9]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 108.
[10]Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 35.
[11]Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 35.
[12]In unfolding Jeremiah's response, I rely on the book of Jeremiah in its final form. Some scholars separate material that they believe belongs to Jeremiah himself from later revisions by his followers. I use the book as it stands because it is the book as a whole which articulates and embodies the messages that became influential.
[13]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 107-8.
[14]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 2.
[15]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 2.
[16]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 3.

Exile is not merely a punishment, though it is a punishment. It is also an opportunity—to turn to God.

disaster, but the people themselves are the cause. They left their God in pursuit of other gods; they violated the covenant by cheating, stealing, murdering, committing adultery, oppressing the poor. At first glance Jeremiah's message threatens to intensify despair. Yet a closer examination shows us otherwise. By naming the people themselves as the cause of disaster, Jeremiah does not simply indulge in that debilitating (and common) practice of blaming the victim. Instead he offers a basis for reconstruction.

God is in control, says Jeremiah. God is always in control. But God is responsive to human behavior. The way back is therefore possible. When the people return or turn back to God and remember him, they will be healed and restored. Such restoration, however, takes time. None of this will happen suddenly. Jeremiah recognizes the necessity of process. Meaningful events are not simply miracles. They must develop in time. Genuine transformations of persons do not happen overnight.

To a city under siege, Jeremiah counsels surrender. After the first deportation, when other prophets promise a quick resolution to conflict and an imminent return of those who were taken to Babylon in the first deportation, Jeremiah denounces such diviners and their dreams (Jer 29:8-9). Having shattered other prophets' dreams of imminent return, what hope does Jeremiah hold for those displaced persons who lost everything? Here Jeremiah differs from other prophets in that he advocates the *long view*, the pursuing of a dream that will be fulfilled not in one's own time, not even within the traditional 40 years time, but one which requires 70 years for fulfillment. He urges people to trust in a future that their eyes will never see. In the meantime, they must purify themselves, turn to their God, hold on to their dreams—but learn to live in exile hopefully.

In a famous letter to the exiles (Jer 29), Jeremiah suggests that it is possible—and necessary—to live in an impure land. Although he does not explicitly mention the psalmist's lament with which we began, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps 137), Jeremiah's message is an indirect response: one must indeed learn to sing, to love, to pray, to propagate.

For Jeremiah exile is not merely a punishment, though it is a punishment. It is also an opportunity—to turn to God, to mend one's ways, to start anew. Exiles are not simply abandoned in favor of another people. No, they remain God's chosen.

> For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile" (29:10-14).

Note the sequence: "...you will seek...I will be found...I will restore...I will bring you back."

Because there are reasons for exile, there are also possibilities within exile. Jeremiah assures those in exile that there is meaning to their suffering and that there is a future for them. *They* are, in fact, the future.

The return from exile

The Babylonian exile proved to be relatively short. In 538 B.C.E., about 50 years after the fall of Jerusalem, Cyrus, the king of the Persian Empire, having overthrown the Babylonian Empire, invited the exiles to go home (Ezra 1:1).

Home. So much energy in the Hebrew Bible is expended upon the exilic experience; so very little tells us about the return itself. Psalm 126 is one of the few texts to capture the sense of euphoria at the return. Our other sources are brief, limited to Ezra-Nehemiah and Haggai and Zechariah. They portray a scene that is far from the promise of the prophets. There is no new exodus. The returnees do not arrive with signs and wonders. Slow and plodding is the reality of the return. Freedom and new beginnings lack luster. They do not bring forth new poetry. This is now dominantly an age of prose, an age of daily care and careworn attention to the unglamorous task of reconstruction. Stone by stone, inch by inch, the memories of the past are translated by the returnees into concrete reality. National grandeur gives way to new institutions, new rituals, new values. In particular, this becomes the age of the little people who seek to redefine freedom in new ways. Political independence is a thing of the past. Kings have come and gone. A sanctity that encompasses every one, not only leaders, deflects the limelight from heroes to ordinary folks. And the city as a whole, not just its temple, is holy. Moreover, a book, the Torah, continues to speaks the messages of God for a new age.[17]

The dreams of return

But what about the dreams? The book of Jeremiah contains a relentless record of despair and denunciation. No other prophet captures collective and personal anguish in the face of doom as vividly as Jeremiah does. But Jeremiah also nurtures the dreams of return and provides some of the most poignant expressions for such dreams. Sometimes he nurtures the dreams less by what he says than by what he does. When the city is under siege, Jeremiah buys land, showing the despairing community that he is staking his money on the future in which land will be owned by the people, not simply by the conquering army (Jer 32). His letter to the exiles, as we have seen, promises an end to exile in 70 years. Exile is to be endured; it is to be used to forge a new, good people.

Scattered throughout the book, however, are many unforgettable images of return, some of which come to full expression in Jeremiah 30-31, also known as the Book of Consolation.

What dreams does Jeremiah nurture? What dreams can the survivors cling to? The dreams of return for Jeremiah are first of all a return to God. In Hebrew, as in English, the word "return" has a double meaning: first, to turn, in the sense of a

[17]For a description of these transformations in the post-exilic era, see Tamara C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*. SBLMS 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

change of direction; and second, to come back in the sense of transporting oneself in space, back to an actual location or place. For Jeremiah, the two movements belong together. In the aftermath of a return to God, a renewal and return to the land will take place. Using the imagery of God as one who hears and responds to the tears of a broken-hearted mother, Jeremiah writes:

> Thus says the Lord:
> "A voice is heard in Ramah,
> lamentation and bitter weeping.
> Rachel is weeping for her children;
> she refuses to be comforted for her
> children,
> because they are not.
> Thus says the Lord:
> "Keep your voice from weeping,
> and your eyes from tears;
> for your work shall be rewarded,
> says the Lord,
> and they shall come back from the
> land of the enemy.
> There is hope for your future,
> says the Lord,
> and your children shall come back
> to their own country" (Jer 31:15-17).

The nation is God's beloved child, confessing its guilt (Jer 31:18) to a responsive parent who also longs for reconciliation:

> Is he my darling child?
> For as often as I speak against him,
> I do remember him still.
> Therefore my heart yearns for him
> I will surely have mercy on him,
> says the Lord (Jer 31:20).

The nation is God's daughter about to go back home:

> Again I will build you, and you
> shall be built,
> O virgin Israel!
> Again you shall adorn yourself
> with timbrels,
> and shall go forth in the dance
> of the merrymakers (Jer 31:4).

And above everything and surrounding everything is the promise of love:

> I have loved you with an
> everlasting love;
> therefore I have continued my
> faithfulness to you (Jer 31:3).

Two different images of the future alternate in Jeremiah. On the one hand, Jeremiah claims that the return itself will be like a new exodus—a miraculous event that will astound the nations and will outdo the wonder-filled exodus from Egypt in splendor. Political justice will characterize life in the new land under a worthy king (23:3-8). This new exodus, though amazing, is also more aware of the fragility of the returnees. God will be a tender parent, nurturing the children through hardship and struggle:

> Behold, I will bring them from
> the north country,
> and gather them from the
> farthest parts of the earth,
> among them the blind and the lame,
> the woman with child
> and her who is in travail, together;
> a great company,
> they shall return here.
> With weeping they shall come,
> and with consolations I will
> lead them back,
> I will make them walk by
> brooks of water,
> in a straight path in which they
> shall not stumble... (Jer 31:8-9).

Along with the vision of grandeur, of miraculous intervention by God in a public arena of nations, Jeremiah holds another, humbler vision, touching the lives of individual men and women who seek basic securities in life. These dreams emphasize the return as a time of building a home and hearth, a time for the small joys of family life. The dreams of return speak of "the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride" (Jer 33:10).

Above all, the dreams are the dream of an end to exile—from God and from the land. Political and economic life are important, but the recovery of a place in relation to God and community is the basis for such dreams and an important content of the dreams themselves.

Let us linger a moment on the meaning of place, of home. Jonathan Z. Smith[18] and, following him, Walter Brueggemann, distinguish between space and place. Brueggemann writes:

> "Space" means an arena of freedom, without coercion or accountability, free of pressures and void of authority. Space may be imaged as a week-end, holiday, avocation, and is characterized by a kind of neutrality or emptiness waiting to be filled by our choosing. Such a concern appeals to a desire to get out from under meaningless routine and subjection. But 'place' is a very different matter.[19]

Brueggemann, citing Smith, continues:

> Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued. Place is indeed a protest against the unpromising pursuit of space. It is a declaration that our humanness cannot be found in escape....[20]

Place is also the declaration that our humanness is nurtured by attachment and commitment. "Whereas the pursuit of space may be flight from history, a yearning for place is a decision to enter history...."[21] It is a decision to remember and re-member. For the Jews, re-entering history meant living with God and with each other as a people on the land promised to the ancestors.

This dream shapes the Hebrew Bible in its entirety, from beginning to end. Thus the Hebrew Bible does not conclude with the post-exilic prophet Malachi, as does the Christian Old Testament.[22] Nor does it end with what would be historically logical: the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, which depicts the return itself. Instead, the Hebrew Bible ends by recalling the dream. The final words in the Hebrew Bible invite all the exiles to go home and fulfill their dream: "The Lord... has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah," proclaims Cyrus. "Who is among you of all his people? May the Lord his God be with him and let him go up" (2 Chr 36:23).

The Bible ends on the brink of the return. The dreams themselves, not the actual return, reverberate throughout and sound the final note. Why?

Perhaps the Hebrew Bible stresses *yearnings* for a return over the actual return because biblical writers know that dreams of return are never wholly fulfilled. Exile has so shattered basic security that life can never continue as it was before. We can come back; but never are we truly at home again.

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[18]Jonathan Z. Smith, "Earth and Gods," *JR* 49 (1969): 108-27 and *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[19]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 5.

[20]Smith, "Earth and Gods," cited in Brueggemann, *The Land*, 5-6.

[21]Brueggemann, *The Land*, 6.

[22]For illuminating interpretations of how the canonical shape of Jewish and Christian Scriptures convey distinctive meanings, see Gabriel Josipovici's profound study, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), especially 29-49.

Boldly Embracing Humanity: Toward a Theology of Mission[1]

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One of the recurring and persistent dilemmas which the church faces is that many do not hear the good news of Jesus Christ, despite our good intentions. This is not surprising: after all, we remember that the Christian is always *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and sinner), to use Luther's phrase. One form of miscommunication substitutes law for gospel, or vice versa. Another substitutes ideology for gospel even in an innocent-sounding witness such as, "I would like to share *my* Jesus with you." "My Jesus"—possessed and defined by me—is a far cry from the unique, universal Savior and Lord of all. It is no wonder that many who are addressed by the message of this "exclusive" Jesus feel personally affronted and denigrated. They might say, "If he were truly my Jesus, he would not treat me this way. He would not look down on me, my culture, my religion!"

Jesus Christ is not for Christians only; he is for all. St. Paul writes: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Jesus Christ, about whom we talk and to whom we bear witness, came first and foremost to save all—while you and I, like everyone else, were yet sinners. The Holy Spirit is always at work to convince us that it is not *our* Jesus whom we share with others. It is God's Christ who is shared, and those who proclaim him do so from a profound sense of solidarity with their hearers as fellow sinners in need of God's mercy.

The Triune God is God of all. The Psalmist tells us, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps 24:1). As sovereign Creator and Ruler of all, God works even among people who do not publicly confess Jesus the Christ as Savior and Lord. This is the "foolishness" of God's marvelous love

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[1]This was the theme of the Western Michigan 1988 Annual Assembly. Parts of the two addresses which were given at the Assembly have been included in this essay.

> The proclaimer has no basis for making the gospel less than it is, good news for all people.

for all. God always takes the initiative to reach out in mercy and forgiveness. The proclaimer has no basis for making the gospel less than it is, good news for all people in all their situations in life. In word and deed the proclaimer—both individual and community—boldly embraces humanity because the sovereign Triune God has first lovingly embraced humanity in creation and redemption. We boldly embrace humanity because the Triune God does so, and because we are called to be participants in this loving and saving embrace. It is not God who participates in our mission; rather, it is we who participate in God's mission. In the words of Roy Harrisville's poignant missiological summary: "The mission of the church is not the mission of God. The mission of God is the mission of the church."[2]

When put in the language of justification by grace through faith, the concept of 'boldly embracing humanity' may be considered the appropriate response to the question: justified for what? Humanity is embraced to the glory of God and for the sake of humanity. Any kind of gospel which does not have missional and ethical implications for the individual Christian and the community is not gospel. On the contrary, it is a kind of ideology which makes us irresponsible recipients of God's grace. Justification, *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus,* means that we receive ourselves from God rather than achieve ourselves before God. To live by God's grace means being willing to take risks and to make sacrifices that place us on the line for the sake of the gospel.

Luther's classic formula, "Faith active in love,"[3] is a helpful way to think about the fundamental unity between faith in God and love of the neighbor. To be saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit does not intrinsically connote an ethics of quietism in which we do only "little" acts of charity (important as those may be) but do not concern ourselves with the wider, more complex, and unavoidable issues of justice and freedom. Luther does not separate faith and love as if you can have the former (faith) without the latter (love). But neither can love be the basis for petitioning God to bestow faith in Christ upon us as a reward for our loving the neighbor.

It is crucial to evangelical faithfulness that the Christian community be vigilant against making its language about God promote or legitimate ways of enslaving humanity and destroying the creation. The

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[2]Roy A. Harrisville, "Paul: Justification and Mission," in Wayne Stumme, ed., *Bible and Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 59.

[3]For an investigation into this theme, see George Wolfgang Forell, *Faith Active in Love* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1954). The dialectic of justification and justice, in response to the challenge of liberation theology, for example, has still to be satisfactorily formulated so that neither justification nor justice is compromised on ideological *qua* theological grounds.

critique of religion by Karl Marx, among others, continues to press the church to demonstrate that its God-language does not rob human beings of authenticity and wholeness. God's total embrace of humankind and the whole of creation in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is salutary, liberating, freeing, and loving. Nevertheless, until the promised eschatological consummation occurs, the distortion of God's name and power for evil ends will continue to plague the world.

Christ came into the world, not in order to take us out of the world and thereby make us irrelevant and useless in the world, but rather, God came into the world to save us in this world so that we might live for God in this world. The basis of our hope is God's presence through the cross and resurrection of Jesus. God's presence is nothing other than God's loving embrace of the whole creation, even when divine judgment is rightly meted out. We are justified by God's grace in order to serve the whole creation, including brothers and sisters whom we might not naturally describe as brothers and sisters. But because God loves them and takes their condition seriously, we see them differently and thus pursue their good.

The proclaimer of the gospel (both the community and the individual-in-community) is turned outwards to a vision which sees and acts upon the world in the light of God's loving embrace of the creation. In this vision, we see sister and brother as the oppressed and the oppressor, and we recognize that the categories of oppressed and oppressor are not fixed and static. Through the Holy Spirit we see that we all are engaged in a common task of discerning what justification by grace through faith means in the face of the challenges of the world. In his treatise on "Christian Liberty," Luther soberly reminds us:

> We conclude, therefore, that Christians live not in themselves, but in Christ and their neighbor. Otherwise they are not Christians. They live in Christ through faith, in their neighbor through love. By faith they are caught up beyond themselves with God. By love they descend beneath themselves into their neighbor. Yet they always remain in God and in God's love....[4]

God, who transcends the world, is immanent in it as the decisive history-maker. This immanence does not begin with the Incarnation, but it is characteristic of Yahweh even in the Old Testament. As Terrence Fretheim notes, "The Old Testament witnesses to a God who truly shares in the life of the world. God has chosen not to remain serenely above all that makes for life; God has entered into worldly reality and made it God's own."[5] In God's engagement with the world, sharing in its sufferings, God bestows upon human beings the honor of co-creatorhood. This is a derived honor, reflective of the freedom of God, who is not thereby threatened by this divine-human historical partnership. Humanity's derived co-creatorhood is the occasion for genuine creaturely freedom. The Triune God alone is the source of healing, wholeness, and freedom. Indeed, to ask human beings to save themselves is ultimately enslaving!

The church must renew its efforts at learning from people of diverse, even clashing, ideologies and faiths. Mutual respect and learning must be extended to our under-

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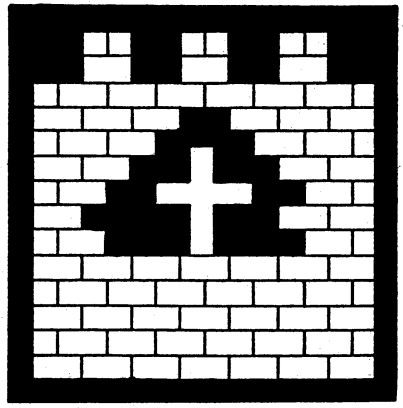
[4]Martin Luther, *Christian Liberty*, trans. W. A. Lambert, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 34. Translation modified to make it inclusive.

[5]Terrence E. Fretheim, "The Understanding of Mission in the Old Testament," in Wayne Stumme, ed., *Bible and Mission*, 22.

standing of God. The proclaimer should expect to learn more about the meaning of the divine-human encounter, including the Incarnation, through dialogue. For the church to learn from other faiths and ideologies is not tantamount to surrendering the gospel, but is a concrete expression of the fundamental Christian confession that in Jesus Christ God has embraced the whole world.

Unfortunately, many Christians are guilty of living as if the final, ultimate reality is that there are many worlds unrelated to the one world which Christ redeemed and re-created through his life, death, and resurrection. Any ethics premised upon the fragmentation of the world into many irreconcilable, irredeemable worlds is radically different from an ethics premised upon a vision of one world created and redeemed by the Triune God. It would be misleading to suggest that human beings do not *experience* the world as fractured. But it is contrary to the gospel to let such empirical worlds lead us to a less than holistic vision of God's loving and redeeming embrace of the whole creation. The eschatological vision of a new heaven and a new earth is not a sham. It is the new reality which is already proleptically present in this broken world. Paul writes of our experience, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:22-23). This vision of the new creation is rooted in the Spirit of God, who "intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26).

The message of God's gracious and healing embrace of all people is good news to those who live at the level of survival, who are challenged to believe beyond all



appearances that God is good and gracious. It is also good news to those who in the midst of material plenty experience meaninglessness and despair. God hears the cry of the hungry, the poor, the destitute, the lonely, the exploited, and the despairing. To embrace humanity is to embrace sinners, outcasts, victim and victimizer, oppressed and oppressor, friend and enemy. In the context of the local congregation, this does not mean forsaking the "old" members for potential new ones. Both are God's people.

Are we irreconcilably separated by geography? by economics? by ideology? by race, gender, class, and skin color? Are our horizons so separate and disparate that they are beyond the pale of the reign of God? Does not the energy and power of the Kingdom of God lift us up to see the world differently, and consequently, live differently? Is our nationalism or patriotism more central to our life as human beings in God's world than our being joined together, all over the world, as brothers and sisters, children of God "who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of human will, but of God?"

The life that God has offered in Jesus Christ says No! to the many worlds in which we live, and which we selfishly maintain in order to separate ourselves from others and keep ourselves in power. The message of the gospel is that we live in one world. Thus, in the Holy Communion, when we partake of the bread and wine given and shed for the forgiveness of sins, we participate in a new vision and in a new life. We are not expected to "bring in the Kingdom," but to live as if the Kingdom has come and will continue to come.

The church must be ever vigilant against the danger of becoming an exclusive club, with privileged access to an exclusive "gospel." The good news is that the church is not a club and that Jesus died outside the city walls, thereby opening up access to God to the despised, the sinner, and the rejected. As Orlando Costas tells us:

> Since Jesus died outside the gate, mission has become the crossing of the walls and gates of our secured and comfortable compounds, the continuous movement toward him to bear "the abuse he endured" for the world. It is only in this continuous movement toward his cross, in our identification with him and his cause, in our participation in his suffering death outside and for outsiders that we can be authentic witnesses of God's saving grace. Only thus can we lift him up and enable women and men to be drawn to him (Jn 12:32).[6]

Jesus is with those who are left out by us.

Would an evaluation of who the people are to whom we devote most of our time and energy tell us how inclusive and radical the gospel is? Would an evaluation of where we cast our gaze, which economic, ethnic, or gender grouping we consider "worthy" of our efforts in mission and evangelism, tell us how we come down on the question of who should dine with Jesus or where Jesus should dine?

Jesus does not mean gospel and the Spirit does not bear witness to a new creation in Christ, if we set ourselves up to decide who does or does not merit God's forgiving love in Jesus Christ. In the words of Martin Luther, at the end as at the beginning, "We are beggars; that is true." In his actions, his words, and in his death and resurrection, Jesus included tax collectors and sinners in the Kingdom of God. Thereby Jesus redefined who God is—one who desires mercy rather than sacrifice. Costas writes:

> Jesus died outside the gate, and in so doing changed the place of salvation and clarified the meaning of mission. No longer can I see God's saving grace as an individual benefit, a privileged possession, or a religious whitewash that enables me to feel good and continue to live the old way because my bad conscience has been soothed and my guilt feelings washed away. On the contrary, because salvation is to be found in the crucified Son of God who died outside the gate of the religious compound, to be saved by faith in him is to experience a radical transformation that makes me a "debtor" to the world (Romans 1:14) and calls me forth to share in his suffering by serving, especially, its lowest representatives: the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed. Nor am I allowed to use the cause of evangelism to build ecclesiastical compounds that insulate Christians from the basic issues of life and impede them to follow through in their calling to take up the cross, deny themselves, and follow Jesus through the crossroads of life.[7]

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[6]Orlando E. Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 192.

[7]Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate*, 194.

We may disagree on how we express our discipleship, individually and corporately, i.e., on mission strategies for the world today. Frequently, we think and act in dualistic terms: *either* social action *or* evangelism, not both together. But the gospel unites social action and evangelism into an integral whole. This inherent unity is expressed well by Carl Braaten:

> We do not want to see the church substitute social works for gospel words, nor the other way around. Evangelization and social responsibility are both integral to the universal mission of the gospel, and we have no right or need to concentrate on one at the expense of the other. The church meets the world with both hands at work, holding out the offer of justifying grace to sinners for Christ's sake, while working tirelessly to do the good works of love for the neighbor's sake. We have received from Christ two things: a Great Commission to tell the gospel and a Great Commandment to love the neighbor. We cannot be obedient to one without the other.[7]

Which part of the human person should be our primary concern? It is clear that any answer which is less than holistic distorts what it is to be truly human and, ultimately, is nothing short of turning the gospel into an oppressive ideology. We boldly embrace the whole person, not the soul apart from the body, or vice versa, for the Triune God does no less. In an address to the ALC Minneapolis Convention, Kent S. Knutson reminded his hearers that there is no other gospel but the gospel for the whole person.

> I've heard it said that evangelism and social action do not go together. I'm genuinely puzzled. If involvement is helping to right the wrongs of society and if that involvement is not motivated by the love of Jesus, then of course it is not the work of a Christian community. If evangelism is motivated by an attitude which refuses to show love to all persons, it is a distorted evangelism and may not be evangelism at all. When they brought a man sick with palsy to Jesus they started a conversation which finally led Jesus to say, "Which is it easier to say—'your sins are forgiven' or 'take up your bed and walk?'"
>
> Evangelism is the communication of the whole gospel. Grace... is spoken to the whole [person]. It is a manifestation of the grace which is in Christ Jesus to show love both to the body and to the soul, for the body and the soul are simply different ways to speak of the same whole person. Eradication of racism is the work of evangelism, the work of the gospel. The eradication of poverty is the work of the love of Jesus, and that is the work of the gospel, of evangelism. Whatever you do in the name of Jesus is a proclamation of the grace manifested in Christ Jesus. The eradication of the devastation of war is the work of evangelism, is the work of the gospel. If you treat every human being in a human way, if you can make a person whole in his spirit, give him hope, train him to become proud of his identity, help him to care for himself and his work, whatever you do to make the gospel alive, you proclaim the grace of God manifested in Christ Jesus.[8]

We are constantly pressured to find substitutes for Jesus or to avoid the consequences of stewardship and discipleship which follow from listening to him. We may be tempted to replace the Christ with our own "Jesus" who is our ideological tool. But there is no substitute for the Jesus who is the Christ. He is uniquely Savior and Lord. He alone gives life abundant! Love of the neighbor and of all of humanity has its source in God, not in ourselves.

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[8]Carl E. Braaten, *The Apostolic Imperative* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 11.

[9]Kent S. Knutson, *Gospel, Church, Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 138.

Dance in Christian Worship

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In the beginning there was dance. Before Israel, there was dance. Before Jesus' birth there was dance. Before the writing of the Scriptures there was dance. Before words there was dance. "Dance" has been described and performed in many different ways from one worshipping community to another throughout history. Here I will examine dance historically, practically, and theologically by addressing some common questions, concerns, and opinions about this most ancient form of worship.

Why should dance be part of Christian worship?

Many people fear the idea of dance within their worship because their visions of "dance" include the awkward stumbling of children's dance classes, memories of dance forced upon them by over-zealous physical education teachers, or even the experience of watching poorly-conceived or poorly-executed dance within the context of worship. The word "dance" is often accompanied by feelings of embarrassment and discomfort. Here I will propose ways in which dance can be utilized within worship which are natural, helpful, and appropriate.

I define dance in a more general way than perhaps many have in the past. Some may be surprised to hear that they are already dancing in worship! When arms are raised in prayer, when we make the sign of the cross to remember our baptisms, or when we kneel to express humility, we are participating in a form of liturgical dance. Any expressive movement of our bodies within worship can be considered, in a general sense, liturgical dance.

In the beginning God *moved* over the waters and *created.* If we accept the definition of dance as expressive movement, we need no further proof of the importance of dance. Expressive movement is an integral part of the human worship experience.

From Shiva, India's deity, who danced the world into being and through dance holds it in sacred order, to the Shakers, who dance to receive the gift of prophecy, dance

Dance appears in some form within most human expressions of spirituality.

appears in some form within most human expressions of spirituality.

To witness the natural human response of dancing, we need only look at our children. Even before a child has mastered speech, he or she will likely whirl and jump in dancing movements. In responding to the wonders of creation which unfold daily in the life of a young child, it is probably not words but movement and music which come most easily and naturally as a response. In the perception of many children, all of nature seems to sing and dance.

Dance was one of the first forms of worship for humankind, and it was also one of the first forms of Christian worship, inherited from the Jews. Dance within worship is part of our Christian heritage. It was practiced earlier than our creeds, most of our hymnody, and even our naming of God as Triune. Yet, while historical precedent goes far toward justification of a practice, I will not use that argument for the continuance of dance. As with any religious practice, we should examine our reasons for maintaining or discarding it regardless of historical precedent. We must judge dance using the criteria we use to judge all practices we call "Christian": does it enrich our worship, carry spiritual meaning for us today, and reflect the Good News of grace and forgiveness we have through Christ?

As a child I looked around at the stony faces of adults in church pews and wondered how they could sing, "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory" with faces and bodies absolutely devoid of expression! When I could understand the message these words were intending to proclaim, I was at first puzzled, then amused, and finally saddened and frustrated. The love and grace we proclaimed were incredible; the God we worshipped, awesome. How could these people have the restraint to keep from dancing, shouting, embracing, or at least smiling?! I could not understand or accept a response limited to reluctant vocal chords.

Why should we embrace dance as a valid, even necessary part of our worship? Because expressive bodily movement is fundamental to our humanity. When we hear the gospel of Jesus the Christ, how can we help but express our joy with all of our being? The question now becomes one of form.

How can we dance appropriately in worship?

Some think that *no* dance is appropriate in worship and consequently use a very narrow definition of dance. Others feel that only congregational movement is legitimate. Some insist that any spontaneous movement by anyone at any time during worship is acceptable and a gift of the spirit, while others insist dance should be done only by those who are properly trained.

By defining dance as I do, it becomes an action done by nearly all worshipping people and includes a wide variety of things. Different forms of dance are appropriate in different settings. Here I will mention a number of specific forms dance can take, all

of which are not acceptable in every congregation or in every worship setting:

1. Common worshipping movements

These movements include special postures of praise or reflection (e.g. kneeling, raised arms, folded hands, bowed heads, and embracing) in the name of Christ. Unlike simple walking, standing, or sitting, these movements are done not merely for the practical reason of moving from point A to point B so the service may continue, but they are done by the individual to express something specific and meaningful about his or her faith. Under this definition, one who presides at a worship service does a considerable amount of dancing.

2. Communal movement

This includes movement shared by an entire congregation which helps to emphasize equality and community among the worshippers. The movements generally resemble simple folk dances if they are structured at all. The movements of charismatic congregations come under this heading, in which case the movements are extemporaneous and unrestrained. This form of "dance" is difficult to classify, as it may be done by many or only a few within a congregation; and whether it promotes unity or equality may be debated. I have little experience with this form and will not comment further on it. Historically, communal movement has been accompanied by singing or chanting. The most common forms are circular and processional.

3. Fine art dance

This is performed by one or more dancers with technical training in dance and a sensitivity to liturgical practice. This involves the community in a less direct manner. These dancers help to set the mood for a community's worship, using their particular gifts to express the community's praise, repentance, gratitude, sorrow, or joy. It is more refined and ordered, using instrumental more often then vocal accompaniment.

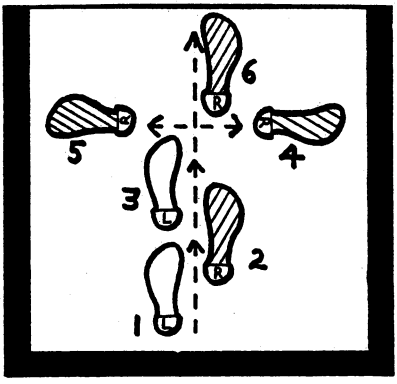
4. Mime and clowning

While these expressions of the Christian message fall under our definition of dance as expressive movement, they should be seen as separate expressions of worship and faith. Confusion results when these things are lumped together with liturgical dance in the forms of communal or fine art dance. While all three are expressive movement, they are are very different and should be studied separately.

5. Drama

This too deserves a classification all its own. While drama involves much expressive bodily movement, it is confusing to speak of it as dance.

In what form, then, should dance be a part of worship? I consider any of these forms appropriate as long as it is done in the proper setting and with willing participants. The choreography must fit the occasion and produce a worship experience that enriches the faith of all involved. Where it is possible, communal movement is a wonderful vehicle for enriching the worship of a congregation. It beautifully illustrates our oneness as the body of Christ. More realistic, however, is the performance of fine art dance. In 20th century America, this form, in most instances, best expresses our cultural identity. Dance is no longer a part of our shared communal identity, woven into our culture as it once was through folklore, recreation, and celebrations of life events and natural cycles. If the dance is properly done, the dancers do in fact dance for the whole congregation. The more experienced with both dance and liturgy the dancers are, the more naturally this bond is formed.



If dance was once part of Christian worship, why did it not continue?

The debate over dance and what forms are appropriate within the context of Christian worship has gone on since the church's first days.

The Old Testament's references to dancing make clear that dance was inseparable from Jewish worship. J. G. Davies tells us: "The religion of ancient Israel was without question a dancing one."[1] Dance for Israel was a sacred expression of faith, one worthy of heaven itself. Daniels writes, "The idea of heavenly beings encircling the throne of God and singing his praise goes back to the Talmud, where dancing is described as being the principle function of the angels."[2]

As Christians considered the "new covenant" in Jesus the Christ, many forms of Jewish worship, including dance, were adopted as a natural part of early Christian worship. "The string of dancing prophets continues with Jesus, as described in the Acts of John. The often violent opposition to dancing by the Church Fathers throughout the centuries has made us forget the significant role of the dance in the life of the early Christians."[3]

The Acts of John (C.E. 120), an apocryphal writing, describes dancing at the Last Supper. The disciples gather around Jesus and perform a circle dance, with Jesus speaking the words, "Whoso danceth not, knoweth not the way of life. Now answer thou to my dancing."[4]

Eusebius tells of the worship of the Therapeuts. It is an all-night festival which includes sacred dancing:

> They all stand up in a body and in the middle of the banqueting-place they first form two choroi, one of men and the other of women, and a leader and conductor is chosen for each, the one whose reputation is greatest for a knowledge of music; they then chant hymns composed in God's honor in many metres and melodies, sometimes singing together, sometimes one chorus beating the measure with the hands for the antiphonal chanting of the other, now dancing to the measure and now inspiring it, at times dancing in procession, and at times set-dances, and then circle-dances right and left.[5]

Throughout the ages many leaders of the church have loved and promoted dance as a form of worship, defending it against many false perceptions. In the second

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[1]J. G. Davies, *Liturgical Dance: An Historical, Theological and Practical Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 96.

[2]Marilyn Daniels, *The Dance in Christianity, A History of Religious Dance through the Ages* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1981), 18.

[3]Walter Sorell, *The Dance through the Ages* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1967), 19.

[4]Sorell, *The Dance through the Ages*, 20-21; Daniels, *The Dance in Christianity*, 14.

[5]Sorell, *The Dance through the Ages*, 20.

century Lucian of Samosata called dance "an act good for the soul, the interpretation of what is hidden in the soul."[6] In a late fourth century sermon on the text of Luke 7:32, Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, gives this defense of dance:

> ...the dance should be conducted as did David when he danced before the ark of the Lord, for everything is right which springs from the fear of God. Let us not be ashamed of show of reverence which will enrich the cult and deepen the adoration of Christ. For this reason the dance must in no wise be regarded as a mark of reverence for vanity and luxury, but as something which uplifts every living body instead of allowing the limbs to rest motionless upon the ground or the slow feet to become numb.... This dance is an ally of faith and an honoring of grace. The Lord bids us dance....[7]

There are numerous references to dance as a beneficial and welcome part of liturgy in the early church, including Gregory of Nazianzus, Bishiop of Constantinople, Basil the Great (344-407), Bishop of Caesarea, Jerome (340-407), Ambrose (who requested that persons about to be baptized approach the font dancing), Hippolytus, and Clement, among others. These people judged dance according to its place in Scripture and tradition and encouraged sacred dance as an acceptable, even necessary form of worship and praise.

The first limiting factor for dance was space, since Christians met (often secretly) in private homes. In days when Christians were persecuted and driven into hiding, dance was limited for practical purposes.

Official prohibitions of dancing began for a variety of reasons. When people were converted to Christianity from other religions, they sometimes wished to bring with them the dances of their former religions. This was troubling to the early church leaders and led to a fear of the dance becoming a pagan intruder into the Christian faith. Not all of these dances borrowed from other religions lent themselves well to the purpose of expressing the Christian faith.

Some early church leaders also tried to prohibit dancing in order to set Christianity apart from Judaism. For this reason many Jewish practices were "spiritualized." Christian practices may also have fallen victim to spiritualization due to Hellenistic ideas about the dualism of flesh and spirit, body and soul, which were so much a part of the culture into which Christianity came.

Under Constantine dance faced another obstacle. While Christianity was made the state religion and grand, ostentatious worship spaces were built, a wedge was driven between clergy and laity. Participation of the laity in worship, especially in the form of dancing and singing, was discouraged.

Dance nevertheless continued. Some of the most well known dances were the "Dance of Death" and the "Mozarabe." When plagues swept through Europe, touching the lives of all (especially the Black Death, 1347-1373), peasants believed that if they could catch the devil (who caused this terrible malady), they could drive him off. In the Dance of Death this was symbolically done.

The Mozarabe was a seventh century dance where a wooden arc of the Testament was carried through the cathedral in procession with eight boys dressed as angels, dancing and singing. In 1439 it was forbidden by Don Jayme de Palafox, the Archbishop of Seville. The dance was so be-

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[6]Ronald Gagne, Thomas Kane, and Robert VerEecke, *Introducing Dance in Christian Worship* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1984), 39.

[7]Daniels, *The Dance in Christianity*, 18-19.

loved that the people of Seville collected money and sent the young dancers to Rome to dance before Pope Eugenius IV, who responded, "I see nothing in this children's dance which is offensive to God. Let them continue to dance before the high altar."[8]

The reactions of church officials to dancing appears to be a very subjective thing throughout the church's history. In 539 the Council of Toledo condemned dancing in church processions in Spain and dancing in churches during vigils on saint's days. In 633 the Council of Toledo forbade the Festival of Fools with its singing and dancing. In 678 the Council of Toledo suggested that the Archbishop Isidore of Seville compose a ritual with much sacred choreography.[9] Many such examples can be found throughout the history of the church.

Where do we go from here?

Dance began as an expression of the faith of common people as inherited from the Jews and was used to express faith through the centuries despite the warnings and prohibitions of the church hierarchy. The rationale for these prohibitions ranged from legitimate concerns about inappropriate practices making their way into Christian worship, to clericalism, to a confusion between sensuality and sensuousness.

Sensuality arises when the body is objectified and is thus stripped of its sacramental meaning. Sensuousness is a natural and good aspect of humanity which needs to be incorporated into our worship. We cannot worship as disembodied spirits. James Nelson writes: "Because the human body is vitally and spontaneously sexual, many Christians in their dualistic alienation have been offended by the radial implication of the incarnation.... The Victorian within still winces at the thought that the incarnation might be 'a tale of the flesh.'"[10]

> We cannot worship as disembodied spirits.

Why is dance not a more widely used expression of worship today? If we hesitate to use dance but not song because we feel one form of worship has more historical precedent, we must look more closely at our history. And if dance is omitted from worship solely out of our fear of causing someone to notice the beauty of the human body and of its movement, we need to confront our own fears and ask whether they are valid reasons for prohibiting someone's worship of God. Deiss writes:

> [Humans are] not only spirit, but also flesh. Our creator has given us bodies endowed with beauty and grace, and expects us to use them—not as a hindrance in our progress toward [God], not as "weapons of iniquity" in the cause of sin, but rather as "weapons of justice for God" (Rom 6:13). It is, therefore, natural that the inner prayer of the soul express itself outwardly through the body.[11]

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[8]Daniels, *The Dance in Christianity*, 22-23.

[9]Gagne, et al., *Introducing Dance*, 82; Daniels, *The Dance in Christianity*, 22.

[10]James B. Nelson, *Embodiment, An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 74.

[11]Lucien Deiss and Gloria Gabriel Weyman, *Dancing for God* (Cincinnati, OH: World Library of Sacred Music, 1965), 3.

Worshipping as whole people should not frighten us. We should, in fact, look for ways in which we can "offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1). Our worship should incorporate all of ourselves: our voices, our minds, our eyes, our ears, our hands, and our feet. Worship cannot be restricted to one day per week and certainly should not be restricted to watching the show in the chancel! Jay Rochelle writes,

> Dance in church still seems offensive to many, not only because of the focus of the human body, but because of the active nature of that body as instrument of worship. Our sense of the passive, even quietistic, uses of the body as receptor may block us from seeing the body active in offering, thanksgiving, and praise.[12]

Our liturgy does not occur in a vacuum, it reflects the whole of our Christian lives. If we will greet one another in the name of friendship, why do we hesitate to greet others in the name of Christ? If we will leap for joy when the Chicago Cubs hit a home run, why will we not leap for joy at the good news of Jesus the Christ? And if we feel the unquenchable impulse to dance, as Gene Kelly declared in "Singing in the Rain," shall we not dance also for our God?

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[12]Jay C. Rochelle, "The Contemplative Ground of Craft," *NICM Journal* (September 1977).

The Ups and Downs of Jay McInerney

Duane Mehl
Charlottesville, Virginia

Though the ways of God and novelists may be past finding out, most novelists give us some clue by their works as to why they are writing about this as opposed to that, and in what style. Thus, if Saul Bellow writes two highly meditative and philosophical novels named *Herzog* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, it is not surprising that he should follow, even though much later, with a similar novel called *The Deans' December*. The works fit together. They have continuity, as we presume the author has a continuity, of interests and concerns.

I hope that the aspiring young novelist, Jay McInerney, does not turn out to be an unfortunate exception. After creating a good metaphysical novel with the ironic title *Bright Lights, Big City*, and, in my opinion, an exceptional metaphysical novel with the even more ironic title, *Ransom*—works that show the influence of such disparate writers as Melville, Kafka, Hemingway, and Flannery O'Connor, not to mention the Bible—he has now given to his suddenly long-suffering readers the moral and artistic disaster he calls *Story of My Life*.

In *Story of My Life* he writes about the same young adult city sub-culture he examines in *Bright Lights, Big City*, but, curiously enough, with much vulgarity and none of the religious and philosophical concerns that make his earlier works shine like lights in a great darkness. In the process he presents us, sad to say, with a collection of empty-headed major female and a few minor male characters, who have no moral or religious impulses, but who pursue through 188 pages of big print nothing more than sex and drug highs. One might expect such a book from Brett Easton Ellis, but not from Jay McInerney. Hopefully, *Story of My Life* will prove to be a passing aberration, a product of financial necessity, and not a portent of things to come.

Moral and theological meanings and lessons are at the core of his first two novels, no matter what the critics have failed to say

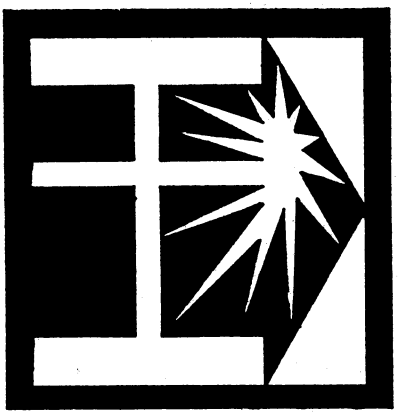
about them. In fact, everyone who has followed reviews of McInerney's works in the stylish book review sections knows that, for some reason or another, critics have ignored the theological symbolism of these stories and typed McInerney as a comic impressionist of city life—New York and Kyoto, Japan—as if he were a Cezanne writing travel books, with laughs.

Worse yet, a reviewer writing for the *New Republic* (so says the book jacket of *Story of My Life*), said—and I quote lest I be disbelieved—"McInerney not only jests at our slightly tawdry life, but also celebrates its abiding possibilities," as if McInerney were writing PR copy for the secular city.

That is exactly what he is *not* doing. Far from jesting at our slightly tawdry life in New York, Kyoto, on television, or anywhere else, McInerney deliberately and balefully (though with a sense of humor) describes that modern way as a variation on Dante's *Inferno*. A Roman Catholic by background and tradition, McInerney says in all three books (only by inference in the third) that the culture he describes is (in Luther's words) "lost and condemned" out of its own mouth, apt for McInerney's and God's judgment.

In fact, McInerney deserved mention in Dan Wakefield's excellent article in the *The New York Times* book review section, February 12, 1989, called, "And Now, a Word from Our Creator," about the emergence of God and religious faith as serious subjects in recent American fiction. Flannery O'Connor and J. F. Powers no longer have that field to themselves in the waning years of the 20th century.

In his first two novels McInerney presents a male, Roman Catholic, protagonist, lapsed, as a hero. Each has a Roman Catholic mother, who dies painfully of cancer—and in the case of *Ransom*, a profligate father. All fathers are profligate in *Story of*



My Life, particularly the father of the heroine, Alison Poole, called in the novel a "post-modern girl." In McInerney's perspective, post-modern fathers don't do well. All the characters (with the exception of Ransom in his repentant phase) in the three novels use, or have used, drugs and are promiscuous. All have, in the words of the unnamed hero (always referred to as "you"—a second person, present tense work) of *Bright Lights, Big City*, "disheveled souls" in need of a "cleanup." All have a life and a society from which they must escape—in order to find another sort of society which, in McInerney's words in *Bright Lights, Big City*, "has God and a History and a Community."

The heroes of his first two books are aware of their own evil and need for grace from someone, for confession, absolution and penance. They both know about moral bankruptcy and reformation of the spirit. Both yearn for order in the disordered young adult city sub-culture of the kind which seems, in so far as television advertising may be believed, to dominate our society.

As an epigram for *Bright Lights, Big City*, McInerney quotes *The Sun Also Rises*:

"'How did you go bankrupt?' Bill asked. 'Two ways,' Mike says, 'gradually and then suddenly.'" The you of *Bright Lights, Big City* goes bankrupt gradually. Christopher Ransom of *Ransom* goes bankrupt suddenly, and tries in a reasonably Christ-like fashion to redeem himself—though without the Christ to whose name and, what theologians call his work, Ransom's name so obviously and ironically bears witness.

Critics have ignored the theological symbolism and typed McInerney as a comic impressionist of city life.

In *Bright Lights, Big City* the hero thinks to himself: "It is after all, Sunday morning, and as long as you have any brain cells left there will be a resonant patriarchal basso echoing down the marble vaults of your churchgoing childhood to remind you that this is the Lord's day." Not unexpectedly, therefore, Sundays loom large in the novel.

In the first night on the town described in the novel, the hero binges on cocaine on a Saturday night and Sunday, only to struggle back on Monday to his job as a copy reader in the Department of Facts Verification of a New York magazine.

Through a series of picaresque misadventures, largely self-wrought, the you of the story loses his Kafkesque (not to mention Bartlebyesque) kind of job, thinking to himself, "I'd rather be in Fiction" (meaning the Fiction Department)—after he has already lost his jet-setting wife.

As a finale, he has another binge, beginning on Friday and ending early on a Sunday morning—a sort of Good Friday to Easter sequence. After a "bum" on the streets in the bright light of Sunday morning says to him, "God bless you and forgive you your sins," the hero breaks bread, no less, garnered from a bakery delivery truck.

"You get down on your knees," McInerney writes in conclusion of the novel, "and tear open the bag. The smell of warm dough envelops you. The first bit sticks in your throat and you almost gag. You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again." Is that plain enough?

Far from celebrating the possibilities of a slightly tawdry life in a secular society, McInerney suggests that the you of the story must make a break with that drug and sex-ridden society and find forgiveness, acceptance, and relief in the reception of something not unlike the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Even more pointedly in *Ransom*: after selling his girl friend (in order to save a mutual friend) to a Pakistani drug dealer for sexual purposes, and in the process inadvertently murdering her, the American Christopher (Christ-bearer) Ransom joins a karate group, or *dojo*, in Japan, and accepts a *sensei*, or master (displacing his California-based TV producer father whom he despises), in order to bring discipline, order, and hopefully some sense of purpose to his life.

He thinks to himself: Better to have a master who requires the murder of one's own child (echoes of Abraham with Isaac) than to have no master at all.

Ultimately, Ransom gives up his life by the sword in combat with a maniacal American Vietnam veteran—a grisly act of penance. If this sounds like deadly serious stuff, it is!—ridiculously far removed from comic celebration of the possibilities of the young adult city sub-culture at home or abroad, about which McInerney writes so brilliantly. McInerney, in my opinion, has not received the intelligent attention he deserves for his creation of *Ransom*.

Even in *Story of My Life*, Alison Poole ultimately (after a dizzying round of parties), and at least, needs and gets "therapy" of a psychiatric variety (one hopes also for treatment of chemical dependency)—though kicking and screaming against it. As McInerney has said personally: "She is given a second chance at life."

All the major characters in McInerney's novels need a second chance and must make a break from the young adult city society as they know it—or die in "anarchic dissolution." That is the message of McInerney's books, even the last one, however murkily the message comes through. Check the epigram to *Story of My Life* to gain a better sense of McInerney's attitude toward the characters of that novel.

McInerney has yet to describe what a new life for his protagonists might entail. That is unfortunate. Because he paints the danger and depravity of the new pagan age so compellingly, it becomes all the more important for him and his readers that he discover the will and the means to characterize a different way of life in his works.

His failure is not yet to be held against him, however. No less a writer than Flannery O'Connor in her early works found it easier to place her main characters under judgment, threatened by damnation, than under grace, suited for salvation. The guys in the black hats are more easily characterized than the guys in the white hats.

I hope that McInerney has now gotten the *Story of My Life* out of his system and can afford to move forward in his career. Other less gifted authors are inundating the land with similar books, descriptive of current promiscuity and heavy drug use. He needn't bother.

With his skill, religious background, and his considerable popularity, Jay McInerney has the opportunity in future stories to present to a wide readership an alternative to our chic young adult city way of life, so ceaselessly glamorized by avaricious TV producers (similar to Ransom's father), and shamefully celebrated by the nation's advertisers. If McInerney has his way, the night may yet belong to something other than Michelob.

McInerney made a good start in the right direction with his story of Ransom in Japan. But American readers do not react spontaneously and empathetically to the culture of Kyoto or the cult of karate. We need a Ransom type of character, confronting similar moral and spiritual crises, but situated in more mundane circumstances in New York or San Francisco. Given McInerney's sensibilities, I do not believe we have long to wait.

Pastor–Parish Process

Robert J. Grosch
Redding, California

All too often a new seminary graduate's first parish assignment doesn't last as long as most would like, or it ends amid avoidable frustration and tension on the part of everyone.

Our failure as a church in this area of parish life is all the more tragic in that the dynamics of pastor-parish relationships are strikingly similar to other patterns of relationships we experience in the counseling office or in our own families.

While I have only served two parishes in my 16 years of parish ministry, I was struck in each situation by the similar dynamics that were set in motion with my entrance into the parish family. This similarity is the more striking considering that one of these parishes is an all-Black congregation of over 300 members in a midwestern city, and the other a primarily white parish struggling for survival with a membership of less than 100 communicants on the West Coast.

The emotional/bonding process

The process of our coming together as pastor and people is an emotional process not unlike courtship-marriage rituals. Each parish/pastor courtship is a bit unique, but just as in every other case of courtship, finally someone has to "pop the question" and extend the call.

Once the call has been extended and accepted and the "date has been set," the extended family is invited to participate in the formalizing of the bond, much as the extended family comes to witness and celebrate a family wedding.

Immediately after the installation ceremony it is evident that the operative mythology of the people now joined to their new pastor is similar to that of a naive young couple boasting of the "catch" each has made. Things we have heard in church basements over punch and cookies after weddings and installation services are alarmingly similar:

1. "She (we) really was (were) lucky to get him; he was jilted by another and became available at just the right time; it was a stroke of luck, really!"
2. "She will bring our family (parish) financial stability; she'll be a good provider (fund raiser)."
3. "He sure brings a bit of status to this family (congregation)!"
4. "She loves him (us) a lot."
5. "He even gets along with Uncle Harry (them)."
6. "He will make her (the congregation) happy and content, I'm sure!"
7. "I would have loved to see the look

on my ex son-in-law's (previous pastor's) face when he heard who was being married (installed) here today!"

By these comments it is evident that the emotional relationship between pastor and congregation is often that of a new husband and wife, complete with the insecurities, jealousies, and unresolved extended family issues evident in most families.

Previous "marriage" partners can sometimes plague this new relationship of pastor and people just as they would an actual marriage. The unrealistic hopes for one another are strikingly similar to love-struck newlyweds.

In-laws, in the form of neighboring congregations, church officials, and denominational executives, often become a part of the marriage as well, even when nobody thought their presence was particularly important in the first place. "After all," the groom often says, "I married *her* not her family." Pastors who say such silly things about the extended family of their congregations are no better off than the similarly naive bride or bridegroom.

That such emotionally-laden dynamics exist in pastor-parish matches will likely be evident to those who have been there. What is more, little can be done to eliminate it. We should also be aware that church families often become the battle ground for unfinished family issues from the memberships' families of origin.

Proper management of the emotional baggage in the parish is possible when the model of bride and bridegroom is changed to that of step-parent and step-children.

Pastors do not come into congregations "till death us do part," as do a bride and groom. Nor do they come together "just to see how it works out; if it doesn't work, we'll just split," thereby reflecting a severely casual attitude prevalent among many modern nuptial participants.

Rather, while there is a definite *serious* commitment between a well-considered match of pastor and parish, it is not a life-long bond. It is also not entirely a commitment of equals as is that of husband and wife. In the parish the status of the participants is different, and the functions are different.

Pastors should enter the congregation with a message that might not be spoken in so many words, yet, if it were, might sound like this: "I was not your original parent. You have another (or other) parent(s). However, I now have the status of the parent in this family. Some of you may like that immediately; some will take a "wait and see" attitude; some dislike me already because I am not your personal choice. Nevertheless, I will parent you the best way I know how.

"Some of you will seek special favors from the parent of this parish family. I will try my best to avoid that divisive practice. I will work hard for you, but I will also expect you to pull your own share of the load in taking care of the family's business. I will stay in this family as long as it benefits the family as a whole. When I am no longer of benefit to the family or when I can be more useful elsewhere I will move on to another family. Let us not manipulate each other by knowing these truths about me. Now let us be about the family business!"

There is little likelihood the shape of the emotional bond between pastor and parish will change during our lifetimes. Since we are tied together like a family, let pastor and people at least be tied in an emotionally healthy way, similar to a healthy nuclear or extended family.

Healthy families have certain consistent characteristics. Differences in the following four areas make healthy families and healthy parishes more functional than less healthy ones:

Family structure

In a healthy family the structure is such that the power distribution is overt. Leaders are not hidden. No one "pulls the strings" from behind the scenes. The coalition of leaders in a family (mom and dad in a nuclear family; pastor and elected leadership in a parish) is strong; leaders are respectful of each other even when they differ; they seek the welfare of the family above their own personal preferences. The structure of a healthy family encourages personal closeness while respecting personal privacy and recognizes the rights and responsibilities of the parents (or parish leaders).

Family mythology

Every family has its mythology, that set of propositions which the family believes about itself, which shape its self image, and which it will defend as true even in the face of evidence to the contrary. A healthy family's mythology is congruent with reality. The mythology of an unhealthy family is not.

An example of a healthy mythology on the part of an inner-city congregation that has seen better days would be: "We are a congregation that has entered a period of its history where we find it difficult to relate to our neighbors. We are seeking a new identity to better carry out God's mission in our changed situation."

An unhealthy family mythology for this same congregation would be: "We are the mother church for the area. We have one of the most beautiful buildings in our denomination. Belonging to such a prestigious congregation as this is something to be proud of. We used to be the largest congregation in our synod, but we have slipped a little in that regard. However, our new pastor will surely restore us to the fullness of glories past!"

Family boundaries

Healthy families have flexible boundaries that can include new members with ease and without prejudice. The boundaries around a healthy family are also permeable. A permeable boundary allows influences from outside to come into the family for consideration; not all knowledge, money, or influence need to come from within the family. In an unhealthy family system the boundaries are not flexible or permeable.

Family affect

In a healthy family there is freedom of expression concerning one's feelings. The mood is generally warm and affectionate, and even unhappiness and dissatisfaction are tolerated, listened to, and received with empathy. If there is conflict, it is resolved without undue strain on the solidity of the family relationships. In general, the mood is optimistic and hopeful in a healthy family, whether of the parish variety or that of the nuclear family.

The interaction process

Knowing what the emotional climate is like within a given parish is only half the battle. The other side of the task in merging a new pastor and congregation into an effective ministry team involves understanding the process of settling in with each other and developing roles and expectations that will enhance ministry.

The adjustment process of pastoral interaction with a congregation can effectively be viewed as similar to that of a group psychotherapist and his/her therapy group. Newly formed psychotherapy groups follow predictable stages of development, similar to that between a new pastor and a congregation.

The following stages of interaction in the parish are similar to those first identified

in psychotherapy groups by Irvin Yalom.[1] We take responsibility for altering Yalom's stages to apply to the local parish.

Stage 1: Group Boundary Stage

During this phase, the main issue is the boundaries of the group. Questions faced include these: What would it take for me, the group member, to be kicked out of the group? If I was in this group before, what actions on the part of the new therapist or pastor would cause me to leave? Will the old rules concerning membership in the group be enforced as strongly as in the past? More so? Less so?

Also faced are the issues of what activities are not appropriate to this group, hence are outside its boundaries. The status of "delinquent" members is also clarified. Does the family boundary still include them?

Finally, this phase is characterized by dependency upon the leader, and for a brief period it is as if there has been no group history before the arrival of this leader. Those members of the group unwilling to accept the new leader are often "shunned," and hence put outside the group boundaries. The group in this stage of development is seeking to establish or reestablish its boundaries, its rules of cohesion, its limits.

Within the parish this phase is expressed specifically in the following scenarios:

1. Existing ecumenical involvements will be questioned. Will the boundaries of the congregation continue to include such endeavors? The same questions will be raised concerning any unusual or especially controversial social programs of the congregation.

2. Friends of former members who have left the congregation over disagreements of various sorts will ask the pastor for a sign as to whether or not their friends can return. Will the congregational boundary stretch to include these folks?



3. Great dependency on the new pastor is expressed in the sudden ineptitude of those who ran things during the interim or even before. Suddenly church secretaries need advice as to where to order office supplies, what kind of church bulletins to order, etc. Altar guilds and acolytes want to know which candles to light first on the altar.

Stage 2: Conflict Stage

As in all human relations, dependency breeds resentment. This resentment is given expression in the second stage of group development.

In this stage we find the group focusing on issues of interpersonal dominance. Power is the commodity being argued about; sides and weapons are chosen and the battle begun. In the parish, this takes place about the third year of a pastorate—not coincidentally the year in which a great many new seminary graduates accept a call away from their first assigned parish.

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[1]Irvin Yalom, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1975).

In this stage old alliances are revived, and if the group has taken a new direction, a "new guard" and "old guard" grouping of the membership takes place.

In both the parish and the therapy group some of the membership will try to incorporate the leader as their "special friend." Invitations to dinner increase for the pastor at this stage, as a more intense attempt is made to get him/her onto "our" side.

Since power issues are not dealt with nearly as well in the church as they are in a psychotherapy group, often the issue of power becomes too frightening for the congregation to deal with, and the issue becomes a hidden time bomb threatening the continued peace and even the very existence of the group at some time in the future.

It is at this stage that old issues of the group will emerge, issues that seemed too volatile when they were first raised, perhaps many years ago. Blame for the resentments over these issues is placed upon some of the old actors, and some will pontificate on the "obvious" new direction the group or congregation must go.

In the heat of this stage someone seems to realize that the new leader, on whom they hung their high hopes, has not kept them from this present discomfort. Unable to deal with the present conflict, the feelings generated by it are often displaced upon the leader. "Maybe the pastor isn't all we thought he was. Maybe he isn't the right pastor for us after all!"

The conflict and resulting anger of this stage are actually good, for they move the group to the next and most critical stage.

Stage 3: The Transition Stage

At this stage of group or congregational development only the healthiest of the participants stay at their posts. In a therapy group, some members will grow silent or absent themselves. The same thing happens in the parish, where for the first time in many years a congregation may find itself unable to find a full slate of officers for the annual election.

The message from the general membership at this stage seems to be: "O.K., leader—lead! *You* show us how it's done. Save us. Make us better. Take responsibility for us and bring us through this!"

Wise and experienced leaders, in both the parish and the therapy group, will respond: "No; save yourselves. I will assist; I will seek to keep us on the right track, but I will not take responsibility for you; I will not do your job for you."

How the above message is delivered will determine how it is accepted. One of two reactions is likely: (1) a given member will take on responsibility and begin to contribute to group goals in an adult, mature manner, or (2) unable to rise to such a level of maturity free from an unhealthy dependency on the group's leader or pastor, the member may leave the group entirely.

Stage 4: The Stage of Maturity

Having passed through stage 3, the effective leader, surrounded by people taking responsibility for their own growth and its associated tasks, becomes a true facilitator. In the church such a "true facilitator" is known as a "priest" who aids the congregation not by doing its ministry, but by distributing the healing power of the group (Word and Sacraments) in an effective manner. In the therapy group the psychotherapist's role is not radically different, except that the "power" of the group is the group itself, a sort of secular third sacrament of mutual consultation and exhortation of the brothers and sisters.

Once the members have taken responsibility for their own growth and left behind their dependency upon the leader, real progress of the group is for the first time a

possibility. In group therapy this takes about 12-15 sessions, or about 24-30 contact hours. In a congregation the process moves much more slowly, since many more people are involved and their contact with the leader/pastor is much less uniform.

The process of leaving

When a pastor leaves a congregation the operative dynamic is not so much that of a psychotherapy group as it is once again that of a nuclear family.

In fact, the period of leave-taking for a pastor is a sort of litmus test as to whether or not the emotional relationship has changed from that of a courting lover/spouse to that of a nurturing parent/step-parent.

If the emotional process of pastor and congregation has not matured beyond that of a bride and bridegroom, then the pastor's leaving of the congregation will be characterized by the emotional dynamics of a marital divorce between dissatisfied lovers.

In such a situation, there will be jealousies over the "other" congregation that has "seduced" the pastor. Snide remarks may be made about the increase in salary that "bought off" the pastor, or hurts may be expressed in other such remarks of jealousy. In extreme cases the congregation being "left behind" may question whether or not the pastor ever was sincere in loving them in the first place.

On the other hand, if the relationship of pastor and people has matured, the shape of the leave-taking process will be quite different.

In the ideal situation the congregation will not feel jilted or unloved, but will soberly realize that changing relationships are as much a part of maturing in the church as they are in a healthy nuclear family.

In this case the congregation can say to the pastor: "We have grown under your care. We appreciate that. We are especially thankful that we have not grown dependent upon you, but that you have allowed (perhaps even forced) us to take responsibility for our own growth. You have meant a lot to us; you will continue to remain in our hearts and in our prayers. We wish you well, even as we ask you to wish us well on our own new phase of growth. We hope you will not be offended if we and our next pastor do things a bit differently, for our respect for you is expressed chiefly not in doing everything the way you did, but in our ability to make mature choices about such matters. Go in peace!"

Similarly, a mature pastor taking leave of a congregation will not act like a divorcing spouse but like a loving parent giving leave to a child: "My parish, you have grown and matured. In our process together I have also grown and matured. Thank you for your contribution to my own growth. Our mutual growth is an indication that it is best for us now to part from each other, so that we can continue to grow as the Lord would have us do. To your next pastor, whom you may first accept in the style of a spouse, I say: 'Care well for this, my child. She and I still love each other and will continue to do so. While I will maintain contact with her, I will not interfere or attempt to interfere with her life or with her relationship to you. Like a loving in-law, I stand ready to assist you if I can, without judgment and without unasked-for advice. God bless you both. May you also be a blessing to each other.'"

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Book Reviews

TROUBLING BIBLICAL WATERS: RACE, CLASS, AND FAMILY. By Cain Hope Felder. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989. xviii and 233 pages. Paper. $14.95.

For centuries on end, the Bible has been subjected to self-serving scriptural interpretations and theological constructs informed by class, race, culture, and gender interests. According to Dr. Felder, a New Testament scholar at Howard University, such prejudicial tendencies have for centuries characterized Western historiography and hermeneutical approaches to the Christian history of salvation. Felder argues that although the historical-critical method has been in use for two centuries, it is still the product of bourgeois academics. As such, the method has not made inroads into most Black churches, where biblicist and literalist interpretations are being applied.

In his book, Felder constructs an interpretive framework for biblical attitudes about race, class, and family and determines implications for the problem of racism, class consciousness, ethnocentrism, and gender superiority that he argues bedevils both church and society in many nations today.

By appealing to archaeological evidences and scholarly works, and by critically re-examining Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Old Testament and New Testament materials, Felder tackles crucial biblical themes of social and economic justice, poverty, freedom, and peace. Such fundamental issues constitute a discourse about God in relation to the power dynamics and social structures of a given society. Felder's aim in re-examining these themes is "to clear a new pathway that leads to the Bible as an indispensable tool for liberation—socio-political, economic, as well as spiritual."

Commenting on social ills like homelessness, unemployment, divorce, and drug abuse rates among Blacks in the United States, Felder insists that the struggles for economic freedom, civil rights, and women's emancipation have not yet been won. Commenting on the church's sense of mission and responsibility, Felder argues that the battles/struggles of the marginalized sectors in the U.S.A. should be fought by Black churches which historically have always been the "least of others." Felder argues that since the Black church has become the "most significant institution of power in the Black community today," they should always be in the forefront of protesting and challenging the injustices stemming from unequal distribution of power, material resources, and freedoms. He goes on to say that their cry (which is the voice of God) and their witness are needed to fill the moral void that is endemic in the U.S.A. and the U.S.S. R.'s nuclear armament programs. "The presence of the Black church within a modern-industrial 'super-power' is strategic, and her witness must be informed anew by New Testament foundations that make for peace," Felder argues.

Troubling Biblical Waters is one of the few scholarly efforts by a Black person that addresses aspects of the Bible that impinge directly on the lives of Black people in the U.S.A. However, the book is a welcome development not only for U.S. Blacks but for all Blacks in the Black diaspora, certainly not excluding those on the African continent. It is very relevant for African Christianity and other Third World churches still engaged in precritical, literalist and eisegetical hermeneutics. Felder's book is especially crucial since there is a growing need for more studies on the significance of the Bible in relation to Black people, drawing insights from political theologies of liberation that have come into existence in the last quarter of the century. Like James Cone, Felder underscores the fact that although justice is not the ultimate goal of faith, "the struggle for justice is not only a social witness but also a witness to God's es-

chatological righteousness as defined by Jesus' cross and resurrection."

One major weakness Felder overlooks concerns language use. To use non-gender inclusive forms like "He" for God and "he" for personifications of racial groups, e.g., the Negro, in a book purporting to free readers from "the paralysis" of class, race, and sex prejudices is to make double standards.

A minor problem has to do with editorial consistency in the use of either first person pronoun in singular form or in plural form, in the general introduction.

These weaknesses do not, however, seriously affect the overall strength and high-class quality of the book. It is not only readable and flowing; there are explanatory notes/phrases where technical language is adopted. These are of much benefit to lay readers. Felder also includes comprehensive notes, a well-organized bibliography, general index, and a scriptural index.

Paul H. Gundani
University of Zimbabwe

CONFLICT IN MARK: JESUS, AUTHORITIES, DISCIPLES. By Jack Dean Kingsbury. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989. ix and 150 pages. Paper. $8.95.

Kingsbury is one of the leading interpreters of the Synoptic Gospels in America. In this volume he uses literary criticism to first lay out the story world, describe the characters, and then briefly run through the plot (Chapter 1). The three following chapters detail how Mark's story focuses attention on three major characters or groups of people: Jesus, the [religious] authorities, and the disciples. There is inevitable overlap in these three chapters, but overlap that reinforces the overall interpretation of Mark.

Kingsbury reiterates his conviction that the primary title for Jesus in Mark is "Son of God," through his excursus on "Jesus' Use of 'the Son of Man'" (pp. 58-61) shows that he recognizes that "Son of Man," the only title on Jesus' lips, offers difficulties for his interpretation. Were Kingsbury to recognize that 13:26 and 14:62 do not talk about the parousia of Jesus (that is the Matthaean reinterpretation!) but about his enthronement (cf. Dan 7:13-14), he would be able to integrate the titles "Son of God" and "Son of Man" in a manner to account for the singular Markan resurrection narrative.

But that is a smaller point of difference. This book, originally a series of lectures to pastors, combines judicious scholarship, clear writing, and a sense for what is significant in an interpretation that will aid all proclaimers of Mark. Buy it for the year of Mark, 1990-1991. You will be glad you did.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

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

Here are five lectures originally delivered at the Chautauqua Society summer series in 1988, supplemented by notes and bibliography. Each lecture covers one period of Jewish-Christian relations from earliest times through the contemporary scene. Four key issues frame the discussion: the relation of Christians to the commandments, the place of the Hebrew Bible in Christianity, the land and its significance, and the ground rules for toleration of Jews in Christendom. The final chapter discusses these issues in contemporary context and shows that, while much progress has been made in terms of understanding, there is still an ambiguity at the heart of Christianity toward Judaism, e.g., on one hand we can now speak, beyond supersessionist rhetoric, of the Jews as the covenant people of God; on the other hand, the missionary zeal of Christianity repeals that verdict in many quarters. The crisis remains. A useful book for parish study because of its brevity, clarity, and directness.

Jay C. Rochelle
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

PAUL AND THE POPULAR PHILOSOPHERS. By Abraham Malherbe. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989. xvi and 192 pages. Cloth. $24.95.

The Qumran Scrolls naturally led to meticulous examination of the New Testament in the light of early Judaism. The contributions to the understanding of Jesus, of New Testament apocalyptic, the significance of the Torah, etc., were immense. The excitement of this enterprise led to the neglect of the Greco-Roman environment as an aid for New Testament interpretation.

Interest revived about twenty years ago. Prof. Malherbe of Yale University was one of the leaders in that revival. He began publishing articles that showed how New Testament texts, especially parenetic sections in Paul, were similar to documents of popular philosophy. He also highlighted the differences between them. This volume reprints eleven of those articles. Malherbe concentrates on popular (as opposed to theoretical) teachers of moral virtue as his primary frame of reference. He sets Paul in 1 Thessalonians into a new light as a pastor concerned about the on-going Christian existence of this newly-founded Christian community. He shows how philosophers and Paul alike used the language of warfare to describe their efforts in teaching morality (1 Cor 15:32, 2 Cor 10:3-6), how the medical imagery in the Pastoral Epistles resembles that of the Cynics, etc. Malherbe offers extensive documentation, both from the NT and from Greco-Roman philosophic literature, to support his insights. These articles are well known, but scattered in both well-known and more obscure journals. Augsburg Fortress serves scholarship well by gathering them in this well edited volume, with footnotes at the bottom of the page where they are more easily consulted.

An impressive series of graduate students have written doctoral dissertations under Malherbe and Wayne Meeks, his colleague. Together with these students they have revived interest in the moral aspects of Hellenistic-Roman philosophy and the New Testament. That is an achievement of significant positive value. They form a school of New Testament interpretation (the Yale School?) to rival the Chicago School at the beginning of this century. It stresses the role of popular philosophy and, to a lesser degree, ancient education in rhetoric. Perhaps they will go on to include ancient epic, lyric poetry, and drama in their purviews. Vergil's stress on *virtus*, Roman *humanitas*, and the like also formed the moral world. But thank Malherbe (and Meeks) for reviving interest in the world to which the Christian gospel came. As Malherbe's essays show, that interest pays rich dividends (to mix metaphors).

Edgar Krentz

INTERPRETING DIFFICULT TEXTS: ANTI-JUDAISM AND CHRISTIAN PREACHING. By Clark M. Williamson and Ronald J. Allen. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989. viii and 133 pages. Paper. $10.95.

Beginning with a definition of anti-Judaism under six heads, including "the cleavage between promise and denunciation" and "the Jews were rejected because of their crimes," the authors take us through a summary of anti-Judaism in preaching from early times through the present with specific examples. The Gospels, Paul, and Hebrews are examined from the perspective of anti-Judaism, and then we are given options of interpretation toward a more hopeful future in which the grace of the gospel, with the texts themselves critiqued from a gospel perspective, may be proclaimed with an eschatological anticipation which embraces Christians and Jews in a theocentric hermeneutic. Nine texts are then examined out of this methodological base; these are followed by three sermons. The last chapter deals with liturgical issues, ranging from lectionary problems to the eucharistic prayer. This is a practical tool for avoiding anti-Judaism, which the authors claim is as ingrained in our heritage as is sexism.

Jay C. Rochelle

SURPLUS POWERLESSNESS. By Michael Lerner. The Institute for Labor and Mental Health (5100 Leona, Oakland, CA 94619), 1986. 320 pages. Cloth. $14.95. Paper. $9.95.

Surplus Powerlessness is "the set of feelings and beliefs that make people think of themselves as even more powerless than the actual power situation requires, and then leads them to act in ways that actually confirm them in their powerlessness." It pervades the lives of most people in our society. It is manifested in such symptoms as various stress-related diseases and the continuing arms race. Although we live in a Meritocracy, where "not making it" is blamed on the individual, the pervasive feeling of most folks is that of being powerless to change the situation impacting them. There is Real Powerlessness in our class-dominated society, with vast discrepancies in the economic, political, and institutional power that people have. However, people have come to understand their reality in ways that make them *more* powerless than they need to be. What is needed is a deeper understanding of the social roots of what are thought of as personal problems or inadequacies.

The author emphasizes "the dynamic interaction between stress at work, stress in family and personal life, and the legacy of childhood—and how this dynamic interaction makes people feel that their powerlessness is somehow fitting and appropriate." Much of the book is spent discussing the many and complex ways in which such Surplus Powerlessness is engendered: how the workplace is organized; how the pain of work is taken home to the family, which in turn becomes a place of frustration; how drug and alcohol therapies tend to reinforce the very dynamics of "taking responsibility" that led to the abuse in the first place; how many of our "leisure" activities are ways of avoiding being in touch with the pain, anger, and self-blaming that so pervade our lives, and fail to provide us with the fulfillment/joy for which we yearn. Individual or family therapy will not overcome the painful dynamics, which are reflective of a wider social reality which can and must be restructured, through a massive social movement of empowerment and compassion.

Surplus Powerlessness is rooted in individualism's beliefs that we cannot trust anyone else, that we are completely alone in the world, and that we have made a mess of our lives. Consequently, we are unable to allow ourselves to become part of a potential "we" that could transform things.

The most striking part of Lerner's prognosis is the strategic role religion has in countering Surplus Powerlessness. Religion provides an alternative reality, a sense of history, the power of ritual, and points to the centrality of liberation. Although he earlier seems to discount the value of any notion of "original sin," he here seems to reinterpret it in terms of the emergence of class-dominated societies, in which the original experience of wholeness and connectedness to the universe was torn asunder. The mutuality and reciprocity fundamental to our nature was thwarted. Our fear of reconnecting with some larger whole is a response to the actual powerlessness we experience under classism, which permeates and distorts our experience of communities. In light of this, a just world is an ontological necessity, and becomes rationally possible insofar as we struggle against Surplus Powerlessness.

Here is where theological substance is needed if the project of social transformation is to become effective in the way he intends. From a Christian perspective, it is divine redemption from Surplus Powerlessness that unleashes the dynamic of socially-transformative compassion, particularly as it occurs through the Christ-event.

The perspectives Lerner offers here challenge many of the assumptions underlying how we in the church go about ministry.

Karen L. Bloomquist
Commission for Church and Society, ELCA

THE NEW TESTAMENT: A CONTEMPORARY INTRODUCTION. By Stevan L. Davies. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. 207 pages. $18.95.

New Testament Introductions often attempt to be too comprehensive and replace a direct engagement with the New Testament. Davies designs his introductory text to avoid this problem. His chapters assume a close reading of the New Testament documents, and the exercises after each chapter direct students to a first hand, critical appreciation of scholarly issues.

Davies limits his coverage of the New Testament. After an introduction, he devotes a chapter to "Judaism and the Roman Empire," briefly explaining items necessary for a beginning reading of the New Testament (on the basis of Mark 12). A helpful chapter on "Gospel Sources" provides thoughtful explanation of the oral tradition and sources like "miracle sources" and "Q," thus enabling students to better understand the dynamic process behind the Gospels. In the next chapter, he discusses Paul and limits consideration to Galatians and Romans on the (questionable) assumption that these two writings capture the essence of Paul's thought. Extensive treatments of the four Gospels fill the next four chapters (ch. 7 combines Luke-Acts), while the final chapter provides brief descriptions of the circumstances and major issues evident in remaining writings in the New Testament (Pastorals and Hebrews through Revelation).

Davies' choice to limit coverage of the New Testament was wise, including his decision to exclude treatment of the "historical Jesus" issue. For the most part, Davies discusses a specific writing in a coherent and sustained manner which should not only be understandable to novices in New Testament study but draw them into the ongoing discussion. Davies ends each chapter (3 through 8) with summary remarks of how the writing under consideration treats the following topics: sources, Jesus (his life, his death), Torah Law, eschatology, community, and controversies. Finally, in a section called "Interactions," he develops a comparison among the various New Testament authors on these topics. For example, he compares how the Johannine Gospel approaches the key topics in comparison to the perspectives of the Miracle Sources, Q Source, Paul, Mark, Matthew, and Luke.

Davies introduces critical methods (specifically, form criticism, text criticism, redaction criticism) where each method logically fits the materials being discussed, but he ignores both narrative or literary criticism and sociological criticism. Other shortcomings include the failure to offer the biblical texts in gender inclusive language as much as possible and his treatment of Galatians, where he repeatedly characterizes Paul's opponents in that situation as "following the Law to win God's approval." The recent work of Pauline scholars has demonstrated that the opponents' position is more complex and subtle than Davies' statement of it suggests.

Despite these shortcomings, Davies has largely succeeded in writing an introduction to the New Testament which will facilitate the reading of the primary writings themselves and draw students into critical thinking about these texts.

James L. Bailey
Wartburg Theological Seminary

LUKE: A NEW PARADIGM.
VOLUME 1: Part 1: The Argument; Part 2: Commentary: Luke 1.1–9.50.
VOLUME 2: Part 2 (cont.): Commentary: Luke 9.51–24.53.
By Michael D. Goulder. JSNTSup 20. 2 vols. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989. xi and 824 pages. $60.00.

This massive work has as its primary objective the demolition of long-standing hypotheses respecting the interrelationships of the first three Gospels. Goulder's primary target is appeal to a lost sayings source known as Q. Since Q is "indistinguishable from Matthew in date, style and theology," and since Luke has taken it over from Matthew, albeit with less felicitous and frequently "clumsy" expression, it can be dispensed with as a factor in determining synoptic

interrelationships. Similarly unnecessary is the assumption of documentary forms of Luke's special material (L or *Sondergut*).

Dissatisfied with research based principally on word counts and concordance study, Goulder endeavors to broaden the base for determining distinctive traits in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, both of which Goulder agrees use Mark as a primary source. Briefly stated, Matthew has unusual poetic capabilities, and compared to him Luke is prosy but blessed with extraordinary creativity. Luke's potential for creative writing is therefore a major datum in Goulder's demonstration of the superfluity of Q.

Recurring features can be discerned in Luke's narratives, and they serve, in a way that mere word counts cannot do, as indicators of Luke's creative hand, thus obviating the need of search for lost sources. For example, the human qualities of Luke's story characters contrast with Matthew's "virtual stereotypes." They frequently soliloquize. Some of them are lower-class heroes, and even God is compared to unscrupulous characters. Luke's business sense is naive, and his middle-class interests in the main contrast with Matthew's, whose material reflects a higher economic level. Realistic details dominate in Luke's accounts, and they also display less of Matthew's allegorical interest, but he is far wordier than Matthew and his muddled thinking frequently leads to ambiguity concerning the point to be made (compare, e.g., Luke 16:9 and 10-11). Luke is fond of pairs, fours, fives, and tens. Goulder taps all these characteristic features in the course of his commentary, which serves as the battlefield for the demolition of what Goulder calls the "standard" hypothesis.

Being acquainted with Paul and some of his correspondence, including especially 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, Luke is also able to draw on such association and knowledge for some of his creative writing. For example, his picture of Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42) uses colors drawn from 1 Corinthians 4.

Once the way has been cleared for establishing Luke's creativity, it is not necessary to look for a separate source Q or a special Luke source (L). Since Q is in reality part of Matthew's book, omissions as well as deviations or variations are attributable to Luke's creative use especially of hints in Matthew's own work, Mark, the Greek Old Testament, and Paul, with some help from members of Jesus' family. These same sources make appeal to Special Luke (L) unnecessary. And the Gospel of Thomas is out of question.

Whatever initial reaction one makes to Goulder's presentation, it is clear that life can never be the same for students who presuppose Q as a source for Luke apart from Matthew's Gospel. Complacency will be no match for the disquieting evidence in Goulder's work. And in any case, much can be learned from his discussion in the commentary portion.

Frederick W. Danker
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

OUR FATHER ABRAHAM: JEWISH ROOTS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH. By Marvin R. Wilson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, and Dayton: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989. xxi and 374 pages. Paper. $15.95.

This is a superb work, worthy to be used again and again as a reference tool for information about Judaism, about Christian faith, about their interrelationship in the early years, about the different ways each one approaches questions of love and marriage, passover and Eucharist, the land, about Hebrew thought patterns and language construction and their relationship to theologizing, and about the wonderful life of learning among Jews. It concludes with a plea for the reintegration of the Judaic roots into contemporary Christianity. The volume contains an enormous bibliography plus a set of indices which cover biblical texts, rabbinic texts, extrabiblical materials, and Hebrew and Greek word/concepts. This is a book you will not find easy to put down no matter how you approach it. You may dig into any one of the chapters and gain wisdom or regain understandings once received in seminary but long forgotten. You can read it through from cover to cover and know that you have been touched by the finger of

profundity. You can use it as a reference tool. This one will find a front place on your shelf of Jewish-Christian dialogue books, and deservedly so. Within it is a breadth of learning and reading, distilled into remarkably succinct comments and statements (despite the overall length of the book, which is necessary to such a crucial topic). Each chapter concludes with a long list of review questions that are useful in assessing how well you have understood the author's review and original insights. Yet the author maintains a central focus on the differences that legitimately exist between Christians and Jews, while eschewing those which have grown out of misunderstanding, misappropriation, or plain hatred of the Jewish background of our faith. Chapter 14, on "the life of learning: the heart of Jewish heritage," is stunning in its completeness and in the outlining of Jewish methods of teaching which center on the oral, the proclaimed, Word in the context of a faithful community. Rich material!

Jay C. Rochelle

EARLY CHRISTIANITY ACCORDING TO THE TRADITIONS IN ACTS. By Gerd Lüdemann. Translated by John Bowden. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989. ix and 277 pages. Paper. $19.95.

This is a clearly written, sharply defined, and narrowly focused commentary on Acts. Lüdemann uses redaction-critical methods to determine the value of Acts for the reconstruction of early Christian history. Lüdemann begins with a revised form of his inaugural lecture at Göttingen University in 1984, "The Historical Value of the Acts of the Apostles." He holds that the author of Acts was not Paul's companion, an eyewitness to Paul's missionary activity; otherwise the disparity between Galatians and Acts about the number of visits of Paul to Jerusalem is inexplicable. There is also no evidence that Luke knew the letters of Paul. (The difference between Pauline theology and the theology of Acts would not prove that, since there is broad theological variety in the Pauline school.)

However, Acts is based on traditions that often are historically reliable, as an examination of the redaction and the tradition in Acts 18 (Paul in Corinth), Paul's journeys (Acts 16ff., 18ff., and 27), and Acts 21 (Paul in Jerusalem) shows. However a Pauline chronology must be based on the letters, since Luke has created much of the chronological framework of Acts. His reading has also influenced his redaction of the tradition. Therefore we need a critical examination of the traditions in Acts in order to evaluate their historical significance in detail.

The commentary is Lüdemann's evaluation of the historical basis of Acts. He examines each segment of Acts in four interrelated steps. He first carefully clarifies the structure, then identifies the redactional contributions of Luke to the narrative. In the third section he isolates the tradition(s) Luke uses, then assesses the historical value. This examination produces many acute insights into the editorial work of Luke and the underlying traditions. Scholars will debate and evaluate the details in the next years. In part the positive evaluation of the traditions in Acts 16-21 is based on a comparison with details in the Pauline letters. The tradition criticism of Acts 1-12 and 22-28 is more difficult, and much remains purely hypothetical, as Lüdemann himself points out. Personal names and travel itineraries are often based on reliable tradition, while the speeches in Acts are (as in much ancient historical writing) stylized creations by Luke, only rarely based on some historical traditions. (See, for example, the remarks on Acts 2:4-47, 7:2-53, 17:16-34, 20:18b-36, 26:2-23.) Nonetheless, measured by the standards of ancient historiography, Luke comes off quite well. Almost every narrative has, according to Lüdemann, an historical substratum, though Luke stylizes, expands, organizes, and amends the traditions to serve his own auctorial goals.

Lüdemann does not sum up his results in a grand synthesis at the end of the volume. Nor does he describe Luke as historian. (Perhaps that will come in a future volume.) Some readers will be disappointed at what they will regard as meagre historically certain results. Almost all will disagree on specifics. Gerd Lüdemann has done all his readers a service by raising historical

issues sharply and taking positions that are clearly marked off. He should stimulate renewed attention to Luke as historian.

Edgar Krentz

JAMES. By Ralph P. Martin. Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 48. Waco: Word Books, 1988. cix and 239 pages. Cloth.

1 PETER. By Ramsey Michaels. Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 49. Waco: Word Books, 1988. lxxv and 337 pages. Cloth.

Martin Luther regarded 1 Peter as one of the four central books of the New Testament (along with John, Romans, and Ephesians), but James was one of the four he personally rejected because he held it did not teach justification by grace. Lutherans therefore should greet new scientific commentaries on these letters with anticipation and subject them to critical scrutiny. Both have found worthy commentators in the Word Biblical Commentary Series.

Both follow the series format. Each has a detailed introduction, including an extensive bibliography, discussion of the traditional matters of origin (author, date, recipients, historical situation, etc.), canonical history and status, sources or background, and structure and theological significance. The commentary proper discusses the text section by section under the following categories: special bibliography, original translation, [philological and textual] notes, form/structure/setting, [verse by verse] comment, explanation. This allows for full discussion of exegetical and historical issues, while insuring that theological interpretation receives its due attention.

Martin begins with an extensive discussion of James in the New Testament, early Jewish Christianity (where his role as a blameless authoritative leader in the Jerusalem church is embellished), and patristic literature down to the fourth century. The letter fits with the picture of James: it has an anti-revolutionary cast (1:20), based on a strong eschatological hope (5:7-9). Martin concludes that the letter has a Palestinian Christian core, but could not stem from Jerusalem in its present form. An editor has given it a more Hellenistic dress, stressing the role of teacher in an environment where false teachers have brought the community close to disaster (chapter 3). The editor reaches for the Matthaean church tradition as a resource to compile a "parenetic miscellany" (p. lxxvi) for a Syrian church. I find this argument both illuminating and persuasive. This parenetic purpose accounts for the stress on perfection expressed in action, on wisdom that is practical, on the piety of the poor, and the like. The commentary proper is an informed, carefully argued, thoughtful interpretation. Place beside Dibelius' Hermeneia commentary and you have the basic material for an informed reading of James.

Michaels has written a very useful commentary. He holds that Peter's authorship is strongly attested in the early church. Yet the internal evidence points to a time later than the Neronian persecution. The "letter should probably be regarded as a product of the Roman church not long after his [Peter's] death." He identifies it as a diaspora letter in genre—a term I do not find particularly helpful because it is vague. While the audience is gentile Christians of Asia Minor, the letter itself is permeated with motifs and attitudes strongly influenced by the OT and Judaism (though there is almost no evidence of Judaizing nomism).

Luther valued 1 Peter highly. Michaels' summary of the theological contribution this letter makes shows why. He stresses God's action in raising Jesus from the dead, the *imitatio Christi*, and the striking interpretation of the exaltation via resurrection in 3:19-22. The commentary is excellent and gives due attention to the confessional and hymnic traditions drawn on by the writer. All who use it will find it edifying, learned, judicious, and enriching—without it becoming overtly homiletical. 1 Peter provides most of the second lessons in the Easter season in Lectionary Series A. Preachers who use this commentary as a resource will discover the wealth inherent in 1 Peter for edifying preaching. And they will thank Michaels for his aid.

Edgar Krentz

DER HERRENBRUDER JAKOBUS UND DIE JAKOBUSTRADITION. By Wilhelm Pratscher. Vol. 139 in *Forschungen zur Religion und Literature des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, edited by Wolfgang Schrage and Rudolf Smend. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987. 316 Pages. Cloth.

This very thorough investigation draws together all the evidence in the New Testament and ancient church history concerning the life, history, theology, and martyrdom of James, the Lord's brother. According to Pratscher, James was at some distance from Jesus during the latter's lifetime. However, the tradition of the risen Christ's appearance to James (probably in some competition with the appearance to Peter) is strong and brought James to the Christian community and to a leadership position. James is mentioned only in connection with Peter or Paul, so that he probably was not the decisive figure of the earliest church as he is portrayed in later writings. But he gained the leadership of the Jerusalem congregation because of his Torah observance (without demanding the circumcision of gentiles), his relationship to Jesus, and his personality. The reader is amazed at how much Pratscher deduces from the scarce information in the New Testament. Although the argument is presented cogently, the question of the historical events still remains. Pratscher is in favor of an early chronology which is not convincing: crucifixion 27 C.E., conversion of Paul 28, first visit of Paul to Peter (Gal. 1:18ff.) 30/31, apostolic convention (Acts 15:1ff.) 43. The events described in Acts 12 would take place *after* this, and the conflict in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14) in 46. The Epistle of James was not written by the Lord's brother, according to Pratscher, a view for which he presents convincing arguments.

Two thirds of the book are devoted to the image of James in Jewish Christianity, in Gnosticism, in the mainstream church, and in the pseudepigrapha. These chapters are interesting and contain information which is not otherwise easily accessible. Pratscher demonstrates his close familiarity with all the relevant primary and secondary literature, including Gnostic and legendary writings and the church fathers till the time of Jerome. A section on the martyrdom of James as described in Josephus and later writings concludes the book. Pratscher believes that Josephus offers the most reliable account. James was stoned at the instigation of the high priest Ananus after the death of Festus in 62 C.E. An enlightening stemma about the dependency of the other reports is found on p. 255. The book must be consulted by anyone interested in the history and theology of James.

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Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

GREEKKEYS, Version 6.0.3. By George B. Walsh and Jeffrey Rusten, with the assistance of Marc Coga, Josh Hodas, and Elli Mylonas. Atlanta: Scholars Press Software, 1990. Diskette and 20 page manual. $50.

This program was invented to help students and teachers of ancient Greek type Greek fonts and accents on the Apple Macintosh Plus, SE, II. Another system (6.0.4) is available for the Mac Portable and IIci. It produces beautiful Greek print on a LaserWriter or the ImageWriter. Three Greek fonts are provided: Attika (primarily for LaserWriter), Salamis, and Sparta. Different font sizes also are available. Four English fonts are built in: Chicago, Geneva, Monaco, and Seattle. These also come in different sizes. In order to switch from English to Greek and vice versa, you press Command-Shift-5 (to arrange the keyboard) and select the desired font. An icon indicates whether the keyboard is prepared for Greek or English. It is relatively easy to get used to typing in Greek. The Greek letters are in general on the same keys as the corresponding English letters. Extra letters, such as digamma, koppa, and sampi, and some other symbols also are provided. The accents are on dead keys but require the depressing of the Option key and the typing of the accent before the letter on which it is to stand. With the Option key, it is also possible to type vowels with accents after getting used to a complex system.

In comparing GreekKeys with MacGreek, let me first say that GreekKeys produces a beautiful printout and offers many possibilities for students of classical Greek, especially since the marks for the scansion of poetic texts are included. It is less expensive than MacGreek ($79.95). Both work with Microsoft Word. However, it must be said that MacGreek is easier to install and to use. GreekKeys requires its own system which must be activated by a Blesser (included) if both systems are installed on the hard disk. I also prefer to type the accent after the letter on which it is to stand (the method used in MacGreek). Switching from Greek to English is easier in MacGreek because it is not necessary to change the keyboard by depressing Command-Shift-5. And for students of the Greek New Testament, MacGreek has the distinct advantage of including the symbols used in the Nestle-Aland text for textual variants.

Wilhelm C. Linss

MARY, MOTHER AND DISCIPLE. FROM THE SCRIPTURES TO THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS. By Joseph Grassi. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988. 166 pages. Paper. $8.95.

The vast majority of this book considers the portraits of the Virgin Mary presented by various New Testament writers. More briefly treated are some second century writings, including apocryphal Gospels, and then a smattering of church fathers up until the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus (431 C.E.). That Council supported the full divinity of Christ by agreeing that Mary could be called "Theotokos" ("God-bearer" or "Mother of God"), since the one she brought forth was truly God. This Christological decision confirmed the popular piety about Mary which was gradually transferring to her the kind of praise once directed to the goddesses, such as Isis as Queen of Heaven. Once devoted to Artemis, the city of Ephesus was now the site of Mary's triumph as Theotokos.

Accompanied by some reflections and poetry about Mary by Carolyn Grassi, the book is good general reading for pastors and laity interested in Mary, perhaps especially for grass-roots ecumenism. In light of the forthcoming volume about Mary from the bilateral dialogue between North American Lutherans and Roman Catholics, interested readers should also know of Glazier's major reference work on Mary, *Theotokos, A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

Paul Rorem
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PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION. Second Edition. By Norman Geisler and Winfried Corduan. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988. 424 pages. Paper. $18.95.

This revised textbook on the philosophy of religion does more than just lay out the problems of the discipline. The two authors take a position—the position of theism—and seek to make a comprehensive case for the credibility of believing in God.

Its seventeen chapters are organized around four philosophical problems: experience, reason, God-talk, and evil. The first is the question of the relationship between religious experience and God. Because we experience the need to transcend our finitude, and because this need is already an experience of transcendence, and because an experience of transcendence requires a transcendent object to be experienced, it follows that God exists. Feuerbach and Freud are mistaken when they describe religious belief as illusory. What we humans really need really exists. There is in reality a God who corresponds to our experience of transcendence. This, it appears to me, is a circular argument which posits the reality of the transcendent God because it is presupposed in the definition of religious experience as the experience of the transcendent. It is a clever argument, if you can get away with it.

The second philosophical problem has to do with the relationship between rational proofs for the existence of God and theism. Teleological and ontological arguments may very well demonstrate the necessity for a divine ground.

But these arguments cannot discriminate between pantheism, panentheism, and other such alternatives to theism. The theistic understanding of God requires more. The authors of this book conclude that the cosmological argument satisfactorily and convincingly argues that there does exist an absolutely perfect Being who operates with absolute perfection. Furthermore, the God of biblical revelation is identical with this God of cosmological theism (p. 191).

The third problem is God-talk. Amidst an examination of the *via negativa*, modeling, and other such proposals for discourse about God, Geisler and Corduan opt for the *analogia entis*. They argue that because there is a continuity between the creator and the creation, we may make positive analogical—not univocal or equivocal, but analogical—statements about God. Although Geisler and Corduan do a fine job of citing classical and contemporary philosophers on the issue of God-language, conspicuously absent is a discussion of issues posed by feminist theologians.

The fourth problem is reconciling the existence of evil in the world with that of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. Geisler and Corduan defend Calvinistic theodicy in which evil in all its forms—metaphysical, moral, and physical—is seen as a necessary step on the way to a more perfect world. God needs evil to heighten the good. If a free person confronts danger, he or she might develop courage. If a free person experiences hatred, he or she will gain a greater appreciation for love. God has "utilitarian goals" and employs evil as "a necessary condition and a necessary by-product of a maximally perfect moral world."

The authors adopt positions which belong to the classical tradition of Augustine and Calvin. They are defended well. It would make an excellent philosophy of religion text as well as supplementary reading in Christian dogmatic theology.

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THE CATHOLIC MOMENT: THE PARADOX OF THE CHURCH IN THE POSTMODERN WORD. By Richard John Neuhaus. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987 (cloth) and 1990 (paper). xi and 292 pages. $19.45/12.95.

Composed of 58 sections arranged in six parts, *The Catholic Moment* is a formidable survey and critique of the Roman Catholic Church since the 1950s. In Part One, Neuhaus argues that the Catholic Church has emerged as the flagship vessel in the fleet of contemporary churches that ply the seas of modernity. As the largest, most influential church, it is the premier religious force of the age, the "institutional baseline" for Christianity, preserving both catholicity and continuity while pointing the way to the future. Despite its tendency to idolatry, Roman Catholicism is nearer to the truth than Protestantism because it proclaims the scandal of Christianity. Although it functions as a wisdom for the world, it also underscores the oddity of the holy within the unholy. Thus, the issue has moved from the riddle of Roman Catholicism in a divided Christianity to the paradox of Christian existence in the modern world.

Part Two presents the background, composition, and significance of Vatican II, along with the author's criticism of its gnostic, anarchist, liberal, and secular accents. Possibly "the most important religious event of the twentieth century," the Council challenged traditional Catholic theology while redefining the church in christological terms. Neuhaus sees Vatican II as a new ecclesiocentrism focused on this-worldly salvation. Exuberant about the possibilities of redeeming society, the Council set forth a "wondrous synchronicity" between church and world. Joining Protestant liberalism, it relativized the church, debunked the supernatural, and turned theology into anthropology. It is now time to "relativize the relativizers," reestablish the authority of the magisterium, and reject the assumption that belief in God is no longer possible.

Enter contrasting voices from the Right (Part Three), in particular, Joseph Ratzinger and the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. Complaining

that many Catholics are really Protestants, Ratzinger has become a "patrolman" for the church, reminding the faithful that the church is not democratic, but sacramental/hierarchical. Its center is the cross, not triumphalism, cognitive dissonance, not conformity to the world. The Synod spoke out against secular theology, championed the authority of Rome, and emphasized a ministry of preaching and witness. Neuhaus closes this part with a survey of Ratzinger's reconception of authority against the background of several other representative voices in the debate.

Liberation theology is the subject of Part Four. Following a brief look at John Paul II, Neuhaus questions the power-greedy pretensions of a movement devoted to the powerless. While the Pope speaks for a freedom grounded in the transcendent, Liberation theology simply sells out to the world. According to John Paul, authentic liberation is first salvific and next socio-political. The 1986 "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation," which Neuhaus regards as perhaps the best recent statement on theology and politics, argues that, while the freedom given by God has implications for the social order, no political system can satisfy the human aspiration for the infinite. The church can have a theology of politics, but it should not espouse a particular political theology.

How can a Catholic be an American? Part Five surveys the traditional view that Catholicism supports the American ethos, and contrasts that with the view of the 60s which set Catholicism in opposition to Americanism. Today, Catholicism is a part of the American way, and Catholics are like everybody else. Neuhaus calls for a "repoliticization" of Catholicism that will change society rather than the other way around, and will do so in a way that respects the authority of both church and state.

The final part sets forth possibilities and proposals for the "Catholic Moment" in which we now live. It is time for Catholicism to take the lead in proclaiming the gospel. In contrast to the "new knowledge class," and the academic theology that serves it, Catholicism must become postliberal in service to the gospel and the church. It must also reject every "idolatry of the political" while becoming politically effective. Above all, it must keep eschatological hope alive. In all this, it struggles on behalf of all Christendom and its future.

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MIDDLE PLATONISM AND NEOPLATONISM. THE LATIN TRADITION. By Stephen Gersh. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986. xx and 939 pages (in two volumes). Cloth. $75.00.

The multi-faceted tradition of Platonism has been a major dialogue partner for Christian theology over the centuries. Greek philosophers such as Plotinus and Proclus have received enormous attention lately in penetrating studies which will help illuminate more precisely how this dialogue influenced various Christian theologians. Stephen Gersh has already contributed mightily to this general field, but the current two-volume work is virtually alone in its detailed concentration on the *Latin* authors of this tradition.

Names such as Cicero, Seneca, the "Asclepius," Calcidius, Macrobius, Martianus Capella, and especially Boethius may not be covered in the basic theological curriculum, but their versions of Platonism shaped the course of Christian theology just as surely, although not as deeply, as the better known Greek writings of Plotinus. Gersh provides thorough discussions of these authors, especially on their doctrine of God.

Yet the dialogue with Christian theology is not Gersh's concern in this work, and thus he omits any discussion here of the influence on Augustine or Eriugena. This is not really a criticism of the book, except that Boethius himself is rent asunder in the detailed attention paid to his *Consolation of Philosophy* to the neglect of his *Theological Tractates*. Built to last, this fine work will be the standard reference for the Latin Platonists who were co-terminous with the Early Church.

Paul Rorem

Briefly Noted

SHIVITTI: A VISION. By Ka-Tzetnik 135633. Translated from the Hebrew by Eliyah Nike De-Nur and Lisa Herman (Harper & Row, $16.95). The author is an Auschwitz survivor who writes under his tattooed number as a concentration camp inmate (Ka-Tzetnik). The book is a careful distillation of the visions he gained from experiences re-lived under the influence of clinically-administered LSD in the clinic of Dr. Bastiaans in Leiden, Holland. Bastiaans specializes in work with "concentration camp syndrome" victims. Each visionary sequence is called a gate (as are Jewish collections of prayer and liturgy), and there are five gates (like the Torah?). Each gate represents an increased integration of the author's personality. The record of sheer horror is only amplified by its setting in this psychedelic nightmare, which is so skillfully written that the reader is pulled right into the vision. In the end the warning comes: you and I are the creators of Auschwitz, in our land of fears and prejudices and hatreds are the seeds of its birth in any age. The puzzle of human nature is our extraordinary capacity for good and for evil, death and life; we must choose life. Life cannot be preserved and urged toward creativity and compassion without our choosing the path of life in each moment of our existence. Survival is a *primary* value. This book bears chilling witness to the value of survival. JCR

DEUTSCHE ALTTESTAMENTLER IN DREI JAHRHUNDERTEN. By Rudolf Smend (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, DM 78). These 18 academic biographies of German Old Testament scholars during the last three centuries provide a wonderful tour of biblical scholarship and of the great figures who shaped it. S. usually rehearses the education of each person, the contents of his chief works, his theological position, and interesting anecdotes about his personal life or teaching style. Herman Gunkel was a spirited teacher (though Wellhausen was not), and among his students in Berlin was a certain Rudolf Bultmann. Wilhelm Rudolph, who served as assistant to Albrecht Alt, could not join the faculty at Tübingen because he was not a member of the Nazi party, and gave his own subtle witness against anti-Semitism at Giessen by offering lectures on the enduring value of the Old Testament. Similarly, Von Rad, another Alt assistant, had only one theological colleague at Jena who had not bowed to Hitler. In 1934 Von Rad participated in a politically-sensitive lecture series entitled: "Leading to Christianity through the Old Testament." Karl Marti was a kind of child prodigy, who studied Latin and Greek vocabulary while tending the family's sheep and edited a German commentary series, all of whose volumes appeared within a six year period. Unfortunately, he also published in 1921 an appeal for colleagues to show that materialistic eschatology and the doctrine of justification were religious remnants from Judaism not on the same high plane as Christianity. Wilhelm deWette, famed for his dating of Deuteronomy to the time of Josiah, was also godfather to the only son of Friedrich Schleiermacher. S., who was assistant to Martin Noth during his years of graduate study, reports that his teacher was not a workaholic, but when he dedicated himself to a task, words did come easily and very quickly. RWK

MARK 1-8:26. By Robert A. Guelich. Word Biblical Commentary 34A (Word Books). G. believes that the evangelist was familiar with Jewish customs, but was writing for a non-Jewish audience. He probably wrote in Rome, sometime between 67 and 70 C.E., though the tenuousness of the evidence is conceded. Mark addressed a community under duress, concerned about who Jesus was and the nature of the kingdom he had come to inaugurate. This gospel offered a renewed basis for faith, made clear the dangers and pitfalls along the way, and offered

the hope of the kingdom's future. Thus, G. suggests a universal character to the Gospel's message and does not attempt a more precise definition of the community and the occasion for which Mark was written. Preachers will cherish this first, somewhat cautious volume on Mark in the Word series and eagerly await the completion of this detailed discussion of the oldest gospel in volume 34B. RWK

The Apocalypse fascinates and mystifies many Christians. Sophie Laws helps to dispel the mystery and enhance the fascination in **IN THE LIGHT OF THE LAMB: IMAGERY, PARODY, AND THEOLOGY IN THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN** (Good News Studies 31. Michael Glazier, $9.95), the Tuohy Lectures at John Carroll University in Cleveland. Her lectures cover exegetical principles, the resurrected Lamb Christology, imagery for the opponent (beast, harlot), martyrdom and millennialism, hymns and worship, and the Apocalypse as prophetic book. The 85 pages of text are terse, clear, well documented, and stimulating. Her overall thesis is that the Apocalypse, though it gave the name to the literary genre, breaks that genre at many points because the writer's thought determines form, not form thought. Laws, who earlier wrote a helpful commentary on James, puts the readers in her debt. One hopes there are many. Edgar Krentz

Roman Catholic biblical scholarship entered the world of modern, critical scholarship slowly, often with strong and even malevolent opposition within the academic world and from Rome. Gerald Fogarty, S.J., tells the story in **AMERICAN CATHOLIC BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP: A HISTORY FROM THE EARLY REPUBLIC TO VATICAN II** (Harper & Row, $34.95), the second volume in the Society of Biblical Literature *Confessional Perspective Series*. He correlates the American story with developments in Rome, from the Modernist Controversy through Vatican II. The issues revolved around biblical translations based on the Hebrew and Greek texts, historical criticism, and the growing use of form criticism. The Catholic Biblical Association, founded in 1937 (St. Louis), and its *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* provided a forum for discussion and common action by Catholic scholars. The heroes in the story are Henry Poels, Edward F. Siegman, C.PP. S., James A. Kleist, S.J., John L. McKenzie, Bruce Vawter, C.M., and many others; the most significant opponents are Joseph C. Fenton of Catholic University (using the pages of the *American Ecclesiastical Review*), Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi (the Apostolic Delegate to the United States), and others. In the late nineteenth century C. Augustus Briggs of Union Seminary in New York wrote in defense of von Hugel. Catholic scholars became active in the Society of Biblical Literature beginning with the 1940s and welcomed Protestant scholars into the Catholic Biblical Association beginning with the 1960s. Protestants who think of the Roman Catholic Church as a monolithic bastion of received tradition should read this book. They will find, at times, unlikely heroes, such as Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, who defended biblical scholars on more than one occasion. Fogarty has an interesting story to tell, and he tells it well. It is a lasting memorial to scholars dedicated to truth in the face of opposition. If you have known some of them personally, as I have, the narrative is gripping. Edgar Krentz

DEUTERONOMY. By R. E. Clements (Sheffield Academic Press, $7.95). Part of the Old Testament Guides series, this small volume presents a clear and balanced picture on all the central questions about Deuteronomy. C. expounds the contents of the major legal collections and indicates how they are given meaning by the book's introduction and epilogue, by the figure of Moses and the presence of the Ten Commandments, and by the speeches of exhortation, the blessings and curses, and the poems of Deut 32 and 33. Brief and very helpful bibliographies are provided. Since Deuteronomy is in certain respects the center of Old Testament faith, this book can help the pastor or educated lay person get at the heart of the Hebrew Scriptures. RWK

JESUS AND HIS TOWNS by Sherman E. Johnson (Michael Glazier) presents a summary narrative of Jesus' life and ministry against the background of brief information about the villages, towns, and cities named in the Gospels. Seventeen chapters describe the history, topography, and surviving physical remains of Bethlehem, Nazareth, the population centers around the Sea of Galilee, Caesarea Philippi, Samaria, Jericho, and Jerusalem. One map and a few pictures (often taken long ago) are scattered through the book. Though it offers no new information, it is well written and easily understood. Placed in parish libraries, it will help a general audience understand the relation the story of the Gospels better. Edgar Krentz

In **THE LIBERATION OF CHRISTMAS** (Crossroad, $18.95), Richard Horsley of the University of Massachusetts in Boston interprets the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke as expressions of liberation theology within the context of Roman oppression in Palestine. He argues that the stories are not myth, if interpreted against this background. He discusses Roman ruler ideology and the portrait of Herod, the "client king" in Matthew, to set the political stage; then he argues that the stress on the people, piety, and preparation receive their definitive interpretation as liberation theology in the "songs of liberation" in Luke 1-2. (He sketches an interesting "parallel" in the self understanding of the U.S.A.'s role in maintaining peace in Central America; many will not be persuaded.) Horsley pleads for a liberating understanding of these stories that will apply them to modern enslaving ideologies. It is liberation theology supported by historical analysis. Edgar Krentz

THE MACCABEAN REVOLT. ANATOMY OF A BIBLICAL REVOLUTION. By Daniel J. Harrington. Vol. 1 in Old Testament Studies (Michael Glazier, $9.95). This practical and concise study of the Maccabean Revolt has grown out of considerable teaching experience. The Books of Daniel, 2 Maccabees, and 1 Maccabees are the main sources, and a separate chapter is devoted to each book in the above order—which has proved most helpful to the author. Generous and vital sections of the books are provided, surrounded with good commentary. Harrington deals with theological issues, such as the Son of Man in Daniel 7 (which he prefers to identify as a collective image for the "saints of the Most High"). The presentation faces historical questions directly, presenting all the conflicting data, without settling for simplistic solutions. Harrington has also provided a top-notch bibliography, allowing for further study at all levels, even the most scholarly. The book accomplishes exactly what it sets out to do. The reader comes away not only with a clear picture of the Maccabean Revolt, but also with an idea of the historical complexities that surround it. Joseph I. Hunt, Nashotah House Seminary

IN SEARCH OF GOD: THE MEANING AND MESSAGE OF THE EVERLASTING NAMES. By Tryggve N. D. Mettinger (Augsburg Fortress, $24.95). M. offers a philological and historical treatment of the most representative divine names, with a view to revealing the underlying theological conceptions. He decides that Yahweh means "He is," connoting at one time an assurance of God's active presence and later a confession that he and no other is the true God. El Shaddai (traditionally, God Almighty) is one of the oldest divine names and was known for providing numerous progeny and guaranteeing the survival of the lineage. The "hosts" referred to in "the LORD of hosts" are the members of the heavenly council, who sing God's praises, serve as members of the heavenly government, and carry out God's assignments on earth. Special chapters are devoted to the living God (separating Israel from the dying-rising deities of the ancient Near East and connoting Yahweh's interest in history), the Lord as king, and the divine references in Second Isaiah and Job. There are 24 excursuses ranging from the linguistic significance of names to God-language and gender ("Father" does not refer to divine gender, but to the function of God, who liberates people from bondage and allots them their inheritance). RWK

THE VARIABLE SPELLINGS OF THE HEBREW BIBLE. By James Barr (Oxford, $49.95). In the Schweich Lectures of 1986, B. described the variable spelling patterns in the Hebrew Bible due to the presence or absence of vowel letters. He denies that archaic spellings indicate the antiquity of a given book. The spelling of a book depends not on when it was written, but on how late and how frequently it was revised. The most obvious characteristic of biblical spelling is its haphazardness. RWK

TO TOUCH THE TEXT: BIBLICAL AND RELATED STUDIES IN HONOR OF JOSEPH A. FITZMYER, S. J. (Crossroad, $39.95). Fitzmyer is one of the foremost Aramaic scholars of the 20th century and a distinguished Roman Catholic New Testament scholar. He was one of three editors of the Jerome Biblical Commentary, and he wrote a two volume commentary on St. Luke in the Anchor Bible Commentary. The twenty-five essays in this book deal with language, the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls (F. published an outstanding monograph on the Genesis Apocryphon), and the New Testament. He has been part of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue and participated on the team that made significant ecumenical studies of Peter and Mary. Among the contributors to this volume are Lutherans Karl Paul Donfried and John Reumann. RWK

GENESIS. THE JPS TORAH COMMENTARY. By Nahum Sarna. (Jewish Publication Society, $) and **LEVITICUS. THE JPS TORAH COMMENTARY.** By Baruch A. Levine. (Jewish Publication Society, $). These popular commentaries, intended for lay people, print out the Hebrew text and the modern English translation by the Jewish Publication Society (JPS). The comments are a mixture of historical critical exegesis and traditional Jewish exegesis developed over the last two millennia. While admitting that Genesis may have been based on earlier sources, S. deals primarily with the final shape of the text. In Gen 15:6, Abram's faith is seen as an act which made him worthy of God's reward. (I believe God considered Abram's faith as an appropriate response to his promise, as fidelity to his relationship to God, and, hence, as something righteous.) L. provides definitive interpretations of the priesthood, the sanctuary, and the cult as outlined in Leviticus. This commentary on Leviticus is now the commentary of choice for anyone who wants an authoritative interpretation of Israel's worship life. RWK

ECCLESIASTES. Old Testament Guides. By R. N. Whybray (Sheffield Academic Press, $7.95). **ECCLESIASTES. THE NEW CENTURY BIBLE.** By R. N. Whybray (Eerdmans, $13.95). **QOHELETH AND HIS CONTRADICTIONS.** By Michael V. Fox (Sheffield Academic Press, $42.50). The two volumes by W. rehearse introductory questions and provide a commentary on the RSV respectively. Among the characteristic ideas in the book W. focuses on wisdom, death, wealth, work, the divine justice, and God and human beings. Despite Qoheleth's "many apparent contradictions" W. finds it to be the most fascinating book in the Old Testament. The first four chapters of F. deal with the meaning of "vanity" (absurd), the relationship between toil and pleasure (toil is absurd, but it provides wealth, the source of pleasure), Qohelet's epistemology (Qoheleth affirms and denies the possibility and value of wisdom), and the interface between justice and theodicy (Life is unjust, but God is just. What is the moral quality of the world?). The fifth chapter, which exceeds the other four in length, is a commentary on the book from a Jewish perspective. A paraphrase of the book at the end sums up F.'s exegesis. RWK

JUSTICE AND THE HOLY: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF WALTER HARRELSON. Edited by Douglas A. Knight and Peter J. Paris. (Scholars Press). An outstanding scholar and Dean at both the University of Chicago and Vanderbilt, H. is also a passionate advocate of ecumenism and social justice. Of the twenty articles in this impressive jubilee volume, only eight deal directly with the Hebrew Scriptures, indicating clearly the breadth of his interests. In 1975 H. published studies of Psalms 104 and 139 in *Currents*. RWK

Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost—Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Series A



God Bless This Mess!

Plaques adorned with the title, carefully painted in large Gothic letters and surrounded by tendrils decorated with hearts and flowers, beam down upon many kitchen counters and countless cluttered desks. And I can understand it very well.

This past month I managed to give conflicting signals to our kind contributors. As I prepared to send copy to Chicago, I finally did some counting and found that I was missing material for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost. It was missing because I had not asked anyone to prepare it.

In checking the propers for the day I found both rebuke and comfort in the second Collect. The first Collect prays that we may receive "the spirit to think and do what is right." That is a bracing and necessary prayer. The second is perhaps offered as a back-up, just in case the first does not seem to be answered. In it we pray that God would take pity on us, seeing "how busy we are with many things."

Even trivial busy-ness can distract us from the one thing needful. And so we pray to God to "turn us to your teaching and lead us to choose the one thing which will not be taken from us." That "one thing" is then defined as "Jesus Christ our Lord." He will never be taken from us. But it is maddening to think how often we can take our eyes off him and be distracted from him.

The season of Pentecost is designed to help keep us on track, in tune, and focused. Helping us in this issue as author of "First Readings" is Mark Allan Powell, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Trinity Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. He completed his doctoral work in Matthean studies at Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. We welcome his contributions to our understanding of Matthew's preaching.

Contributing the "Pastoral Reflections" is Michael Cooper-White, Bishop's Associate in the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA. Mike has had extensive experience both in parishes and in organizations of advocacy. We thank him for his clear and probing reflections on the lessons.

Pastor Don Prange of Appalachia once again contributes "Prophetic Voice," exploring the social and economic dimensions of the texts and of the realities within which we live.

"Busy with many things," but fortunately "the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26, Pentecost 9).

God bless your mess and mine!

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
August 5, 1990

Psalm 86:11-17
Isaiah 44:6-8
Romans 8:26-27
Matthew 13:24-30(36-43)

FIRST READING

The parable of the Wheat and Tares (Mt 13:24-30) stands in Matthew's Gospel in the same relative place as the parable of the Seed Growing Automatically in Mark's Gospel (4:26-29). Preceding these parables in both Gospels are (a) the parable of the Sower and the Soils with (b) the hard saying about the purpose of parables and (c) the interpretation of the Sower and the Soils (Mt 13:1-23; Mk 4:1-20). Following these parables in both Gospels is the parable of the Mustard Seed (Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32).

And these parables (Wheat and Tares/Seed Growing Automatically) have in common some peculiar vocabulary not found in other "seed parables": sprout, blade, grain of wheat, harvest, sleeping.

Is the Matthean parable (Wheat and Tares) some kind of transformation of the Markan (Seed Growing Automatically)? Some kind of meditation on it and transfiguration of it? Whatever the genetic relationship, Matthew's parable is certainly a substitute for Mark's. It stands in for it, displacing it.

We can only guess why Matthew has chosen to replace the Markan picture of the farmer sleeping all night and sitting in front of his house all day. The parable with its images of inactivity and of growth hidden from sight beneath the ground makes perfect sense in Mark. All three "seed parables" in Mark focus on the contrast between present and future: present weakness, failure, or insignificance in contrast to future greatness and bounty. Mark's Jesus encourages disciples to trust in the mysterious path God walks in working to inaugurate the kingdom through the apparently powerless and insignificant figure of Jesus, defenseless against his foes and naysayers.

Matthew perhaps saw difficulties in the Markan picture. That farmer who only sleeps and sits, who does absolutely nothing, who works not at all, who expends zero energy, is not Matthew's idea of a model for disciples. Matthew searches for a usable message in the tradition of Seed and Sower and Soil.

He looks back to the first of the parables. Why does some seed yield good fruit and some does not? Does God sow bad seed? No! But God has an enemy, and the enemy sows stealthily, "while the farmer sleeps." So not all the seed that sprouts will yield "wheat." Some comes us as "weeds."

If both God and Satan are busy sowing, so that good and bad spring up together, urgent questions arise: What kind of seed are you? What kind am I? If you and I are confident that we are good seed, what should we do about bad seed springing up as weeds?

Careful! says Jesus. Matthew presents Jesus as creator and teacher of righteousness. Jesus brings the gift of all-rightness, and he calls us to live lives of all-rightness. But Jesus knows that people who take righteousness most seriously may most easily fall into making dangerous comparisons: how do we look in comparison with others?

And the "others" are not just outside the community but inside. The interpretation of the parable (Mt 13:36-43) defines "the field" as "the world" (v. 38), and some think that Jesus pictures a righteous church versus the unrighteous world. However, in spite of verse 38, Jesus seems to be talking about the condition of the church. Almost everywhere in Matthew, Jesus pictures the church, the new community, as a "mixed body," consisting of wheat and weeds, good fish and bad (13:47-50), children obedient and disobedient (21:28-32), wedding guests ready and not ready (22:11-14), tillers and millers, servants and maidens prepared and unprepared (24:40–25:30), sheep and goats (25:31-46).

Jesus calls us to righteousness. But when sisters and brothers seem to us not to be reaching the goal, but seem to be "busy with many (other)

things" (Prayer of the Day), then what? Jesus says, "patience and forgiveness."

What about criticism? What about pulling out the weeds? Matthew's Gospel alone contains the famous material on excommunication (18:15-20). But that material is carefully set within a context of infinite forgiveness (18:12-14, 21-35).

The parables of Matthew's Gospel seem to warn us against criticizing one another. They seem rather to summon us to the serious practice of self-criticism. And leave the judging to God. RHS

PROPHETIC VOICE

The task of organizing communities of justice means getting the word out, and making sure all the while that we are operating with "good seed."

We are called only to the task of sowing and planting, not to the ultimate task of harvesting. We just need to remember to work with the "good seed." The Spirit of God who brought us to this point of understanding will be around to take us through the moments of confusion and struggle; and even when we can't find the right "words in order to pray properly" (Rom 8:26), the Spirit will do the praying for us (8:27) so that we'll receive God's "strength" and "saving help" to walk "faithfully" (Ps 86:16, 11) in the way of justice. DP

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 12, 1990

Psalm 119:129-136
1 Kings 3:5-12
Romans 8:28-30
Matthew 13:44-52

FIRST READING

"Understanding" is an important theme in Matthew's Gospel. It was the subject some years back of a dissertation by Gerhard Barth. Barth demonstrated that in Matthew Jesus' disciples typically do understand, but only when understanding is given to them by Jesus. This contrasts with the portrayal of the disciples in Mark, where the disciples often do not gain understanding at all (cf. Mk 8:14-21, Mt 16:5-12).

What is it that the disciples come to understand in this text? First, that the rule of heaven is so precious that its attainment is worth the loss of all else. Indeed, acceptance of God's rule may necessitate the abandonment of all other securities, something the disciples have already learned from their own experience (4:18-22; 9:9). The real lesson here, though, is that such divestment is not to be viewed as an obligation but rather to be undertaken voluntarily through the motivation of joyful discovery (cf. 19:21-22).

Second, the rule of heaven is a present reality and encompasses all, good and bad alike. Just as God sends rain for both just and unjust (5:45), so God's rule excludes no one: it spreads out like a net, enveloping "all kinds" (v. 47). Ultimately, a judgment will have to be made, and it may be determined that some who have been caught up with God's rule do not belong. But this determination is not for the present: Jesus' disciples are called to be "fishers of people" (4:19), but the task of separating good fish from bad is reserved for angels (cf. 13:24-30, 36-43).

Jesus' final comment indicates that the treasure of the rule of heaven includes both new and old. Such a remark is intentionally ambiguous and can have many applications. One possible meaning is that the understanding his disciples receive through his teaching interprets the old (i.e., the law, the scriptures, the prophets) in new ways. Jesus comes to fulfil, not to abolish (5:17). MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

What are your most poignant "parables of the realm?" To what shall the realm of heaven be compared? This collection of Jesus' sayings makes a number of comparisons between the awaited reign of God in all its fullness and temporal, human, unfulfilled situations. Every preacher's own parables ideally are both self-

revealing and God-pointing. What everyday, commonplace occurrences are God-pointing for you? What homely examples both reveal your own theology and give faithful witness to the church's message?

I am bold to offer an image from my youth. Harvest-time in the great midwestern plains a quarter century ago.... Testing for the wheat's readiness to be cut and harvested, Dad walks out into the field a hundred yards. Carefully he breaks a few heads of grain from the stalks. Gently he rolls those heads between his giant farmer's hands until they separate and the golden brown kernels of wheat lie plump and rich in his palms. Finally, with a soft cleansing breath he lifts up the chaff to be carried away on the evening breezes. My father's harvest hands remind me of the words of an anonymous poet, who wrote:

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible
comfort
Of feeling safe with another person!
Having neither to weigh thoughts, nor
measure words—
But pouring them all right out, just as
they are . . .
Chaff and grain together!
Certain that a faithful hand will take
and sift them;
Keep what is worth keeping,
And with a breath of kindness
Blow the rest away!

That kind of grace-filled, forgiveness-granting, comfort-giving presence is a great treasure, a pearl of great price, something to cling to both now and "at the close of the age." In a world where there is much harsh judgment and where many seem so eager to separate others into "good fish" and "bad fish" categories, can we offer some parables of a gentler "separating"? Can we challenge our listeners to become gentle harvesters in their daily lives?

Something old, something new—both worth sharing from the treasure of every scribe trained for God's realm! Are there some new and contemporary stories from your life experience to be coupled with these Matthean parables, pointing listeners toward grace-filled lives? MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

To aspire to "scribal" (Mt 13:52) involvement in communities of justice involves an understanding (13:51) that goes beyond the mere mastery of theories of justice (i.e., concerns for 'orthodoxy'); it involves learning how to constantly balance "both new and old" (13:52) in arriving at what is best (i.e., concerns for 'orthopraxy') in aiming for justice. The happiness (13:44, 5:1-12) of that gift of discernment is what makes for genuine celebration in community; but to fail to discover and appropriate these "precepts" (Ps 119:134) brings on a sadness that can only be described as the "weeping and grinding of teeth" (Mt 13:50). DP

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 19, 1990

Psalm 104:25-31
Isaiah 55:1-5
Romans 8:35-39
Matthew 14:13-21

FIRST READING

The emphasis in Matthew's story of the feeding of the 5,000 is on depiction of Jesus and his disciples as a ministering community. The miracle is preceded by healings (rather than by instruction, as in Mark), and these are wrought from Jesus' characteristic compassion for the crowds (cf. 15:32; 20:34).

The setting in the wilderness recalls not only the gift of manna to Israel in the days of Moses but also, more directly, Jesus' previous sojourn in the wilderness and his own hunger there (4:2). Now we learn that although Jesus refused to miraculously produce bread to satisfy himself, he does not hesitate to do so in behalf of others. This is because he has come "not to be served but to serve" (20:28), a motto that must describe the community of his followers as well.

The feast that takes place in the wilderness contrasts sharply with that just reported in the palace of Herod, which culminated in the gruesome service of a prophet's head on a platter. Thus, Matthew would have us compare the ugliness of an evil world where people care more for the thoughts of their own kind than for the judgment of God (14:9; cf. 10:28) with the caring community where God's rule becomes manifest. In the world, tyrants like Herod will lord over others, using their authority oppressively (20:25), but Jesus teaches (20:26-27) and here exemplifies that it must not be so among us. Leaders in Christ's community become servants and exercise power only in the interest of compassion.

Matthew's narration of this tale has definite eucharistic overtones (note: he omits distribution of the fish to highlight that of the bread). But the story's application is not narrowly sacramental; the main point is that human needs are to be met in the community of faith. Material concerns such as physical hunger should not cause anyone to "have to leave" (v. 16). MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

This Sunday's Gospel is one for which even a limited knowledge of Greek serves the preacher well. In order to convey this text's powerful thrust, I have usually shared with the congregation the Greek word for "compassion." A powerful, explosive-sounding word, *esplanchnisthei* reverberates so much more forcefully in the original! It has etymological connections to ancient Hebrew liturgical rites of sacrifice wherein the high order of priests consumed the vital organs of an animal: heart, lungs, kidneys. In its New Testament usage, then, compassion has connections to getting to the heart of things. One way I have translated the text is to say that "Jesus poured his insides out" or "he shared with them his inner-most self." Jesus' compassion was not simply a series of isolated good deeds. It involved commitment to a way of life in which he poured out his deepest powers to those whose lives he touched.

We preachers struggle with the appropriate boundaries of personal sharing in our sermons, in our pastoral counseling, in our calling and conversations. Where are the limits to gut-sharing and soul-baring? If we err, perhaps it is too often on the side of being professionally reserved and personally aloof.

The Gospel reminds me of a journey by boat to a place called Copapayo in El Salvador. The trip followed several days of frustrating encounters with Salvadoran military bureaucrats and local commanders who refused us passage. Finally, we were given permission to cross Lake Suchitoto by boat and make our pastoral visit to this tiny village in an embattled remote region. The people of Copapayo live in constant fear of invasion by military troops. Nevertheless, they are building homes, planting crops, and re-constructing their shattered lives. A man named "Inocente" (literally, the innocent one) told tearfully of the day years before when he returned home to find his wife and four children beheaded in a military massacre. Others shared equally horrifying stories of their losses. They described the darkest and most sinister workings of this world's evil powers and principalities.

When it came time for the noon meal, it was obvious that food was scarce in Copapayo. Daily sustenance for many consisted in a few tortillas made from rough corn and a simple bowl of rice. In typical Salvadoran hospitality, we visitors were served first. I feared that my eating meant that someone with far greater need for nourishment would forego a meal. By the miracle of sharing, however, it appeared as though all—both villagers and guests—were fed.

My motive in making the journey was to share a small measure of compassion with a suffering people. Instead I found myself receiving far more than I could give as the courageous people of Copapayo poured out their very selves. They shared their deep spiritual wisdom and compassion with me! MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

"Send the people away to buy themselves some food" (14:15), the disciples say. Jesus sees things in a different way, however, and encourages them to do something themselves. No matter

how small our resources, we must do something. It's in that way that communities of justice participate with the Creative Spirit who keeps on "renewing the world" (Ps 104:30).

But there's more to communities of justice than relating to the external contexts of need around us. The soul of the community itself needs to be fed (Isa 55:2-3). And even when communities of justice have to deal with imprisonment and death (John the Baptist, Steve Biko, Nelson Mandela), the experience of compassionate community will nourish a faith which knows that "not any power can ever come between us and the love of God made visible" (Rom 8:39) in Christ communities! DP

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 26, 1990

Psalm 85:8-13
1 Kings 19:9-18
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:22-23

FIRST READING

Jesus' power and authority can be emulated by his followers. Peter exemplifies this in Matthew's Gospel by actually succeeding, if only for a moment, in walking on the water.

In this story, we witness once again the disciples coming to "understanding" (see discussion on Pentecost 10). At first the disciples, like Herod (14:1-2), think Jesus is a ghost. But, unlike Herod, they ultimately come to recognize him as the Son of God (v. 33).

This story has obvious parabolic significance. The boat ("ship of faith") may symbolize the church, and the stormy sea may represent the many trials that beset God's people. Disciples are prone to fear, we learn, because of their little faith (*oligopistoi*, a favorite term in Matthew; cf. 6:30, 8:2, 16:8). But to be a person of little faith is not the worst thing in the world. According to Jesus, faith as a grain of mustard seed is sufficient for the removal of mountains (17:20).

So Peter walks on the water, little faith and all, and when he falters Jesus is there to prevent him from drowning. In spite of his doubt (v. 31) he and his companions in the boat are able to worship Jesus and confess that he is the Son of God (v. 15).

This is Matthew's view of the church. Interestingly, the only other time Matthew ever describes the disciples as worshipping Jesus is also the only other time that he specifically describes them as doubters (28:17; the word "some" in the RSV is not in the Greek text).

The church is a community of worshipping doubters, composed of persons of "little faith" who are nevertheless capable of accomplishing the impossible through the assistance of Jesus. Jesus not only inspires his followers to attempt such miracles but also stands ready to save them when their doubt and fear cause them (inevitably?) to fail. MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Close encounters with raging, uncontrolled fires I have been spared thus far. I have, however, experienced in full terror the other two natural forces wherein Elijah sought God. Great wind storms on the Minnesota farm where I grew up could be terrifying, especially when they struck during hours of darkness. And as with all residents of the San Francisco Bay area, I can tell you precisely where I was when the Quake of '89 shook our souls as well as our real estate. In the midst of howling winds and psyche-shattering temblor, I too have sought holy meanings. But for me, as for Elijah, it is in the still, small voice that God has spoken most often.

Whose are the still, small voices that whisper for attention in your congregation and community? The soft-spoken ones are there in every parish I know. These quiet, reserved persons rarely speak up at the annual meeting. Their voices probably are not heard on the church council. Yet theirs is often great wisdom for the whole community. I think that some of my best

sermons as a parish pastor followed a round of shut-in calling in which I simply shared some wisdom from one whose voice could not otherwise be heard in the congregation.

Both within the church family, and in the larger community, still small voices speak softly with deep pathos and passion. On the AIDS wards of a local hospital, weakened and emaciated bodies of God's children lie row upon row. The voices are weakened and small, sometimes still. To those who behold with the eye of faith, Jesus comes walking. A colleague was recently summoned to an AIDS deathbed to baptize. A bedside basin became a baptismal font. The Word of God came together with full power over the water to birth a dying man into new life as a holy child of God!

Yet other small voices beckon us listen in these times. Women's voices are often not heard over the clangor of male violence in our society. According to FBI figures, at least one of every four women in the U.S. can expect to be the victim of violence at the hands of an intimate partner during her lifetime. Statistically, the average female city-dweller is safer at night on the city's toughest street corner than in her own home. The church has too often assented to domestic violence by elevating the sanctity of marriage over the sacredness of life itself. As the women's movement has gathered momentum, sensitive, caring sisters have reached out over troubled waters to give shelter, to provide sanctuary, to offer legal assistance and restrain the violent storms of men. The empowerment of a battered woman helps break the sinister silence which allows abuse to continue. In her voice, trembling and fear-filled as it may be, the newly empowered woman can claim her anger and speak the awful truth she has endured.

Listen for the still, small voices in your neighborhood—God is calling! Watch for the water-walker on your stormy seas—Jesus roams again! MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

Transcending "courage" (Mt 14:27) stems from transcending experiences. The psalmist (of Ps 85), Elijah, Peter, and Paul could assure us of that. They all had the transcending experience of feeling and knowing the presence of God. Communities of justice are sustained only when they possess such a faith.

A correct analysis and a common ideology aren't enough to sustain communities of justice in the stormy times of struggle and repression. The soul of community can only be sustained around a common spiritual experience. It comes in the "gentle breeze" (1 Kgs 19:12) and in the quiet presence of faithful community. And it is always at the Spirit's initiation; it is always a gift!

There is just no other explanation for those who seem to attempt the impossible. Whoever said it understood... "you'll never walk on water 'til you get out of the boat." DP

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 2, 1990

Psalm 67
Isaiah 56:1, 6-8
Romans 11:13-15, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

FIRST READING

In discussion of the texts for Pentecost 12 it was noted that Jesus' disciples are typically called persons of "little faith" in Matthew. Here, we have a person who is said to have "great faith," the only person to ever be described as such in any of our Gospels.

Modern readers are likely to experience an immediate empathy for this woman and to sense some disappointment with Jesus for hesitating to come to her aid. The story, however, seems to assume a different reaction. In Matthew's own day, it would not be a foregone conclusion that just because Jesus would heal the daughter of a socially significant Jewish male (9:18-19) he would do the same for a socially insignificant Gentile female. Matthew even calls her a "Ca-

naanite," in order to summon for his readers all of the negative OT imagery regarding pagans who do not belong to the covenant of God's chosen.

The "surprise" in this story is not that Jesus hesitates, but that he ultimately does deliver the help that is needed. The hesitation serves to build suspense, to allow the reader to frame the question, "Does Jesus help those who don't deserve his help?" For in the mind of Matthew's intended readers, this woman would surely fit into that category.

Why is this woman's faith so great? Because she realizes what Matthew's reader is to learn from her story: God's mercy is great enough to extend to those who don't deserve it. She recognizes that, although she has no right to claim gifts from God, God will have mercy on her all the same. This insight places her on a level above Jesus' closest (and exclusively Jewish male) disciples. MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Images of wise and courageous women swirl in my mind as I contemplate the Gospel story of the persistent Canaanite woman. A baby is due in our household on this Labor Day weekend!

While I will stand beside my partner in her time of travail and labor, I know I cannot fully comprehend her pain and her courage. So, hail to you, Pamela Cooper-White, as you labor to bring our son or daughter into the world!

And in this 20th anniversary year of Lutheran women's ordination, hail to you, my sisters, colleagues of the collar! You challenge the church to appreciate the depths of your faith and your gifts for ministry. You pioneers of these past two decades have blazed trails through the wilderness of resistance and discrimination. The church's ministry is so much richer for your presence in growing numbers among the ranks of the ordained.

Also, on this Labor Day weekend, the heroic efforts of women for equality in the workplace might be uplifted, even as we acknowledge there's a long way to go toward full equity.

Jesus struggled to break out of cultural boundaries which hindered his appreciation of the great faith he encountered in this Canaanite woman. The woman's plea for her daughter's healing was apparently the occasion for Jesus' own apprehension of the all-inclusive expanse of the gospel.

The great challenge I see before our church in the 90s is to step into the shoes of an inclusive mission. White racism is still perhaps the most potent enemy we face in the North American church. The words we use to exclude are less harsh perhaps than Jesus' when he called the outsider "dog." We may pride ourselves that we are not bigots; we do not overtly discriminate on the basis of race or national origin. So much of contemporary racism is covert, hidden beneath the surface like a deadly submarine. And beyond personal racism, there is institutional racism. Prejudice and exclusiveness are woven into the fabric of every institution in society, including the church.

In spite of all human attempts to exclude, however, "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable," shouts St. Paul in Romans 11! There is no calling halt to a woman about to give birth; no stopping the church's ministry from being graced by women clergy; no inhibiting the gospel from breaking down our human barriers of racism, sexism, and cultural elitism. One by one, and in ever-growing numbers, sisters and brothers who have been excluded persist in claiming their rightful place in the Christian community! MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

The gospel pushes us toward a radical understanding of communities of justice which transcends almost everything our "tradition" (cf. Mt 15:1-20) might have taught us. Our need to be open to the full and transcending implications of "there are others I will gather" (Isa 56:8) can never be overstated.

In the story of the Canaanite woman and her daughter (15:21-28), it's not only a question of who has rights, but who might even have insights into the matter, which come close to the insights of God. In what must be the absolute opposite of all that we have traditionally clung to, the gospel hints that even Jesus must be converted to the

transcending reality that justice relates to very inclusive and universal possibilities. It appears that Jesus is indeed liberated from traditional racist and imperialist attitudes and is converted to a new perspective by the feminist theology of the Canaanite woman. DP

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 9, 1990

Psalm 138
Exodus 6:2-8
Romans 11:33-36
Matthew 16:13-20

FIRST READING

This episode concludes one major section of Matthew's Gospel, one which has dealt with Jesus' ministry to Israel. The very next verse (16:21) will introduce a new section that focuses on Jesus' passion.

The Caesarea Philippi incident is reported quite differently in Matthew than in Mark. Here, Peter confesses Jesus to be not only "the Christ," but also "the Son of God," which in Matthew's Gospel best expresses God's own point of view concerning Jesus (3:17, 17:5). Indeed, Jesus proclaims that such a confession can only be made if the requisite understanding is given by God (v. 17). People (like Peter) to whom such understanding is given form the foundation for the church.

It is only in Matthew that Jesus speaks of the church, much less describes it as his or says that he will build it. The image of the church built on a rock recalls the parable in 7:24-27. True confession of Jesus as "Messiah Son of God" implies hearing and doing his word.

Thus, "binding and loosing" does not refer to granting and withholding forgiveness (an interpretation derived from assimilation to Jn 20:33) but to determining the will of God: discerning what is allowed and what is not. This is also the sense in which exercise of "the keys" should be taken: the church is not here envisioned as guardian of the gateway to a cosmic realm beyond death. Rather, the church unlocks the door for heaven's rule on earth by properly interpreting the will of God according to Jesus' word.

Finally, it is important to note that "gates" are a defensive image. When Jesus says that the gates of hades (or death) will not prevail against the church, he does not mean that the church will withstand their attack. Gates don't attack; they get attacked. Jesus envisions his church as being on the offensive, storming the powers of death, which ultimately give way before it. MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

It is an awesome responsibility to be the keepers of certain types of keys. I watched in somber contemplation a television special which took the viewer inside intercontinental nuclear missile silos. The commonly held image of "the finger on the button" is a false picture. In reality, the two-person missile crews would unleash their horrendous weapons with simultaneous twists of two inter-connected ignition keys. At the conclusion of the bone-chilling program, I found myself praying that we would soon be about the business of mutual disarmament and dismantling those demonic massive agents of death. In the meantime, I pray for the sanity and humility of those men and women who are the keepers of the keys of awesome destruction.

We in the church are the keepers of the keys of salvation! Ours is also an awesome authority and responsibility! A lot of people out there live fearful, lonely lives in search of a key to freedom and liberation—people locked in desperation by addictions, poverty, or fear of death. Many are locked out of meaningful relationships. No one will listen to their stories and help them discover new ways of relating.

People have died for lack of a key. On a freezing cold night, a lost hiker happens upon a shelter in the woods. But because the fellow does not have the key, he freezes to death before morning. A fire in an apartment where children

sleep alone is noticed by a neighbor. Because she does not have the key, the children die of smoke inhalation before the fire department arrives.

Key-seekers are living quiet lives of desperation in your town and mine. Arrogant and self-righteous sloganeering will not suffice as Christian witness. "Christ is the answer" is an inadequate response to those who are still formulating their questions. Isn't our calling rather to share openly our own searching? I'm a key-seeker, too! Can we search together? With Luther we confess that we are all beggars, searching together for the key that will open the bread-box!

Even the "rock-solid" imagery of Peter's confession can become a stumbling block for those who come near the faith with doubts and questions. Coming home from a seashore visit some months ago, I presented my life-partner with a small, sensuous rock that caught my eye while walking on the beach. She was delighted with this rock that had a hole in one corner. Is there room in our communities for those whose faith has a few holes, yet is basically solid and sturdy? Considering the subsequent history of Jesus' number one rock-solid disciple, it seems as though there ought to be! MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

"Impossible" as it may seem, the task of Christ communities is to probe the depths of the 'methods' and 'mind' of God (cf. Rom 11:33-34). That is what the biblical tradition is all about. As we cultivate our own communities of justice today, we remain in dialogue with that tradition because it provides the principles we need for shaping faith (theory) and life (praxis) in a world of injustice and oppression. It puts us in touch with the 'mind' of God which continues to hear "the groaning" of the oppressed and remembers the "covenant" to bring justice (cf. Ex 6:5).

If we examine ecclesiastical methodology today we could do worse than to use Psalm 138 to see how close various practices are to the "love and faithfulness" (v. 2) of God. And if we let that psalm lead us, we also come to an appreciation for how the 'mind' of God can distinguish between "the humble" and "the arrogant" (v. 6). It leads me to wonder about the arrogance of what is passed off as a witness to 'the Christ' from the various 'evangelism' departments of many of our church bodies. Jesus' admonition in Matthew 23:15 is not at all inappropriate here. But at the same time I am led to celebrate the humble witness to justice which is happening in a variety of places where the "groanings" of marginalized people have been heard and doors have been opened to creative 'methodologies' in a search for what it means to be Christ communities in our contemporary world. You can see it in ministries like the Berkeley (CA) Emergency Food Project, or the Lutheran Compass Center in Seattle, or in the ministry at Luther Place in Washington, D.C. There are certainly many other places, but I single these out as just a few illustrations of processes where the 'mind' and 'method' of the Christ are being pursued. DP

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 16, 1990

Psalm 26
Jeremiah 15:15-21
Romans 12:1-8
Matthew 16:21-26

FIRST READING

Peter, as the first of Jesus' disciples to be given the revelation of divine faith (see Pentecost 14) may pre-eminently and justifiably be known as the "rock" of the church. But now we realize that this rock can also be a "stumbling stone" (v. 23). Matthew is playing with the imagery of Isaiah 8:14-15, 28:16 here. Elsewhere in the NT, the double role of the rock/stumbling stone is ascribed to Christ (Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6-8).

Coming right on the heels of Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, this incident serves to highlight the potential for Christian community

to express either the point of view of God (which must be given to it, 16:17) or the point of view of Satan (which corresponds to human thinking, 16:23). The latter is supremely expressed in resistance to the cross.

The thoughts of God always defy human wisdom (Isa 55:8), and this is never more true than with regard to the cross (1 Cor 1:18). God's wisdom evaluates the present from an eschatological perspective, hence the paradoxes expressed in v. 25. It is only from this perspective, available to us by faith, that the call to take up one's cross may be viewed as an invitation to a better life.

It is interesting that Jesus' words to Peter, "Get behind me Satan!" actually use the same language employed in v. 28 ("come after me"). Even when Peter is behaving like Satan, the message he receives from Christ is not to "go away," but to assume the proper position of a disciple—following behind Jesus. MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Joseph Sittler advised us preachers to have in our lives an area of "contrapuntal competence." For the sake of balance and renewal, argued Sittler, learn to do something well, master a body of knowledge apart from theology and pastoral practice. Just as counterpoint in music makes the main theme more distinctive, so our avocations enhance our ministries.

An area in which I claim a certain degree of competence is aviation. As a flight instructor, I teach my students two critical points on their first lesson: 1) you can't stand still, and 2) you can't back up! Confronted with an obstacle, you can go over or around or maybe under, but you can't back up. Once you're airborne, unless you're in a helicopter, you must keep moving forward.

Jesus taught Peter that same lesson in the Gospel for this Sunday: there's no standing still or backing up on the journey to the cross. This mission has taken flight, and it can only move forward.

For me, this Gospel has always had a close connection with the Palm Sunday story as told by Luke. When the Pharisees demanded that Jesus quiet his disciples and the multitudes, he answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out." Both here with Peter, and on the outskirts of Jerusalem as Holy Week begins, Jesus speaks of the unceasing nature of the gospel campaign. Nothing can stand in the way. No one can halt the movement.

In a lecture on spirituality, Henri Nouwen used the metaphor of entering a house. Leaving behind the house of fear, he said, we are beckoned to enter the house of love. One of my spiritual mentors, Salvadoran Bishop Medardo Gomez, was frustrated late one evening in his home city of San Miguel. We had planned to stay in the home where he grew up, but the neighbor who kept the key was nowhere to be found. Finally, in his unabated intensity, the good bishop charged the door like a fullback hitting the line. The steel padlock hasp broke, a deadbolt anchored in concrete gave way, and the front door flew open. There is no stopping a person with a mission who is bound and determined to enter the house of love!

The Gospel confronts us with the unceasing forward movement of the liberating gospel campaign. The text from Romans reminds us that the crosses we bear may be heavy, but we do not bear them alone. There are many members in this body and we bear one another's burdens. And when we are wearied by the unrelenting cross-trek, with Jeremiah, we can "eat the words of God" and be renewed for the journey ahead! MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

This set of lessons lifts up a concern for the relationship of worship to the 'mind' and 'methods' of God. It is in communities which understand their praxis as worship that there is a thoughtful (Rom 12:1) process for discovering "the will of God and what is good, what it is that God wants" (Rom 12:2).

Now when worship centers around the Christ (Mt 16:16) it takes on a very specific way of thinking about a very specific way of life. That thinking and that way of life involve the cross. And a lot of re-thinking needs to happen about how glibly we utilize the cross in worship when we so often resist it in our lives. Matthew asks the

really tough question, and with a bit of paraphrasing it might come out like this: What kind of worship is possible when we have turned our lives over to 'the world'? (cf. Mt 16:26). Jesus had to face up to the cross precisely because he refused to worship what 'the world' had to offer and because he refused "to sit down with the wicked" (Ps 26:5). DP

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 23, 1990

Psalm 119:33-40
Ezekiel 33:7-9
Romans 13:1-10
Matthew 18:15-20

FIRST READING

The abiding presence of God/Christ in the community of faith is a major theme in Matthew (1:23; 18:5,20; 25:40,45; 28:20). Here the emphasis is on the special power that such a community discovers when it is able to agree in prayer.

But agreement is not always possible. Dissension will arise, and Jesus advises his disciples how to handle it. Verses 15-17 probably derive from a primitive Jewish-Christian (or simply Jewish) discipline code. Such rules for excommunication have been found, for example, at Qumran. In their present context, however, these words do not serve to prescribe the proper procedure for excommunication but to encourage the recovery of the lapsed or lost. The concern is not primarily to preserve a pure community but to prevent unnecessary attrition.

This can be seen clearly in Matthew's placement of the code. He has taken what was originally a set of rules for removing members from the community and situated it neatly between the parables of the lost sheep and the unforgiving servant. Hence, we may surmise that Matthew never wanted anyone to read this code without first hearing what Jesus said about it being God's will that not one should perish, and without afterward hearing what Jesus said about unlimited forgiveness (see Pentecost 17). Unfortunately, our lectionary may have thwarted Matthew's purpose to some extent—though the wise pastor always looks at lessons in context.

Our best manuscripts omit the words "against you" in v. 15. This is significant, because it shifts the concern of those addressed from simply righting a wrong done to them to looking out for the spiritual welfare of others in the community. The point is that, in the church, we are all responsible for each other. MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

"Question Authority," insists the bumper-sticker that became one of the key symbols of the 1960s and is still seen with some regularity, at least in California! Authority questions abound in church and society.

The authority of clergy and associates in ministry within the larger priesthood of believers is a major question in the ELCA's study of ministry. The authority of congregations, synods, and churchwide units is an area of constant consultation and negotiation in a church which was founded in a commitment to "inter-dependence." As a synod staff person, I often consult with congregations in conflict; frequently the conflict revolves around core issues of authority. Who gave the pastor permission to let that group use our building? By whose authority did the Christian education committee over-spend their budget? What right has the pastor to write personal opinions in letters on church stationery?

Our church has historically respected and upheld the rights of individuals who feel compelled to commit acts of civil disobedience. We have long recognized that Romans 13 must be held in tension with Revelation 13. There may come a point when the government acts with such dreadful injustice that we must conclude that demonic forces have supplanted legitimate, God-given authority. We can never grant unquestioned obedience to civil authority. Finally, we must obey God rather than oppressive or unjust human authority.

A sermon on Romans 13 may require some personal struggle with questions of the relationship of faith and patriotism. A number of my colleagues have been faced with parish controversy surrounding the appropriate place of national flags in the church buildings. Such hot topics are better dealt with in adult forums than in sermons which allow no give-and-take. Still, faithfulness to our ordained calling will also require prophetic sermons which remind ourselves and our hearers of God's ultimate authority.

Matthew 18:15ff offers a time-honored process of conflict resolution. A number of ELCA synods have designed conflict-mediation processes based upon this scriptural model. A sermon that lifts up these ancient but ever-relevant biblical guidelines for open and honest confrontation in mutual respect could be important to your faith community. Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* continues to be a valuable resource.

"Setting loose" must become part of a Christian lifestyle. People are weighed down with heavy burdens. Gospel proclamation must include reminding each other who and what we are. "You're an eagle, not a chicken," a visitor to the chicken yard whispered in the ear of the young bird who had fallen among the roosters. "You're made by God to soar above the tallest trees, and play among the clouds!" Hearing the message, the eagle extended its wings and took off, to live like a chicken no more! MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

The previous lessons (Pentecost 15) make it clear that when self is put at God's disposal, and that is at the heart of worship, it is the common good and community (Rom 12:4,5) which is served. And when that community life is somehow threatened by the actions of a community member, there is a kind of "sentry" (Ezek 33:7) responsibility which comes into play. But it begins with a one-to-one approach (Mt 18:15), and that seems based on the fact that there is a high level of maturity within the community, and while that's not said explicitly it may be the most important thought here. Too often there is a tendency to turn Jesus' guidance into a disciplinary methodology to be followed like 'step one, step two, step three...' in some legalistic manner. But the real intent here (and it began already in the words about "the greatest" in 18:4) relates to the need to strive for maturity. That means learning how to handle conflict in an adult way, always with a commitment to nurturing community and making a contribution to the common good. Paul sees it in terms of the responsibility of "mutual love" (Rom 13:8), and that gets at the meaning of the deeper justice (Mt 5:20) to which Christ communities are called. DP

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 30, 1990

Psalm 103:1-13
Genesis 50:15-21
Romans 14:5-9
Matthew 18:21-35

FIRST READING

The entire eighteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel is a call for the community of Christ to live in the grace of God that brought it into being. This thought is expressed most beautifully perhaps in the parable of the unforgiving servant, with which the chapter concludes.

Peter's question about forgiveness introduces the parable. Jesus' answer is, of course, rhetorical: the point is not that forgiveness should be granted 490 (or possibly 77) times, but that forgiveness must be limitless. The answer exposes a ludicrous fallacy in Peter's thinking: if one is still counting, then one has not yet forgiven. True forgiveness occurs in relationships where no one keeps score.

The parable also exposes ludicrous ways in which humans act, holding each other to account for every petty debt. "What if God were to treat us that way?" Jesus' story asks. The starting point for our relationships with each other should be an

awareness of our standing with God. We are all recipients of manifold and undeserved grace; we should therefore be gracious in our dealings with each other.

The parable makes this point with grotesque hyperbole. The man in the story actually owes his master over five hundred thousand times as much as the debt that he refuses to forgive. Such is the discrepancy, Jesus would have us believe, between our debt of sin before God and the relatively inconsequential slights that we receive from others.

Although Matthew is not always Pauline, this parable leads to recognition of a Pauline truth: all have sinned and stand in need of God's mercy (Rom 3:23). Blessed, then, are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy (Mt 5:7). MAP

PASTORAL REFECTIONS

A sermon title printed in the bulletin might be crucial in trying to preach about "Fore-giving." People readily understand the meaning of forgiving as granting pardon for past acts. A more radical stance is called for by Jesus when he mandates "seventy times seven" or unlimited forgiving.

Fore-giving is the pre-authorized credit system. Before I even apply, the credit is extended in my name. Fore-giving is an attitude which not only says, "I forgive all the hurtful things you've done in the past." Fore-giving goes the second mile and says, "I will forgive whatever you do to me in the future." Fore-giving is the "for worse" and "for poorer" clauses in the marriage vows. It's the unspoken covenant a parent cuts with a child when the umbilical cord is severed: "Come what may, child of mine, we'll see it through together."

Surely, forgiveness does not mean letting another person perpetrate physical or psychological violence. The loving (and healing) thing to do in some circumstances may be to set limits, even end a relationship that has ceased to be life-giving and has become death-dealing. Urging premature forgiveness on survivors of incest or battering, for example, would result from a false understanding of the deeper meaning of Jesus' teaching. Forgiveness follows true and honest repentance. Fore-giveness likewise assumes that contrition precedes pardon.

In my pastoral experience, the most difficult forgiving is often self-pardon. Some persons can readily forgive others but find it impossible to forgive themselves and be released from some burden of guilt. A gentle reminder of Joseph's question, "Am I in the place of God?" might encourage the one so guilt-laden to accept divine forgiveness and self-pardon as well. If God has forgiven me (and Christ has died for me), who am I to hold onto guilt and self-punishment?

Authentic Christian community is simply not possible without a heavy dose of radical fore-giving. In an increasingly diverse society, healthy congregational life requires greater tolerance of different viewpoints and cultural particularities. Paul wrestled with tough issues such as eating meat, observing the sabbath, or drinking wine (see Romans 14). Perhaps even more gut-wrenching are today's church struggles with inclusive language, age of first communion, or sex education in the Sunday School curriculum. Living amidst great diversity, we will be pulled in many directions. A high degree of "evangelical elasticity" will be required to expand the community's boundaries and thus be more inclusive. MC-W

PROPHETIC VOICE

Organizing community and maintaining community are based on the same principle of mercy which is so fundamental to the 'Matthew tradition.' Community is, in and of itself, the embodiment of mercy; it is the ultimate symbol that we are never treated "as our guilt and our sins deserve" (Ps 103:10). It is not based on any rationalizations about our sins and shortcomings, but on our being accepted in spite of them. And community can be nurtured and sustained only where that kind of acceptance prevails. That's what the parable (Mt 18:23-35) is all about. No one lies about or falsifies 'the debt' in question; there's not even a thought about 'restructuring' the debt (which is the unfortunate reality for so many Third World nations and family farmers in

the U.S.A.). It is simply cancelled! And so we "belong" to God (Rom 14:8) not in any sense of being *paid for*; there is an unconditional belonging based on mercy and acceptance!

So belonging to communities governed by "the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:23), according to the 'Matthew tradition,' meant that entry was based exclusively and unconditionally on mercy. And continued participation in the community is based on the same terms. The story of Joseph and his brothers (Gen 50:15-21) is a prime illustration that only mercy can govern authentic community relationships.

When "accounts" (18:23) are settled on the basis of mercy, one's only accountability is to pursue all relationships in terms of mercy. DP

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 7, 1990

Psalm 27:1-13
Isaiah 55:6-9
Philippians 1:1-5 (6-11), 19-27
Matthew 20:1-16

FIRST READING

The parable describes one more way in which the rule of heaven defies human understanding. Human wisdom decrees equal pay for equal merit, but people do not receive what they deserve in the rule of heaven. They receive what God chooses to give them, which may be far better, far more than what they have earned.

Who could possibly object to such a practice? Only the most self-righteous, of course. Unfortunately, there may be a lot of them around.

What creates trouble is the all-too-human tendency of comparing oneself with others. Even the first-hired workers in Jesus' parable are the recipients of grace: they have been *chosen* for work in the master's vineyard, and their reward for this service is no less than they were promised. Instead of appreciation for what they have received, however, they harbor only resentment that others, less deserving, have received the same. The resentment, no doubt, is brought on by the realization that what they receive, also, is more a credit to the master's generosity than to their own inherent worth. It is always humbling to realize that we receive God's blessings in life because God is good rather than because we are good.

Although the lectionary does not show it, this parable is actually framed by an antiphonal saying regarding the first being last and the last first (19:30; 20:16). This saying expresses its central meaning. Elsewhere, Matthew shows us what it means to be "first": it means to be servant of all, to be one who does not put oneself ahead of others (20:20-27). This attitude is precisely the opposite of that evinced by those "first-hired" in Jesus' parable; thus, although they are "first," they are really last.

This parable (like that of the father with two sons in Luke 15) pits justice (traditionally conceived) against mercy and exposes the superiority of the latter. Those who want justice from God may receive it: "take what belongs to you and go" (v. 14). But the truly blessed in the rule of heaven are those who choose mercy instead. MAP

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Today's Gospel is not a ready proof-text for labor movements or advocates of "comparable worth"! Indeed, it is the kind of text which has been misused to say to the poor and victims of injustice, "Be content with your lot; you receive your due. You who work in garment sweat shops or at home doing piece-work and never receive overtime, don't complain! You who are exploited because you can't produce proper immigration documents, keep silent! You are paid what was contracted. So what if others work less and still receive equal or higher pay? Be glad you have a job at all!"

The Scriptures for the day, both Old Testament and New, are not explicitly about economic arrangements or just labor/management relationships. Both Isaiah and Matthew point toward

God's unexpected and unlimited grace. Isaiah describes God's thoughts and God's ways as "higher" than our own, meaning that God's thoughts and ways are love-giving, forgiveness-declaring, and joy-producing. Matthew declares that God's highest desire is to give full measure of wholeness (salvation) to all who come to the vineyard. The combination of these lessons is a radical declaration of salvation by grace, justification by faith. Heaven holds no hierarchies. When it comes to grace, all are freely ushered into the highest income brackets.

While these ancient Scriptures cannot offer detailed answers to modern economic questions, they nevertheless do carry practical pedagogy for our contemporary world. We are all of equal measure in God's eyes. Just economic orders are of concern to God and the church of Jesus Christ. They are not bringers of salvation, to be sure. But they are signs of authentic communities that dwell in God's *shalom*.

Another practical parish implication in the texts has to do with how "late-comers" are welcomed into the fellowship. Robert Hoyt of the ELCA's Division for Outreach has designed a ministry evaluation process which includes as a central focus this whole matter of welcoming the stranger. Ministries which would reach people in our highly mobile generation must cultivate the art of quickly welcoming newcomers. This kind of outreach is built upon trust. The stranger is trusted as a "partner in the gospel," to use St. Paul's words, without first having to present his or her credentials.

In my former parish, we made an intentional decision to welcome strangers from Mexico and Central America. Many of them did not have proper immigration documents. Certain legal risks were involved, yet we decided to make ourselves vulnerable. And oh, how richly our ministry was blessed as foreigners and "aliens" quickly became "sisters" and "brothers"! MC-W

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