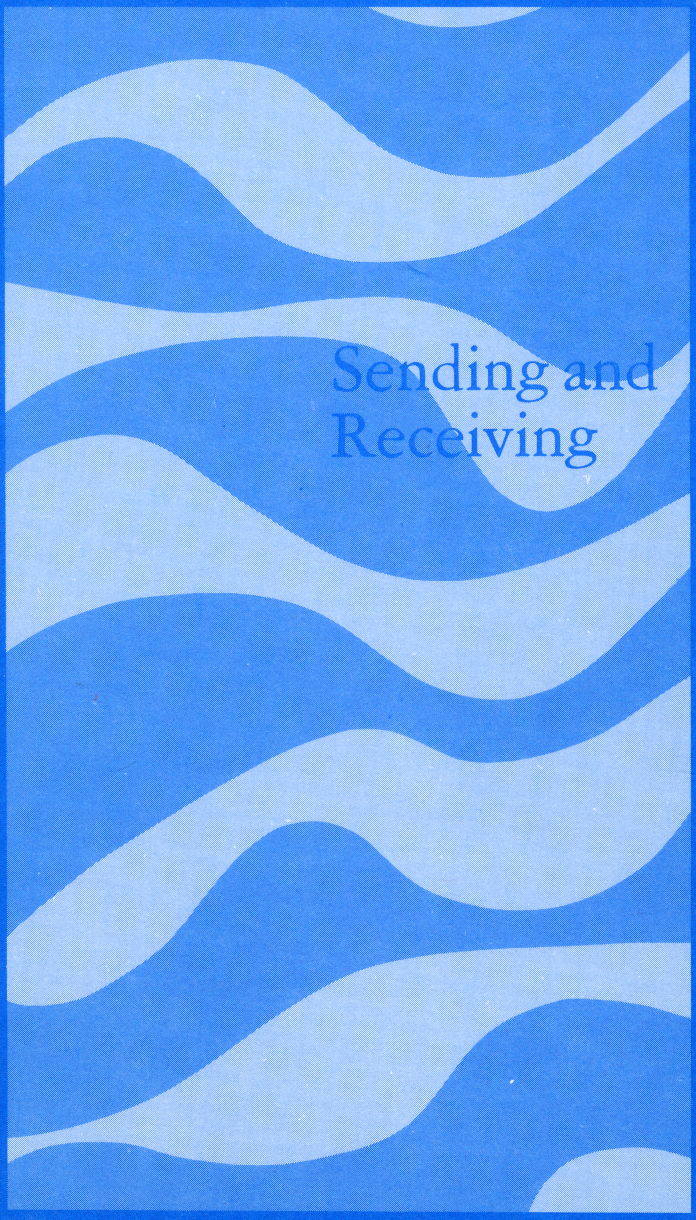
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Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Editor of Book Reviews: **Jay C. Rochelle**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Editor of Preaching Helps: **Robert H. Smith**
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
Wartburg Theological Seminary

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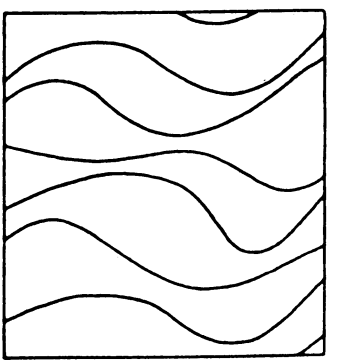
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Sending and Receiving

Most of us were brought up to think of mission as "sending"—to India or Nigeria, to hospitals or slums, or to new or unchurched communities in North America. That was and is a very good definition; we need to pray daily that the Spirit would equip us as those who are sent. But mixed in with sending, at least in the past, was a good deal of political and cultural imperialism and of insensitivity to the gifts of the Spirit "over there" or "out there" or "in there." Sisters and brothers from the Two Thirds World and from marginalized communities closer to home have forcefully borne witness back to us in recent years. We have learned to receive, slowly and sometimes painfully. The collection of articles in this issue—all written by members of the Wartburg faculty—explore the creative dynamic of sending-and-receiving.

Roger W. Fjeld used his opening sermon last year to urge students, set-apart by the church and the Holy Spirit, to come apart for a while in order to learn to embrace the mission of the gospel in a broken world. If mission is the focus of the church, witness is the central task to which we are called. He urged the seminary to view itself as a community that sends out in mission.

Wartburg began as a mission of Wilhelm Loehe and the community at Neuendettelsau. After moving around to several communities in Illinois and Iowa, Wartburg eventually returned to Dubuque for good a century ago. **W. H. Weiblen** tells the story of one of Wartburg's most

famous theologians, John Michael Reu (1869-1943). An expert in Luther, Reu, who had also been sent by Loehe, wrote a nine-volume history of the use of Luther's catechism from 1530–1600 and enough books and articles to fill a 55-page bibliography. He taught *everything* in the curriculum and initiated a program in graduate studies and a continuing education effort now known as the Lutheran Academy of the Rockies. The focus of his dogmatics was the communion of God with humanity.

Norma Cook Everist investigates the relationship between sending and receiving partners in mission and ministry. In human relationships dependency hinders development; in many relationships one partner ignores the other, patronizes the other, or forcefully keeps the other down. People who depend on God, however, are freed and empowered to develop fully. When interdependence characterizes relationships, partners trust each other and realize that each partner has—and lacks—certain gifts. Thanks to the Trinity, we are created, liberated, and empowered for development of our gifts and for caring and courageous interdependence.

Howard S. Olson, long-time missionary in Africa, reflects on the reasons for the astonishing growth of Christianity on that continent. Credit the witness of lay Christians and the pioneering work of trail-blazing missionaries. But also recognize the power of the Bible, now available in more than 500 African languages; in the Scriptures Africans discover for themselves essential Christianity. Many Africans also find correlations between Christianity and traditional religions. They do not find in Christ a contradiction of their spiritual aspirations, but instead a fulfillment, a yes and not a no.

Can a contemporary theology of justification be faithful to its heritage without being intrinsically a theology of liberation? **Winston D. Persaud** says no, but his review of the theologies of Gutierrez and Sobrino also shows that freedom to disagree can characterize a healthy interdependence. At times there seems to be less grace in liberation theology for those who are not involved in liberation movements than for those who are. How do we overcome the problem of reducing revelation

to the findings of critical reflection, or reducing Christian faith to the consequences of correct praxis? Is liberation theology tempted to get rid of the hiddenness of God?

Edwin A. Schick uses the book of Hebrews to outline his theology of mission and ministry. Since Christ secured eternal redemption by entering into the Holy of Holies as the great High Priest, there are no more Christian priests, but only priestly Christians. The Holy of Holies for Christ was outside the camp, and so Christ's followers are pilgrims, outward bound, where he was on Good Friday and where he still is today.

For **Ralph F. Smith** the gospel is not just information about Jesus, but a way of life. Our sense of place shapes how the gospel is shared in mission. Jesus cannot be separated from his places, nor the gospel from our places. Rural life, which reflects the daily sense of place generated by the land, provides a paradigm for connecting life and mission. Liturgy, too, is an integrating experience for Christians because it connects facets of life we tend to keep separate. What happens in worship is a never-ending gift exchange. What we give is our sense of place; what we receive is a renewed sense of our place. The gospel is a map which allows us to experience the territory of our lives in new ways.

When Jesus sent the disciples in mission, he urged them to pronounce peace on every house they entered. When we are on the receiving end of mission, we receive in peace God's peace. In the wonderful words of the Authorized Version, all of us who are sent are to be "given to hospitality."

Shalom!

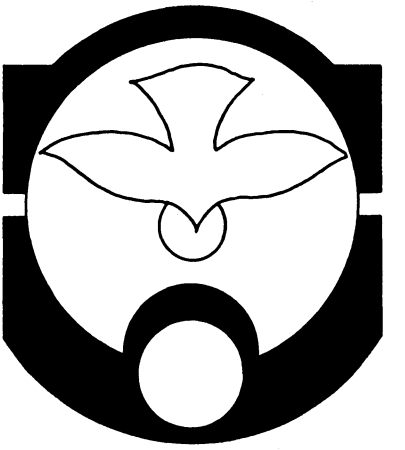
Ralph W. Klein
Editor

A Set-Apart and a Sending-Out Community

Roger W. Fjeld
President, Wartburg Theological Seminary

Excerpts from a sermon preached by President Fjeld at the first service of the 1988-89 academic year at Wartburg

Some important pieces of biblical language have fallen on hard times in modern America. Among them are two which have special significance to this seminary community as some of you begin your studies here and as all of us begin a new seminary year. If we can recover them and apply them to our time and place, these two will enrich our life together. Both appear in that short passage in Acts 13 which is the account of the selection of Barnabas and Saul as missionaries for the gospel. Both of them call a particular community to action. They can also serve to call *this* community and



the whole ELCA to action! Taken together, they can be and ought to be central to the way we see ourselves as individuals and as a community.

We are a Community of Set-Apart People!

The first of the two words is a word translated "to set apart." It appears as a command of the Holy Spirit to the church at Antioch, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." This passage in Acts 13 does not stand alone. It is not the whole story, but it does describe a crucial scene in the lives of two people who became missionaries. It describes their being set apart by the Holy Spirit and the church. The church, in this case, is a congregation. Perhaps the Antioch congregation is an extraordinary one (though in those early days of the life of the church, there really weren't any "ordinary" ones). This one had, as members and leaders, those who were called "prophets and teachers," of whom five are named. For at least a year this congregation and these leaders had been doing theology together. They were not a seminary, but a gathered people of God passionately seeking to understand and to respond to the gospel. For seminarians about to embark on a four-year trek, the idea of one year of study must be attractive, but it is important to remember that Paul and Barnabas had already met the Greek, Hebrew, and Biblical Studies requirements before they started!

In that setting the Holy Spirit spoke, probably through one of those prophets. The command was, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." And the congregation, in response, did just that. Through a laying on of hands two were formally commissioned as missionaries. In recognition of the significance of that event, we use this text regularly in the commissioning service for modern-day missionaries.

You who are students here are people becoming "set apart." First set apart by your baptism, you are now preparing to be called and ordained as Pastors or called and commissioned as Associates in Ministry. Or you are already pastors or lay leaders in your churches in other parts of the world and have come to prepare further. You are set apart by the promise of the gospel; you are sent by the risen Christ on God's mission. Taken together, you comprise a community of set-apart people. And because you are, those who teach here, those who administer, and those who are your husbands or wives or children are also part of a set-apart community.

Or at least, that is the way we should see ourselves. But that reality is neither self-evident nor automatic. The sense of being "set-apart" for ministry is a neglected sense in our world and even in our churches. If each of you could tell the story behind your coming here, some could celebrate the fact that a congregation and a pastor served the prophetic role in calling you to ministry and will follow you and support you as you study. But many others of you would note that you are here on a lonely quest, responding to an inner sense of call but without real congregational and pastoral support. And some of you have come in spite of being discouraged by those who could have been enablers of your calling. In fact, some of you who come as second-career students might have made the ministry your first work, if there had been any encouragement.

Whatever the case, you need now to see yourselves as people set apart by the church to prepare for leadership in the ministry of the gospel. And we need to see ourselves as a community of set-apart people, working together to prepare for a lifetime of shared

work. As you prepare, the church will also be preparing to complete that setting-apart in ordination or commissioning, confirming your inner call and leading you to a setting where you are needed for ministry.

What is the point? Just this: that we all need to shape our life together around the powerful fact that our students are being set-apart by the Holy Spirit for ministry. We are an academic institution and make no apology for expecting academic excellence. We are a professional school and make no apology for expecting you to become thoroughly professional in your understanding and skills. But we are above all a place where the Holy Spirit is continuing to sift and shape and prepare those who have begun to be set-apart for ministry. In being set apart there is a great urgency based on a great promise.

Part of my summer sabbatical reading was Nadine Gordimer's book, *Burger's Daughter*. In that novel about South Africa and the struggles against *apartheid*, Lionel Burger's daughter—the only surviving member of her white family—leaves the South Africa of her father's martyrdom. She leaves because, as she puts it, "I don't know how to live in Lionel's country." In a far country and in a curious way she comes to know that her father's cause is now to be hers, too, and then she can go home to take her turn in the struggle. His mission becomes her mission. In some such sense those who have been set-apart must come apart for a time, to learn how to embrace the mission of the gospel in a broken world. And when that learning has progressed enough, you may go out from here to serve in the places where you are needed. It is in that sense that we need to understand ourselves as a community of set-apart people. That ought to change the way we behave. It ought to change the way we relate to each other. It ought to shape our life together!

We are a Sending Community!

The second important piece of biblical language is the one translated "sent them off." It comes at the conclusion of the text: "Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

Last summer Dr. and Mrs. Erwin Fritschel gave the seminary a book which had been in their family for three generations. It is an "autograph" book which first belonged to Dr. Fritschel's grandfather, Gottfried Fritschel. It was put together by people at the Mission Seminary in Neuendettelsau as that community prepared to send young Fritschel out to America to teach in the new mission seminary in Iowa... to Wartburg. In it are written the prayers, biblical passages, and commendations of people in the sending community. Whatever might have been unknown to young Fritschel about the place to which he was sent, there was no question about the solidarity of the place from which he was sent out! It should not surprise us that the seminary which he and his brother led, in those early years, shaped itself as a sending community. To it came young Germans to finish preparing for ministry in America. And then there also came young people from German-American communities who responded to the call for pastors. This seminary reeked of mission. It lived and breathed mission in those days when it not only trained but also sent out pastors to found and serve over 1000 congregations on the American frontier.

As our church bodies and our congregations have lost some of that passion for outreach, so have our seminaries. We have all become more institutional than is appropriate, given the task to which we are called. As congregations, institutions, and the church body itself, we are all struggling to

give real meaning to our renewed commitment to outreach. It is easy to claim to be in mission, to call ourselves congregations in mission or a seminary in mission or an ELCA in mission. But we've yet to turn the corner by making mission the real passion of pastors and people.

Yet the claim is not hollow. Our congregations would become places of mission if they knew how, or if their own leadership were really given free rein. Many pastors want to break out of a maintenance pattern. You as seminary students want to do more with your lives than help keep sinking ships afloat a little longer. If new zeal for mission is really to develop in our congregations, you, as future pastors and lay leaders, are the key. You will surely be gate keepers, deciding what comes in and goes out in the lives of your congregations. And the seminaries of this church do much to shape you for the tasks of your ministry. Let us not underestimate how much the Spirit can do through us, if we are willing to see ourselves as a sending community, as a place where mission is the focus and witness is the task. Let us not forget that congregations can teach us much about mission on the local scene.

Wartburg people clearly see ourselves as a community, and we have, by most standards, an exceptionally close community of students, faculty, staff, and families. But our community brings us both joy and pain. I sense that we too often focus our community on our own needs without concentrating on mission. When people celebrate community at Wartburg, we tend to celebrate it because we experience caring and support. When we complain about this community, it is because of failure to be as caring and supportive as a Christian community is supposed to be. I'm not suggesting that we devalue what we have as a gathered community. Indeed, I celebrate the degree to which we really are a genuine Christian community. But I am suggesting that we are a community that needs more toughness; giving more attention to the needs of others; more focus on the sending out of those who are ready to serve for the sake of the gospel and the world. We expect both too much and too little from each other. We need to be clear about the special nature of this seminary community as a temporary gathering of set-apart people who are preparing to be sent out.

An illustration jumped off the pages of the history of the first 100 years of the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea. There it is recorded how the earliest indigenous Christians marveled at the commitment of the Mission Seminary at Neuendettelsau. They remembered how that community sent missionaries who came out, worked, died, and were replaced by others sent out by that same committed community. One can imagine how that community received news of missionaries arriving, working, dying, and needing to be replaced.

There was a particular combination of passion and toughness in that seminary community... a passion and a toughness that I covet for this community and this day. Can we be such a place? Can language about mission and witness, about need and service, replace language about career paths and jokes about unfavored synods? Can we pray as fervently about the work of evangelists as we do about fighters for social justice? Can we be excited about the outreach task of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?

We can, we will—through God's grace and power. Let us seek to be a sending community of set-apart people!

J. Michael Reu—A Self-Made Theologian

W. H. Weiblen
President Emeritus
Wartburg Theological Seminary

On September 20, 1989, Wartburg Seminary celebrated the 100th Anniversary of its second beginning in Dubuque, Iowa. Wartburg first began its life in Dubuque in 1854 as a direct result of the missionary efforts of Wilhelm Loehe from Neuendettelsau, Germany. After three precarious years in Dubuque, the seminary was moved to St. Sebald, Clayton, Iowa. Having outgrown the facility at St. Sebald, the seminary was moved to an empty building in Mendota, Illinois in 1875. By 1889 still more space was needed, and a number of cities on the American frontier made offers of sites to attract the seminary to make its home with them.

Dubuque, Iowa made the offer of a beautiful, vacant Victorian mansion, set on 30 acres, on one of the limestone ridges of the southwest part of the city. The offer was accepted, and so the seminary found its permanent home.

The fall of 1989 also marks the 120th anniversary of the birth of one of Wartburg's renowned theologians and educators, Johan Michael Reu (1869-1943). September 1989 is also the 90th anniversary of Professor Reu's call to teach at Wartburg Seminary.

For nearly the first fifty years of its life, the faculty of Wartburg Seminary consisted of the brothers Fritschel, Sigmund and Gottfried, and Director Georg Grossmann. The second phase of Wartburg's life in Dubuque was dominated by the second generation of Fritschels, Maximilian (son of Sigmund) and George (son of Gottfried), and Johan Michael Reu.

Sigmund and Gottfried Fritschel were prepared for their calling as teacher of future pastors by Loehe and his associates in Neuendettelsau. Professor Reu was the last of the faculty sent from Loehe's emergency seminary. Reu stands at the intersection of Wartburg faculty roots in Neuendettelsau and from the wider circles of the Lutheran Church in Europe and America.

Recognizing that any academic institution is ultimately judged by the quality of its faculty and graduates, the Centennial Committee has planned a theological festival to celebrate the contribution of its faculty in the past and present but specifically to focus on new directions for the future. This event will be November 9 and 10, 1989.

It seemed natural to the committee to highlight Professor Reu as the center of that festival. Indeed, Professor Reu is by far



Johan Michael Reu

Wartburg's most extensive and widely-published scholar. Although Reu would not have wanted to have been extolled above his predecessors or successors, he was chosen as the centerpiece of the festival because of his pivotal historical position. Looking at Professor Reu's contribution to scholarship in the church should give all who aspire to serve in the church encouragement and challenge. Professor Reu came out of modest beginnings and very limited formal academic preparation to become a dedicated scholar, faithful theologian, committed educator, and confessional negotiator for Lutheran unity.

Reu's life is also a remarkable testimony to the validity of Wilhelm Loehe's idea to provide another route to prepare people for the parish ministry. Loehe's emergency arrangement, which provided hundreds of pastors for the Lutheran church on the frontier in America, Papua New Guinea, Brazil, and other places, reminds us that the way to learning and creative service need not be bound to established models. Professor Reu stands as a superb example of Loehe's idea that you could take a bright young student with eight to ten years of basic education, teach that student how to study and think, and the student could become a life-long learner and scholar. That is what happened to Professor Reu, for if there ever was a self-made scholar, Reu was certainly that person.

The scholarly output of Reu in quantity and quality is simply amazing. It required 55 typewritten pages just to list the books, mimeographed scripts, and articles that flowed from Dr. Reu's productive pen. Reu wrote no less than 3600 book reviews, as well as substantial articles for the *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, which he edited for nearly 40 years. Reu's monumental nine-volume (sometimes referred to as 11-volume) work on the history and use of Luther's Catechism from 1530 to 1600 (which brought him a Doctor of Theology degree from Friedrich Alexander University in Erlangen, Germany, even before the last volumes were printed), remains the exhaustive and definitive work on that subject.

How was it possible for Professor Reu to achieve what he did? The answer lies primarily in the genius and discipline of Reu himself. Reu, it seems, was not only gifted with a near photographic memory, but he seems to have been born with a scientific, computer-like method of classifying and organizing whatever subject he chose to research.

Some credit for recognizing and channeling the young Reu's gifts goes to the pastor of the congregation in which Reu grew up. Pfarrer Bop tutored Reu in Latin, Greek, and probably Hebrew during the years of Reu's catechetical instruction. He thus may have been the most significant teacher Reu ever had. By teaching Reu the classical languages, Pfarrer Bop helped Reu

discover the foundation for a valid epistemology.

The key components of that epistemology were history and language. Reu came to understand (and stressed in all his teaching) that the historical dimension of the human spirit is its most unique dimension. Human language is the crucial factor in the development of historical consciousness and the greatest facilitator of preserving the record of history. Out of this matrix of history and language Reu was able to absorb the scholarly methods of his historical group, the German Confessional Lutherans, simply by reading the appropriate records.

Reu mastered English very well but did most of his writing in German. During the last years of his teaching he acknowledged to some of his students that he might have made a greater impact with his scholarly efforts if he had forced himself to make the transition to English early in his career.

There are two areas of Reu's scholarship for which he became world renowned: 1) Luther research, and 2) the history and use of Luther's Catechism. In both areas he debunked many popular misconceptions. By going back to long-neglected original sources Reu was able to present a more accurate picture of Luther's great contributions. For example, in his work, "Luther's German Bible," Reu demonstrated that though hymnody was sorely neglected during the years before Luther, it was not totally non-existent, as some popular notions seem to have indicated by extolling Luther as the sole creator of hymnody. Reu wanted to show the great contribution of Luther, but he wanted the estimate of Luther to be enhanced by being accurate.

Similarly, Reu showed that indeed Luther opened up a whole new world for the church and Germany by what he did in getting the Bible into the language of the people. Reu pointed out that Luther's was not the first German Bible, as sometimes excessive praise of Luther might have indicated. By his careful scholarship, Reu demonstrated the uniqueness of the contribution of Luther in regard to the Bible and Catechism. Reu demonstrated how Luther opened the Bible to the people and how Luther developed the Catechism for the home, the school, and the church.

Just as Luther's scholarship was directed to making the eternal message of the Bible come alive with all its power to the people in his (Luther's) time, so also Professor Reu directed his scholarship to helping the pastors and teachers of the church bring the liberating message of the Bible and Reformation to people of today. In other words, Reu's scholarship was pastorally centered. Scholarship, he believed, served the task of theology only if it was practical and applicable to the contemporary life of the people of God.

Reu was called to Wartburg to teach systematic theology. However, during his years of teaching he at one time or another taught every subject in the curriculum. In an article in the *Wartburg Seminary Quarterly*, Dr. Bodensieck provided a summary of what Professor Reu had taught:

> Dr. Reu taught the following subjects: Hebrew, two years; Greek, six years; Introduction to the New Testament, four years; Introduction to the Greek Text, one year; Introduction to the Old Testament, four years; Hebrew exegesis, two years; Old Testament Exegesis on the basis of the translated text, two years; Greek Exegesis: Romans, seventeen years; Galatians, seventeen years; Philippians, twelve years; Ephesians, ten years, and James, ten years; Symbolics, nine years; Life of Luther, three years; Dogmatics, thirty-seven years; Introduction to Theology, two years; for sixteen years he taught Religious Education and for another ten years he taught a one hour course in practical methods;

Liturgics, eight years; Homiletics (Theory), twenty-three years; and Homiletical Exercises, thirty years.[1]

This review of Reu's comprehensive teaching experience also makes clear that Reu's particular area of competence was systematic theology. It was in dogmatics, ethics, and apologetics that Reu excelled as a faithful theologian of the church.

It is not only in his formal treatment of dogmatics, ethics, and apologetics in the respective textbooks (which Reu developed for the classes he taught) that one should look to understand the thrust of his theological thought, but also in the various monographs like "Two Treatises on the Means of Grace" which he wrote. Likewise, a careful study of his many articles, editorial comment, and especially the book reviews which appeared in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift* during the 40 years of his editorship manifests Reu's consistent position in systematic theology.

It was Reu's position that sound theological understanding proceeds from solid exegetical and historical study. Eventually all scholarly efforts in such study came to a focus. Like many before him, Reu found this focus in the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith. This was the material principle that guided Reu in his doctrinal, ethical, and apologetic formulations. The indisputable formal principle of Reu's theology was that of all self-conscious Protestant theologians, namely, the ultimate authority of Scripture. Reu also made the point that he was a confessional theologian and distinguished himself from theologians (with whom he otherwise enthusiastically agreed) like Martin Kähler and Karl Heim.

One could not say that Michael Reu was a creative systematic theologian in the sense of someone like Paul Tillich. Reu was rather a masterful organizer and synthesizer of the vast material from the Bible, the history of doctrine, the Confessions, and the human situation.

Thus Reu's dogmatics is organized around the basic theme of communion between God and humanity. The dogmatics is developed in six main parts as follows:

Part 1: "The Communion of God with Man Grounded in God and His Eternal Decree of Salvation"
Part 2: "Established Through Creation"
Part 3: "Disrupted Through Sin"
Part 4: "Restored in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ"
Part 5: "Appropriated Through the Agency of the Holy Spirit"
Part 6: "Consummated in Eternity"

Clearly, Reu was convinced that the overarching concept of communion between God and humanity brought together the divine/human encounter, and this most appropriately expressed the meaning of justification by grace through faith.

The objective phase of this material principle (the accomplishment of redemption through Christ's death and resurrection) and its subjective phase (its appropriation through faith alone) may be comprised in the one expression—Communion of God with Man.[2]

What Reu did in taking this relational approach is what many of his contemporaries in Germany were doing. Systematicians like Christoph Luthardt and Martin Kähler sought to incorporate the human, experiential side which Luther had integrated so

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[1]Dr. Julius Bodensieck, *Wartburg Seminary Quarterly*, December 15, 1943.

[2]Reu's role as educator is explored by Paul Johnson in "An Assessment of the Educational Philosophy of J. M. Reu Using the Hermeneutic Paradigms of J. F. Herbart and of J. C. K. Von Hofmann and the Erlangen School," 1989 doctoral dissertation at the University of Illinois.

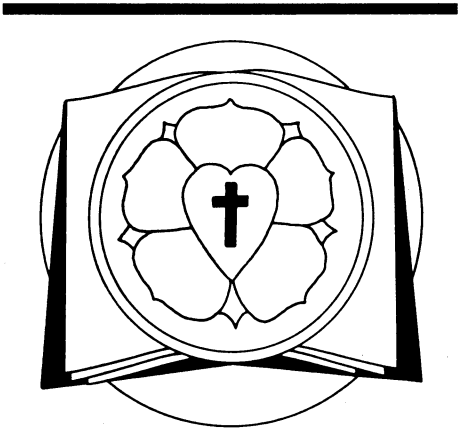
well and which Schleiermacher had reemphasized after great neglect in the time of orthodox rationalism. It is the same motif to which Paul Tillich has given unique emphasis in modern times through his method of correlation.

Reu proceeded to develop his dogmatics by showing how each particular statement of faith was derived from Scripture. He then went on to define the substance of each doctrine and its inner connection with the total of Christian doctrine. Following a review of each doctrine's historical development, Reu concluded by showing how the doctrine was reflected in the experience of the Christian. In other words, what one believes expresses itself in what one understands about oneself and what one does—Christian faith and life belong together. In this way Reu thought of himself as a "practical theologian," and he was not displeased when he was so called by the famous Leipzig, Germany University as Professor of Practical Theology. Reu considered the title an honor and an affirmation of his strong conviction that systematic theology was at the center of pastoral or practical theology.

Some of Reu's most important books were written in practical theology. His *Catechetics* and *Homiletics* are two examples. They are not "how to" books but rather scholarly theologies of catechetics and homiletics.

Mention was made earlier that in addition to his work as a scholar and theologian Reu also contributed to the seminary and the church as an educator and as a negotiator of Lutheran unity. His contributions in these areas will also be given attention during the festival.

As an educator Reu initiated the first graduate studies program at Wartburg in the 1930s. People like O. P. Kretzmann and Martin Scharlemann studied with him at



that time. Reu also initiated what is one of the oldest (if not the oldest) continuing education programs for pastors in America, the Luther Academy. Now known as the Luther Academy of the Rockies, the program was begun by Reu in 1937.

The part Reu played in merger negotiations among Lutherans during the twenties and thirties will be the final area assessed in the November event. As a merger negotiator, Reu was often not as effective as he was as a scholar. It will be interesting to see this side of the self-made scholar and theologian explored now that a half century has passed.

It will also be interesting to see how extensively the assessment of Reu made at the time of his death, by the President of the Lutheran Free Church, has come true:

> He will be remembered as one of the great theologians the Lutheran Church in this country has possessed, and through his books he will continue to teach and witness as a father in the church.[3]

[3]T. O. Burnvedt in *Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, Reu Memorial No. (1945):127.

Dependency Hinders Development

An Exploration of Receiving Relationships

Norma Cook Everist
Associate Professor of Educational Ministry
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The goal of partners in a sending–receiving relationship—whether they be nations, global churches, seminaries, congregations, or individuals—is that both will become the people of God in ministry God intends them to be. This article will not concentrate on the *commitment* to mission, nor the *content* of ministry, but will focus on the nature of the *relationship* between sending and receiving partners in mission and ministry. In order that each partner and the relationship itself be fully developed, dependency of one on the other may be necessary for some period of time; it is my belief, however, that dependency eventually hinders development.

Readers are invited to imagine situations from their own experience as this thesis unfolds. The relationship may be between an old, established Eastern congregation and its young mission partner in the Southwest. The relationship may be an international exchange among seminaries. The experience which comes to the reader's mind may be familial, between husband and wife or parent and child. It may be between a "super-power" nation and an "underdeveloped" country. It may be between pastor and parishioner or teacher and student. In each of these relationships there is much talk about full partnership, but actualization is frequently frustrated. New, more subtle patterns of oppression may replace blatant paternalism. We do well to explore the nature of developments and dependency[1] on our way toward more healthy interdependence.

The issues may be economic, psychological, political, or sociological, but the subject of relationship is basically theological. The questions involve gifts and power;

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[1]Co-dependency is a subject about which much is currently being written. This article will, therefore, not address that issue, but the reader is encouraged to draw parallels where appropriate.

the subject is "domination." Those bigger and stronger may have a great deal at stake in keeping others small and needy. Domination courts dependency. Because the topic is broad, and the examples diverse, the outline will be simple. We shall explore the issues of 1) dependency and 2) development and 3) four possible relationships.

Dependency

Basic to the continuation of dependency is the belief that the welfare of one partner depends upon the prosperity of the other. A wealthy nation assumes that a small nation with a few resources needs the large nation's markets and money, thereby plunging the poorer nation deeper into debt. Susan George details the case of the Green Revolution, an economic development plan for poor countries, using the "miracle" development of plants as the means.[2] The process resulted in people becoming more dependent upon U.S. agribusiness, machinery, markets, expertise, and loans. In receiving plants which bore more, they lost control of their land, labor, economy, and decision-making.[2] Underdevelopment is said to persist because poor nations deviate from the sequence of development determined by the dominant nation.[3] Lost in this logic is the possibility that "overdevelopment" might pose dangers to both partners.

Some observers reason that certain people are dependent by nature, not circumstance. Their sex, or their age (too young or too old), or their heritage necessitates one partner being designated caregiver and therefore defining and determining their needs. Although each person needs protection and care, the fallacy lies in assuming the dependent one will always need protection and is unable to give comfort or make decisions. Dependency begets dependency. Although one may resent the burden of dependents, one sometimes is rewarded for the number of dependents one has.

When a learner is defined by the knowledge and power of a domineering teacher, the teacher keeps the learner dependent on the teacher's information, learning processes, tools, and skills. In order to receive high grades, students must follow the teacher's every direction and use only the teacher's resources. Malcolm Knowles describes the contrast between learning which is dependent, transmissive, directed, and subject-centered with that which is independent, exploratory, mutual, and student-centered.[4]

In our attempts to control, we play God with creation and created people. The fact is, we are not God. The good news is that we do not need to play God. Created for responsible interdependence, we do not need to, nor should we, dominate other peoples. When God is divorced from God's role, and God's authority is usurped by human beings, we develop an arrogance which assumes that all problems are soluble by our own knowledge and power. The "masses" are taught to be passively dependent on a transcendent God through God's authorities on earth. Such a position is dangerous.

It is hard for humans to retain healthy interdependence. We either fear our own

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[2]Susan George, How *the Other Half Dies: The Real Reasons for World Hunger* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1977), 87-106.

[3]Marvin Mahan Ellison, *The Center Cannot Hold: The Search for a Global Economy of Justice* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America), 19-42.

[4]See Malcolm Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (Chicago: Follet, 1980).

dependence and therefore seek to dominate, or we abdicate responsibility in total dependence. Stanley Hauerwas calls this sin: "Our sin is not merely an error in overestimating our capacities. Rather it is the active and willful attempt to overreach our powers."[5] The problem is one of self-deception. We dominate because we have deceived ourselves. Human domination over other humans would not only infringe upon their dignity and rights, it "would be the domination of God's image by God's image, of the pardoned by the pardoned, of the liberated by the liberated."[6]

For those who have continuously been told that their lot is to be dependent, the good news frees them from subservience to servanthood. Christianity's mission is not to romanticize the poor and keep them dependent. Raising someone up on a pedestal is a strategy of domination. They are glorified, elevated, and praised so that they can be humiliated, restricted, and blocked. Jesus as liberator is an ally of the poor. Even the Lord Jesus did not want to be strong except through the solidarity of the weak.[7]

The powerful servanthood of Jesus Christ frees us from false gods which would dominate. We need never again be inappropriately dependent upon one another. "The love which binds us together is the same love which loves us equally... unity in relationship implies mutuality: in relationship with one another we both give and receive our essential being."[8]

We are created and liberated for mutual dependence. Even accepting this goal there is potential for evil as well as for good. Our power to control the poor is enormous. We devise new ways to remain in control or to remain dependent. Either position is disbelief. By God's grace, each day, our distrust is transformed into trust in God's love for our partners and for ourselves and in God's ability to be God.

The heart of liberation is taking seriously the situation of the partner in mission and ministry. It is being open to learn from the learner, being curious about the gifts and experiences of the ones receiving mission action. Naming oneself, one's situation, and one's gifts is the beginning of the transformation from dominance/dependence to interdependence.

Development

What does development mean in absolute and relative terms? Does the word imply progression? By whose standards? What are the consequences? While underdevelopment causes deprivations, overdevelopment may bring not only burdens but dangers. "Development" as the term is most often used presumes that big, wealthy, and powerful are good and that small, less powerful, and less wealthy are not good. It presumes that many resources in the hands of some is good for all.

It may be illusory to suppose that the more "developed" partner will spontaneously resist the temptation to "domesticate" the development of the other through a transfer of knowledge, values, and self-interests. If power and status are to be maintained at all cost, then the "lesser" will

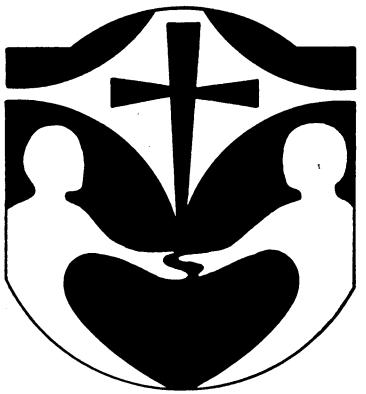
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[5]Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 31.

[6]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 102, 178.

[7]Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 29, 30, 43.

[8]Phil Wolgamon, *A Christian Method of Moral Judgment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 95-9.



be allowed to develop only in the image of and in step-down relationship to the "greater." A new nation or a new church will feel they need to be careful never to outshine the donor. They must remain humbly "grateful," rather than both rejoicing together in mutual development which is unconcerned with eventual rank.

Determining the rate of another's development is not right, nor possible. Development is not simply a cluster of benefits, nor money, nor even opportunity given, but a process by which a person or a populace is empowered. A formerly dependent spouse is "allowed" to go back to school and even is able to keep some "pin money," but full partnership is elusive. A teacher praises the potential of a gifted student, but feels threatened by that person's growth and new stature. A pastor speaks in glowing terms about parishioners' abilities, but, perhaps without realizing it, disables them by withholding information necessary to do their committee tasks well, or by being disinterested in parishioners' ministry in daily life, preferring to focus on in-house matters where the pastor is clearly authoritative.

As the power of the developing partner emerges, there is the danger of cooptation, attempts to neutralize the impact of the formerly dependent person's newfound freedom. One changes the rules, lessens the importance of the position, devalues new possessions. Or when a marginalized group achieves success, those in power suddenly notice the formerly ignored and proceed to take over and "guide" the group's activity.[9] Separation may be a stage toward full partnership, lest emerging development be coopted.

What if all people and groups of people in churches and nations were to be encouraged to use all their gifts and to rise up? Would there be a revolution or a resurrection? The answer may literally depend upon the fear or trust of the dominant. Resurrection, in Christian theology, means that one rose from the dead that all might live: the power of the Spirit is unlimited. If one takes power in a revolution, the formerly powerful lose power; some die. Resurrection power is a radical concept to be believed and trusted even when our reason tells us to fear the other's growth, development, and emerging power.

Developing peoples are not immune from fear. Will my parent, spouse, or teacher be angry if I use this new opportunity? Can a mission congregation become self-sufficient before its subsidy is cut off? Should a small nation divert its limited resources and labor from producing food for its own hungry in order to export crops to pay for mounting debt or to equip an expensive army? Energy, cohesiveness of purpose, and skills

[9]See Elizabeth Howell Verdesi, *In But Still Out: Women in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973 and 1976). In her historical analysis of Directors of Christian Education and the Women's Missionary Movement, she warns against participating in one's own co-optation.

grow while people participate in their own development, but energies and resources are drained if people are pawns in a power game, whether that be in a dissertation committee or a mission board, or between two nuclear super-powers. Christians seek not to catch the developing ones in their nets but to empower them, because the strong cannot be presumed to be righteous enough to determine the fate of the weak.

One cannot develop another. The development of one's own unique gift is innately one's own task whether that be an individual, a church, or a nation. One can, however, work for justice and a safe arena so that there are possibilities for development. The results may not be equal size or strength. People may not become wealthy, but can a materialistic society learn other ways of measuring growth? A congregation in a sparsely populated area may never be large, but what makes a congregation viable and capable of being in mission itself? A small nation may not have the climate or the topography to be self-sufficient, but can there be a healthy interdependence among unequals? A person with a handicapping condition may have mobility limitations, but are there ways of mobilizing communal gifts so that such a person might be a minister of the gospel?

Sending and receiving are mutual activities. God calls all to give and receive. We are not disabled and able-bodied, but differently-abled. We need to think globally and communally in order to share resources and mutually exchange gifts in safe arenas so that each can be empowered to develop toward full created potential in order that all may live. This is a resurrection ethic which is necessary for survival in a dangerous, power-competitive world.

Development must be in the hands of the gifted ones themselves, no matter how diverse those resources, no matter how oppressed, abused, or even enslaved those people. That means the ends of development will be open ends. As uncontrollable as that may seem to those formerly holding power, there is no alternative. Both "dependency" and "development" are transformed. It remains for us to look at the possible relationships of those two terms.

Relationships of Dependence and Development

We shall explore four possible relationships between dependence and development, of which only the final one is healthy and durable.

1. Ignorance

One ignores the other, refusing to take notice of the partner, resulting in ignorance, being destitute of knowledge. This approach is characterized by purposeful passivity, because in willful avoidance the dominant retain power. The poor remain far away, out of sight and out of mind.

"Developed" nations do not realize that they are ignorant of ways of knowing and surviving which may be more healthy to the earth. A pastor in a large parish with many resources and programs finds no need for the collegiality of the conference. The congregation is quite self-sufficient and ignores neighboring churches. A teacher of adults begins a course intent on eradicating the ignorance of the people in the class. Lacking curiosity about and invitation to the learners to bring their rich experience, varied skills, and knowledge to the curriculum, it is the teacher who remains ignorant of the communal learning potential.

Truth is often discerned by definition, and decision-making is shaped by "factual"

> The passive act of ignoring someone is a very effective act of power.

recorded history. Both women and men have always been actors and agents of history, but truth is distorted when history is told by only the male half of humanity. When English-speaking people see no reason to learn the language, symbols, stories, and music of other peoples, international exchange remains a hosting of "foreign" students and is utterly bereft of receiving the mission of the guests who would become teachers in our midst.

The passive act of ignoring someone is a very effective act of power. This strategy works as long as the self-deception determines that it is the ignored who are ignorant. Still, fear lingers. A wealthy nation fears the poor at its borders. Men fear women empowered to discover their history and define their own future. There are no longer remote, untraveled corners of the world to "discover," as though knowledge were in the hands only of the invaders. Only later, when people refuse to be ignored any longer, do we see the fearful dominant ones resort to new tactics of trivialization, ridicule, and if necessary, annihilation.

In defiance of the God who alone is omniscient, the powerful pretend—perhaps believe—that they have all the knowledge they need. They try to ignore, but they actually fear the oppressed. It is the oppressor who is ignorant, because oppressed people have always had to know two systems in order to survive: their own and their oppressors'. To be known by a gracious God is not dangerous. We can no longer afford to remain ignorant of each other, and we don't need to. Beginning with God's gracious knowing of each human being, we can be liberated from our bondage of fear to learn about and from each other.

2. Benevolence

This approach is characterized by burden. Dependency is maintained through no hope of development. Teaching is replaced by custodianship; the dependent is named "crippled." The strong nation, for a while, congratulates itself on its benevolence. One spouse is willing to be responsible for both. But the dependent one is soon seen as burden; the dominant caretaker grows resentful. The recipient of the "benevolence" receives a distorted "good" and, believing that one cannot reject such "kindness," dutifully plays out the role of victim.

The continuation of this unhealthy relationship may lead to the dependent's resources being used or abused by the dominant one. The burden of being a caretaker has its rewards in colonialism and paternalism, but when development is denied, the formerly precious may be seen as disgusting. When any power gained through being benevolent evaporates, the relationship of burden is carried to its logical conclusion; dependency proves deadly. People justify their conclusion, "The poor will eventually die anyway."

We see a striking example in some "missions" to the homeless. Their dependency, through war or famine or economic injustice, changes their very identity. Former food producers, now hungry, are seen as "needy." Talented artisans are seen as

derelicts; the jobless are seen as shiftless. As their numbers grow they are seen as threat and must be removed from the neighborhood. Mission with such a vision can only grow more burdensome. Our action cannot be rooted in our own charity, because that has often been misplaced, but it can be rooted in the reality that for those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world. Jesus' cross is not merely a general symbol of the moral significance of self-sacrifice. The cross is not the confirmation of the facile assumption that it is better to give than receive. Rather, the cross is Jesus' ultimate dispossession through which God has conquered the powers of this world.[10] Ministry is a matter of sharing and receiving the good gifts which God gives, gifts which though latent or hidden in changed or invisible identity, may already be in the other.

3. Violence

This relationship is characterized by aggression. The dominant must keep the dependent down. In this unequal power relationship the dependent resent those who lord it over them and may develop strategies for rebellion through solidarity with each other. Although the dominant may believe they are contributing to the development of the dominated, such intervention is seen as a violation of the dependent ones' rights, resources, and, perhaps, their bodies. Because the dominant believe the dominated do not have rights equal to those of the privileged, they cannot accept their own actions as violation, and may even call them development.

Such violation is violent and invites more violence. Usually the dominant are surprised because they thought their dependents were satisfied. Since the formerly invisible can no longer be ignored, violence escalates. The oppressed realize the dangers in escalation, but the options at this point are few. The dominant fear what those who have "less to lose" can do to the rich and powerful. Development has led the dominant to seek more of the world's resources for their demanding lifestyles. They are surprised and outraged by terrorists' acts. Continuing in their ignorance of the opponents' motives, they are now wide awake and very afraid, but no closer to understanding. Indeed, they do not want to understand; they simply want to not have to be afraid. The solution is all too clear: do away with the terrorists.

Such a relationship is a fearful bondage in which neither is able to develop life-giving and life-sustaining ways to live. Powerful nations can find no way to deal with continuing terrorist tactics, and so confrontation escalates and "development" turns into destruction. An abusive familial relationship is cyclical. What looks like love is actually violence, and the abuser is deathly afraid of losing the abused. Some parents, husbands, and clergy believe it is not only normal but God-ordained to keep the ones "under" their charge in an ongoing state of fear, for their own good. Some teachers believe intimidation is the "real" way to learn "hard" lessons. When fear reigns, control is maintained, but one can never love learning.

Violence takes many forms. Whether in bondage to a nation or individual, we are reminded we are to fear no one but God. The resurrection frees us from the power of false gods, even while we yet have few options to escape their power.

These three unhealthy approaches leave little hope, but trusting in God to be God, we

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[10]Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 87.

are freed from fear and the resulting propensity to dominate or be dominated. We conclude that dependency does hinder development, but affirm dependence upon the Creator, Protector, Liberator God who empowers all people to develop fully. Trusting this, we can adopt liberating, advocacy approaches toward the other. We can opt for a non-hierarchical, non-competitive, mutually-oriented approach to mission and ministry. We recognize the dangers, but realize that change, resurrection, comes from hope, not fear.

4. Interdependence

This approach is characterized by trust. It recognizes that all of us are still developing, and therefore dependent, in varying ways. It also believes that each individual, people, church, or nation has gifts to develop. One can have a physical limitation and still feel whole. One may not be free, or independent, but can claim one's true identity. In claiming one's own gifts and power, even while yet lacking strength, money, land, or a limb, one can already in the name of the Resurrected One empower others. We no longer need to deprecate ourselves or dominate others in disbelief.

There are possibilities for partnership in believing the other is someone from whom I can learn. Partner nations or partners in ministry may not be equal in age, size, or resources, but they can seek ways to be in a mutual, reciprocal relationship. While serving a Methodist church for two years, a change in pastoral leadership after the first year meant my new colleague and I would have to figure out a way to be partners. He was Methodist and I was an outsider, a Lutheran, but I had more years of ministerial experience. I was older, but he was male. He was full-time and I part-time, but he was new and I understood the congregation. Pooling the traditional ways by which people measure and gain status, we laughingly, yet seriously, figured it balanced out just fine. Partners may not be equal, but mutual reciprocity will be possible when each is working from strength.

Each of us lacks something. None is totally independent, nor created to be so, but on the way toward interdependence it is helpful to name and define ourselves and exercise a measure of independence. Only then can we come together in an interdependence which is more than in name only. "Only after reciprocity is established can helpees cease being beggars, and donors manipulators."[11] This will not be easy, of course. It will be a risky venture, and domination and dependency will creep back in, but with this basic belief the dialectical process is worth the effort.

Lest we retreat in unbelief, we confess again belief in the Creator God who designs each one to develop, the Incarnate God who is already with people when they are homeless, nameless, and powerless, and the Liberator God whose freedom for new life we need not fear. The freedom of the resurrection is God creating community. The Body of Christ longs to be whole. That belief calls us to connectedness and community while honoring our differences. Dependence hinders development. We are created, liberated, and empowered for development and for caring and courageous interdependence.

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[11]Denis Goulet, *The Cruel Choice: A New Concept of the Theory of Development* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 53.

One Hundred Grains

Howard S. Olson
Wartburg Theological Seminary

In Jesus' parable of the sower, found in all the synoptic gospels, there are two chief elements. These are the seed and the soil. The assumption is made that in every case of sowing, the seed is good. However, the results are so erratic that one field yields 300% more than another. Since there is no deficiency in the seed, the variable harvests must be due to the quality of the soil, the manner of sowing, or perhaps climatic conditions.

If one looks at the Christian church in Africa today one sees a harvest consisting of one hundred grains for each seed. David B. Barrett in a number of sources has documented the burgeoning of Christianity in Africa.[1] The statistics of this phenomenal Christian growth in Africa are generally well known, but it may be helpful to summarize them briefly. At the outset of this century only 9.2% of the African population was Christian; in 1980 45.4% was Christian, and with the present daily increase of 16,600 Christians it is projected that by the end of this century there will be 400 million Christians in Africa.

At one time it was assumed that, since in many cases evangelization and colonialism coincided historically, with the coming of independence Christianity would erode concurrently with the demise of colonialism. A conference of scholars from various disciplines was convened at the University of Ibadan, Jos Campus, in 1975 to share research relevant to this assumption. It was proved convincingly that Christianity had taken root in Africa, and far from diminishing was bearing fruit a hundred-fold, and had indeed become an ineradicable African religion.[2]

The aim of this essay is to account for the "hundred grain" prolificacy of the African church. A few of the significant factors involved in this vitality are: the transforming dynamic of the spoken and written Word of God; the nature of the soil, i.e., African Traditional Religion as a preparation for the good news of the Kingdom of God in Christ

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[1]David B. Barrett, *Schism & Renewal in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford, 1968), 107, 127-34; *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi: Oxford, 1982), 12; "The Spread of the Bible and the Growth of the Church in Africa," *Bulletin: United Bible Societies*, No. 128/129 (1984): 5ff.

[2]Edward Fashole-Luke, et. al., editors, *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978).

Jesus; the consistent witness of African lay Christians; and the courageous trail-blazing of a host of expatriate missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, from many countries. Consonant with the metaphor of the sower, this article will be delimited to only two of these elements: the seed and the soil.

The Good Seed

John S. Mbiti has devoted an entire book to the role of the Bible in the spread of Christianity in Africa. He writes, "The Bible is exerting a tremendous impact on the religious scene in Africa. It is a major contributor to the spreading of the Christian faith and in the building up of a Christian presence and communities."[3]

Africa has more than 2,000 languages, and as of 1982 the Bible, in whole or in part, had been translated in 530 of its languages.[4] Scripture translation in Africa began as early as the third century B.C.E., when the Hebrew Bible was produced in the Greek Septuagint. Later translations were produced in Coptic and Ge'ez (Ethiopic), which incidentally helped these languages to survive liturgically to the present time. In addition to the relatively recent translations of the Scriptures into many African languages, there is a current program being rigorously pursued to create colloquial translations as well in these very languages.

With such a proliferation of versions it is easy to be unaware of the great effort it took to make the Word of God available. For example, when the author of this article commenced work among a Bantu people of Central Tanganyika, the main dialect of their language had not by then been reduced to writing. The first task was to learn and analyze this spoken tone language. Next an orthography had to be adopted which utilized, as far as possible, the International African Phonetic Alphabet with a few necessary concessions to orthographic conventions of Swahili, the national language. Subsequent to this was the creation and publication of literature out of their oral traditions. A network of literacy schools had to be established together with the training of a group of teachers. Gradually a body of Christian literature was added to the core of literacy materials. These included gospels, psalms, lectionaries, hymnals, catechetical materials, and a newspaper. The teaching of literacy had of necessity to go hand in hand with the production of literature. Producing literature without teaching people to read would be setting a banquet before someone with no teeth. Teaching people to read without providing follow-up literature would be stimulating hunger without food to sate it.

In our New Testament translation from Greek, Swahili, and English sources, the principle of "dynamic equivalence" was used. This meant translating ideas rather than words. In discussing lexicography and Bible translation Ernst Wendland and Eugene Nida advised, "Since the range and meaning of words in any two languages never match completely, one must look for and expect structural inconsistency rather than one-to-one correspondence in lexical units."[5] One then translates as literally as necessary and as freely as possible to produce a version which is both accurate and lucid.

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[3]John S. Mbiti, *The Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford, 1986), 12.

[4]Barrett, in *Bulletin: United Bible Societies,* No. 128/129 (1984).

[5]J. P. Louw, ed., *Lexicography and Translation* (Capetown: Bible Society of South Africa, 1985), 1.

The translation had to take into account such factors in the context of communication as source, receptor, form, content, sense channel, and the setting in which the communication is to occur. The determination of the designative meaning of lexical units was predicated on a number of assumptions: 1) that meaning of a lexical unit is correct which best fits the context, 2) unless it has a deliberate double-entendre a lexical unity has just one meaning, 3) the literal meaning is assumed correct unless the context clearly suggests a different interpretation, 4) no two words are completely synonymous between languages or even within a single language.

> The Bible takes on a new cultural relevance when the readers are their own interpreters.

Beyond these general semantic principles, biblical texts necessitate further presuppositions, namely, 1) the scriptural authors were not trying to deceive, 2) with the exception of apocalyptic writing, which may appear obscure simply because it was directed to a restricted audience, the biblical writers were not deliberately obscure, 3) their message was true and significant, and one to which the writers themselves were committed, and 4) the literary genres employed by the writers were understandable to their contemporaries and should be interpreted accordingly within that context.

In addition to the effort to translate and communicate accurately the designative meaning of lexical units, account had to be taken of the associative meaning as well. This meaning derives from consideration of such things as: 1) the type of people who use the terms under consideration, 2) the context in which the terms are used, and 3) the response evoked thereby. An example of the importance of associative meaning is obvious with the use of the word "liberal" in certain theological circles, or in political campaigns, or in philanthropic undertakings.

Space does not permit a further pursuit here of the preparations necessary for the emergence of the translated word. Suffice it to say that eventually that long-awaited day arrived with great jubilation when God could speak directly to the people through their vernacular language ("the shrine of a people's soul," to use E. W. Smith's formulation) in the scriptural word. The appearance of the Bible in *written* form in the languages of Africa has for the first time given the Africans themselves the opportunity to ascertain from the total scriptural evidence what constitutes essential Christianity. Prior to this only portions of the Bible were accessible to the African. This was due in part to the fact that the Old Testament was often late in being translated, and also that the particular one who shared the Word did so according to certain preferences. In writing about the Independent Churches of South Africa, Bengt Sundkler points out their predilection for the Old Testament in preaching and teaching as over against the tendency in Western theology to neglect it or relegate it to a position of secondary importance.[6] With the whole Bible in many

[6]Bengt Sundkler, *Bantu Prophets of South Africa* (London: Oxford, 1961), 277.

African languages it is no longer necessary for the reader to be limited to someone else's favorite passages. The Bible takes on a new cultural relevance when the readers are their own interpreters. This present accessibility of the Scriptures in one's native language invites untold new insights and releases the potential for fresh conceptualizations of the Christian faith.

The whole scriptural corpus becomes in its newly translated form both a message and a method. As Kwesi Dickson puts it, "The Bible became the instrument of self-awareness."[7] The same Bible which the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa used to try to justify *apartheid* became for the Blacks of South Africa the town crier's announcement of liberation. Africa's two Nobel Peace Prize Laureates, Albert Luthuli and Desmond Tutu, found the Mosaic motif "Let My People Go" not only an appropriate title for Luthuli's book, but the very rallying cry and victory song of the oppressed.

Once again Dickson writes, "It is impossible for any oppressed people not to find solace in the Israelite story."[8] When the South African Blacks read this Bible for themselves, liberation is the thread they encounter from Genesis 15:14 through the Old Testament prophets and on through the teachings of Christ himself. Allan Boesak when commenting on Black theology says, "Liberation is not only 'part of' the gospel, or 'consistent with' the gospel, it is the gospel of Jesus Christ."[9]

The fact that two readings of the same Bible can be as diametrically opposed as that of *apartheid* and liberation theology suggests that the difference is not in the quality of the seed, but in the nature of the soil. In this particular case it is the rocky soil of the oppressor in contrast to the receptive soil of the oppressed. This leads us to the second point of this article.

The Good Earth

The earth referred to as "good" in relation to the whole continent of Africa is African Traditional Religion. It can be said of Africans, as Paul said of the Athenians, that they are very religious. In fact, it has been said that the African is "incurably religious." African life is set in a religious paradigm, and distinctions between sacred and secular are unknown. Religion is so integral to African culture that in most ethnic groups there is no word for "religion."

When one lauds African Traditional Religion it is with the recognition of both a cultural continuity and discontinuity between it and the Bible. While I am not uncomfortable with Bishop Patrick Kalilombe's language about "salvific values in African religions,"[10] especially in the light of how he interprets salvation, on the contrary I do have keen misgivings about J. Milimo's reference to "the hitherto unwritten African Old Testament."[11] My friend, John Mbiti, addresses the subject of salvation in African Traditional Religion in his typically careful way:

> Can we not go as far as to say that Salvation in African Religion belongs to the scheme of God's salvific acts in the world? It is genuine, yet not com-

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[7]Kwesi Dickson, *Theology in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), 151.

[8]Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, 151.

[9]Allan Boesak, "Coming In Out of the Wilderness," in *The Emergent Gospel*, ed. S. Torres and V. Fabella (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 76.

[10]Patrick Kalilombe, "The Salvific Values in African Religions," *African Ecclesial Review* 21:3 (June 1979), 143ff.

[11]J. Milimo, "African Traditional Religion," in *A New Look at Christianity in Africa* (Geneva: WSCF, 1972), 9.

> prehensive. It does not shut out other dimensions of Salvation. To the contrary, it points towards the all-embracing and comprehensive Salvation which is ultimately a mystery of God. Salvation in African Religion can only be a foretaste of that mystery, and not a final possession of it.[12]

African Christian theologians are generally agreed on the primacy of the Bible for the creation of theology anywhere. Gwinyai H. Muzorewa writes, "*Most* (italics mine) African theologians agree that there would have been no written African theology if missionaries had not brought the Bible."[13] Ten years earlier Edward W. Fashole-Luke went beyond Muzorewa's "most" when he wrote, "There is *no* (italics mine) Christian theologian in Africa who denies the fact that the Bible is the primary and basic source for any Christian theology."[14] The final communique of the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians in Accra in 1977 echoes this sentiment: "The Bible is the basic source of African theology because it is the primary witness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. No theology can retain its Christian identity apart from Scripture."[15]

In order to realize its maximum fecundity the good seed needs good earth. In fact, the plant, while remaining true to its genus and species, will nevertheless exhibit something of the nature of the soil in which it grows. Pope Paul VI recognized this reality when he addressed African bishops at Kampala, Uganda, in 1969: "Faith may be manifold, hence it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the genius, and the culture of the one who professes this one Faith.... You may, and you must, have an African Christianity."[16]

There are those who, on hearing of convergence between African Traditional Religion and Christianity, are tempted to raise the charge of heresy or detect a distinct odor of syncretism. Actually "what appears to be syncretism... may be but reflective stages of the conversion process."[17] Syncretism is too amorphous a concept to warrant precise definition even in a confessional Lutheran tradition. Who decides what "syncretism" is, and for whom is it a problem? One must acknowledge that conversion is a protracted process. E. Stanley Jones was once asked by a Hindu if he were a Christian. His studied response was, "I am becoming a Christian." One questions whether conversion to Christianity is ever complete anywhere in the world. Does one ever attain the singleness of eye and purity of heart which is totally unalloyed? After serving over four decades in Africa I return to an America, some of whose churches have been infected with large doses of civil religion, acquiescing readily to the government's militaristic posture, for example. In the chancel a Christian flag and an American flag share places of equal prominence, and few indeed are troubled by the inappropriateness of this, nor sense a need for the cleansing of our temples.

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[12]Quoted from John S. Mbiti, "Convergence and Divergence in the Concepts of God in African Religion and Christianity," lecture delivered to the Staff Institute of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa (ATIEA), Nairobi, April 1988.

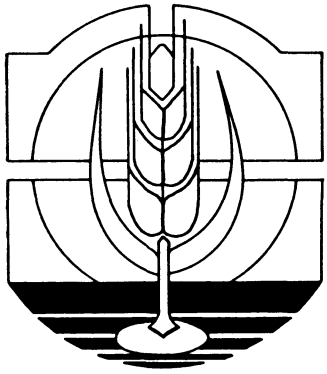
[13]Gwinyai H. Muzorewa, *African Theology: Its Origin and Development* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 21.

[14]Edward W. Fashole-Luke, "The Quest for an African Christian Theology," *The Ecclesiastical Review* 27 (July 1975):263.

[15]Kofi Appiah-Kubi & Sergio Torres, eds., *African Theology en Route* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 81.

[16]*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 66 (1969):81.

[17]Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM, 1985), 158.



In African Traditional Religion it is the convergences with Christianity which constitute a valid, God-given preparation for the gospel. The rapid growth of the church in Africa has not come about by transplanting Christianity from one continent to another, nor by grafting a new scion onto an old stock, nor by adaptation. The process which has brought this dynamic church into being has not been accompanied by technological expertise nor ingenious agricultural experimentation. The method is simply one of sowing good seed in good soil. Thus the church becomes incarnate as a truly African church.

John Mbiti describes this good ground in this way:

> African religion has prepared the religious and spiritual ground for many of its adherents to listen carefully to the teachings of the Bible, to reflect seriously upon them, to find a high degree of credibility in them, to discover meaningful parallels between their world and the world of the Bible, and in many cases to convert to the Christian faith without feeling a sense of spiritual loss but on the contrary thereby gaining a new outreach in their religious experience. The chief new element brought to African religiosity by biblical teaching is the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel. Western missionaries did not introduce God to Africa—rather, it was God who brought them to Africa, as carriers of news about Jesus Christ. African religion had already done the groundwork of making people receptive to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They already knew God through this traditional religion.[18]

It is unnecessary to marshal arguments to substantiate the universal African belief about God. This God is self-revealing to each generation. That revelation is, of course, not necessarily uniform. Even if the revelation is understood as a kind of "diffused monotheism" as in the case of the Yoruba, it still is of the one Creator God, the God of African Traditional Religion and of Christianity. The Bible societies of the world, in recognition of this fact, advise translators to use the traditional name for God in their respective versions. Muzorewa, in reference to both the transcendence and immanence of God, writes, "African theology needs to develop this concept in such a way that the African experience of God's presence and seeming 'absence' affirm God's omnipresence."[19]

The author of this article holds that the God of Scripture and of African Traditional Religion is the same. Operating on this assumption, one is compelled to raise the more difficult Christological question. Is it possible or legitimate to seek for Jesus Christ in African Traditional Religion? Obviously one cannot look for the historical Jesus in African Traditional Religion, yet there may be proleptic adumbrations of his presence even there. Although Charles Nyamiti has wrestled with this issue, the number of African theologians who have

[18]Mbiti, *The Bible and Theology in African Christianity*, 11ff.

[19]Muzorewa, *African Theology*, 10.

done so are very few. One of the bolder ones is John Mbiti. He has looked at the Christological issue from three points of view: 1) Jesus' self-designation, 2) Scriptural witnesses to Jesus, and 3) African Religion itself. In what follows we shall outline his case for a possible Christology in African Traditional Religion.

In the case of Jesus' self-designations Mbiti argues from John 8:56 where Jesus says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." If Abraham as a believer in God rejoiced in seeing Jesus' day, what precludes African believers in the same God from seeing Jesus' day from their perspective? Another argument is that Jesus refers to himself as the light of the world (John 1:9; 8:12). Does not this light illumine everywhere? Again, Jesus calls himself the good shepherd who has other sheep which must be brought into the fold (John 10:16). Are not Africans included in these other sheep? Sheep need not know the shepherd's name for him to be their shepherd. A further argument is Jesus' oneness with the Father (John 10:38). Knowing the Father is akin to knowing the Son. Like Jesus with the Emmaus disciples, he may walk as the unrecognized companion of those who have not yet known his name.

Apart from Jesus' own self-designation the Scriptures employ various metaphoric titles or portraits of Jesus. Jesus is called Savior of the world (John 4:42). In African Traditional Religion God is often referred to as Savior, or by titles signifying the same. Is not this the goal of Jesus' ministry? Another argument involves the Magi who saw his star in the East (Matt 2:1-12). These astrologers were not drawn to Jesus as followers of the Old Testament. Yet God drew them through natural phenomena such as stars and dreams. When they saw the infant Jesus they knew no other name for him than King of the Jews. Traditional Religion, too, has its stars and dreams, drawing its adherents to the unnamed Jesus. A further argument is based on 1 Cor 10:1-4, where Jesus is referred to as the supernatural Rock which followed the Israelites in the wilderness. Is it not possible that this same Rock has followed African believers in God in their pilgrimage? Other arguments Mbiti puts forward deal with the many faces of Jesus presented by the evangelists, suggesting that those who have not yet named him have their own portraits of the unnamed one. Finally he argues that the cosmic Christ, the First and the Last (Rev 1:17) and the One at whose name every knee shall bend (Phil 2:9-11) leaves none outside his orbit. Does not all the African traditional spirituality fall between the poles of First and Last?

The third point of view is grounded in African Traditional Religion. Mbiti argues that the unnamed Christ is present in the acknowledged presence of God in African religion.

> Jesus Christ is present in and known to African Religion inasfar as its followers do not find in Him a contradiction of their spiritual aspirations, but instead a fulfillment, a satisfaction, a YES and not a NO. He could not be a hundred percent unknown, or a hundred percent entirely new to them. Otherwise they could not so readily, so smoothly, sometimes so unquestioningly, swarm, flock, turn to Him when He is given his proper name, Jesus Christ.[20]

The foregoing thoughts may provide a starting point for understanding something of this good earth which enables the good seed to bring forth one hundred grains.

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[20]John S. Mbiti lecture, "Jesus Christ in African Religion," ATIEA, Nairobi, 1988.

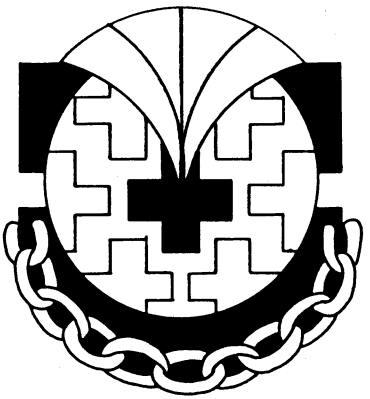
The Article of Justification and the Theology of Liberation

Winston D. Persaud
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Integral to 'sending' and 'receiving' in mission is mutuality in theological reflection in the diverse contexts within which the church bears witness to the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. Mutuality and reciprocity in learning and sharing necessarily require that the 'sending' churches in Europe and North America recognize that their rich theological heritage is to be enhanced by the emerging theologies from the 'receiving' churches in the South and the East.[1] The one Holy Spirit continues to call and sustain the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. While this mutual learning has been occurring for some time now, the theological purity is still set primarily by the traditional 'sending' churches. John Mbiti summarizes this ecclesiological, missiological, and theological dilemma facing the church catholic:

> There cannot be theological conversation or dialogue between North and South, East and West, until we can embrace each other's concerns and stretch to each other's horizons. We from the new Christendom believe that we know about most of the constantly changing concerns of older Christendom. Please come to know our concerns of human survival. It is utterly scandalous for so many Christian scholars in older Christendom to know so much about heretical movements in the second and third centuries, when so few

[1]Black, Feminist, and Native American theologies could also be included here. In most of these theologies confessional paradigms continue to have a primary shaping influence. Examples of African and African-American Lutheran theologians' attempts at articulating Lutheran theologies of liberation can be found in Albert Pero and Ambrose Moyo, eds., *Theology and the Black Experience* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988); for an example of an American Lutheran feminist attempt, see Elizabeth Bettenhausen, "Dependence, Liberation, and Justification," *Word and World* 7:1 (Winter 1987), 59-69.



> of them know anything about Christian movements in areas of the younger churches. We feel deeply affronted and wonder whether it is more meaningful theologically to have academic fellowship with heretics long dead than with the living [brothers and sisters] of the church today in the so-called Third World.[2]

It would be erroneous to suggest that after five hundred years of Christianity in Latin America, the church there is part of the 'new Christendom' to which Mbiti refers. However, it is accurate to describe Latin American (liberation) theology as a new theological phenomenon. How can Latin American theology be a 'sending' theology to 'older Christendom'? Can a contemporary Lutheran theology of justification by grace through faith be faithful to its heritage and to the gospel *without* being intrinsically a theology of liberation?[3] For Lutherans (and Protestants as a whole) theological reflection is subject to the litmus test of the article on justification, the article by which the church stands or falls.[4] Does the article on justification rule out any possibility of a Lutheran theology of liberation, or does it merely qualify Lutheran approaches to the theology of liberation?

With this in mind, we turn to two of the pivotal works in Latin American Liberation Theology: Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, and Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*.[5] Gutierrez's exploration into theology as critical reflection on human praxis in the light of the dawning of the Kingdom of God is taken a step further by Sobrino's formulation of a critical Christology in which the Kingdom of God is seen as Jesus' ultimate focus. These two "theologies" are therefore functionally complementary.

Liberation Theology comes out of a situation of widespread socio-economic poverty and political oppression. Consequently, Liberation Theology is bound up with the problem of socio-economic and political liberation. Its themes of "universal brotherhood and sisterhood," "justice as God's preferential option for the poor,"

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[2]John S. Mbiti, "Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church," *Mission Trends No. 3*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist, and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 17.

[3]With respect to Christian theology in general, Shubert M. Ogden, *On Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 134-50, cogently answers: "Christian theology today *must* be conceived as a theology of liberation" (150).

[4]Cf. *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* [Article iv., Justification] and *Formula of Concord*, Solid Declaration, Article iii, The Righteousness of Faith Before God, in Theodore G. Tappert, ed. and trans., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 107 and 540, respectively.

[5]Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973); Jon Sobrino, S.J., *Christology at the Crossroads*, trans. John Drury (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1976).

"solidarity among the oppressed," and "destruction of all that injures or totally prevents the emergence of the Kingdom of God which Jesus claimed has come," significantly reflect the profound influence of Marx's world-view upon Liberation Theology.[6] There is an attempt to articulate a concept of the God of the Exodus, of justice and freedom, and of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This God sides with the oppressed against the oppressor in the concrete, historical conditions of life, for the sake of both the oppressed and the oppressor.

Critical reflection done by the Christian community attempts to make its talk about God relevant to the needs of the oppressed. But the content of critical reflection is not just the material conditions of life; it includes that which is peculiarly Christian and theological as well. The Christian community needs to listen to the scriptures *and* the human condition. Presuppositions are altered, corrected, or totally rejected in the light of praxis, which is also informed and corrected by the Scriptures and the symbols of the church. This is the new hermeneutic circle. By following the hermeneutic circle, the church moves away from being a supporter of the oppressive *status quo* to being a community for liberation and justice in society.

According to Gutierrez, both the church and society are criticized because "they are called and addressed by the Word of God." This Word serves as a critique of any critical theory emerging out of theological reflection. The authenticity of any theology is determined by its positive evaluation in the light of the Word and its call for genuine liberating historical praxis.[7] Writing in the same vein, Sobrino distinguishes between inauthentic "inherited faith that is rather abstract" and an authentic "concrete faith that is truly liberative."[8]

Gustavo Gutierrez—Theology of the Neighbor

Gutierrez insists that theology is not concerned simply with the liberation of the privileged minority in the church, but with the universal liberation of the whole of humanity. Indeed, it is because of its basic concern with "the liberating transformation of the history of [hu]mankind" that it is consequently concerned with "that part of [hu]mankind—gathered into *ecclesia*—which openly confesses Christ."[9]

As a result of the incarnation of God in Jesus, the erroneous distinction between the religious and the secular realms has now become dissolved. "Since God has become man, humanity, every man, history, is the living temple of God. The 'profane,' that which is located outside the temple, no longer exists."[10] The God of the Exodus and of the cross is revealed to all. God is avail-

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[6]Cf. Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll.: Orbis, 1976), 7-38; also Robert McAfee Brown, "Reflections on Detroit." in *Christianity and Crisis* 35:17 (October 27, 1975), 225-56; Ignacio Ellacuria, *Freedom Made Flesh*, trans. by John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976), 15-18; Jose Porfirio Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, trans. John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974). For an insightful discussion on the declining dependence of Latin American theology upon Karl Marx and an increasing reliance upon a Biblical hermeneutic, cf. J. Emmette Weir, "Liberation Theology Comes of Age," *The Expository Times* 98:1 (1986), 3-9.

[7]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 11; see also 12-15.

[8]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 87.

[9]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15.

[10]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 194.

able to all people everywhere. Every person has a new dignity because of Christ. Socio-economic and political distinctions, which have been used to divide and separate humanity into superior and inferior classes, are no longer operative as far as God is concerned. Divisions and separations which exist are therefore to be historically abolished. The mandate to do so comes with divine authority.

God not only calls humanity to engage in liberating praxis, but God leads the way by generating that living faith and hope born out of involvement in praxis and continually nourished by God precisely where such liberating activity occurs.

> Where oppression and the liberation of [men and women] seem to make God irrelevant—a God filtered by our long-time indifference to these problems—there must blossom faith and hope in him who comes to root out injustice and to offer, in an unforeseen way, total liberation. This is a spirituality which dares to sink roots in the soil of oppression—liberation.[11]

Liberating love and faith are "the gift of the Kingdom of God."[12]

Gutierrez reminds us that love of the neighbor does not violate the sovereignty of God, for it is precisely in the concrete love for human beings that God becomes God. Hence, human beings should be loved for their own sakes and not merely for God's sake. Only in this way can love for humanity not distort human dignity but promote and strengthen it. Humankind is not a means to an end. Only when human beings are loved for their own sakes can there be a genuine encounter with God. Love of humanity and love of God form a dialectic of love which fully embraces the dignity of humankind and the sovereignty of the liberating God. "That my action towards another is at the same time an action towards God does not detract from its truth and concreteness, but rather gives it even greater meaning and import."[13]

Only when human beings are loved for their own sakes can there be a genuine encounter with God.

Theology is a human exercise which is equally concerned about God and humanity. Gutierrez insists, therefore, that if talk about God distorts human dignity, it is irrelevant and illegitimate. It is not grounded in the liberating Word. The existence of God as love in history is *dependent* upon the concrete praxis of love for the liberation of humankind.

If human beings wish to encounter God they must draw near to those whose wretched existence is an offense to God. Both the self-satisfied religious person and the earnest seeker of God are reminded that "to oppress the poor is to offend God... to know God is to work justice among [people]." Human beings know they are in the presence of God when they join the struggle for the liberation of their neighbors.[14]

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[11]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 204.

[12]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 15.

[13]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 202.

[14]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 295.

When celebration of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is divorced from a radical commitment to liberation, there is no genuine celebration, only "an empty action." According to Gutierrez, the loving communion between the Triune God and humanity is the basis for the familyhood of the poor and the oppressed. God initiates and nourishes that two-fold bond of unity—between humanity and God, and among human beings. In the Eucharist the bond is "effectively recalled and proclaimed," provided that there is "a real commitment against exploitation and alienation."[15] Worship and "living" are two aspects of one fundamental activity—living and dying for the sake of others. There is no other way of effectively remembering and celebrating the fellowship between God and humanity. Gutierrez writes:

> 'To make a remembrance' of Christ is more than the performance of an act of worship; it is to accept living under the sign of the cross and in the hope of the resurrection. It is to accept the meaning of a life that was given over to death—at the hands of the power of this world—for the love of others.[16]

The cross of Christ means cross and suffering for the Christian community. Christian life cannot be anything else and still be Christian.

The cross of the Christian community is a specific cross, a cross of solidarity among the oppressed. Knowing that one encounters God in the neighbor, Christians must therefore make the neighbor's suffering their own, and join in the struggle for liberation. Such an unequivocal call seems to leave little room for the gracious presence of God among those who fail to maintain the unity between worship and liberating praxis. *Sola gratia* can become impaired. There seems to be less grace for those who are not involved in the specific praxis for liberation than for those who are. To follow Christ is to walk the way of the cross, but it is the way of grace without merit or praxis. This reminder needs to be more clearly sounded in Gutierrez's theology.

Moreover, sin includes more than alienation as a description of the human condition. By the same token, salvation includes historical liberation but points beyond it to reconciliation and fellowship with God in God's Kingdom beyond this world. When this is forgotten or its significance reduced, the theology of the cross is turned into a theology of glory—or an ideology of liberation.

Matthew 25:31-26—Discourse on "Christ in the Neighbor"

According to Gutierrez, this discourse on the final judgment appears to summarize the very "essence of the gospel message."[17] In light of the preoccupation of Liberation Theology with the solidarity of God with the oppressed, it is not at all surprising that Gutierrez expressly articulates a "theology of universal familyhood" premised primarily upon Matthew's discourse here and upon a reading of various scriptural texts which speak about love of neighbor.

Reviewing Jean-Claude Ingelaere's elaborate study of the text, Gutierrez points out that the two basic questions which Ingelaere finds in the text are: Who are the

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[15]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 265.

[16]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 265.

[17]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 196.

nations judged by the Son of man, and who are 'the least of the brethren' of the Son of man? There are three possible interpretations: universal judgment of all people, both Christian and non-Christian, on the basis of their love for the neighbor; judgment of Christians in relation to "their behavior towards the disadvantaged members of the Christian community itself;" and, finally, a "judgment of pagans based on their attitude towards Christians." The third interpretation, which is espoused by Ingelaere, is rejected by Gutierrez because of the restrictive and selective judgment it describes. Gutierrez himself supports the first interpretation. He is in agreement with the conclusion that "all nations" (v. 32) clearly points to the universal sense in which no distinctions are made between Jews, Christians, and pagans. In short, all people—pagans, Jews, and Christians—are included in the term "all nations."[18]

This conclusion provides the biblical basis for Gutierrez's argument that God is encountered in and among human beings, i.e., that humanity is the sacrament of God. Furthermore, on the question of the meaning of "the least of my brethren" (v. 40), he declares his support for the view that here we have another expression of the universal scope of the human familyhood. All the needy, both Christian and non-Christian, are included in the designation "the least of my brethren." In keeping with his agreement with the "universalist" school of interpretation, Gutierrez emphasizes three points pertaining to the text: "the stress on communion and brotherhood [and sisterhood] as the ultimate meaning of human life; the insistence of a love which is manifested in concrete actions, with 'doing' favored over simply 'knowing'; and the revelation of the human mediation necessary to reach the Lord."[19] For Gutierrez God is encountered in history in our encounter with fellow human beings, especially the culturally, economically, and politically exploited and oppressed. Gutierrez concludes that what Christ reveals to us through his identification with the poor is that the locus of God's salvation in the world is found among the poor. Consequently, "our attitude towards them or rather our commitment to them, will indicate whether or not we are directing our existence in conformity with the will of the Father."[20]

Jon Sobrino—Christology of Radical Discipleship

Jon Sobrino formulates a radical "relational" Christology which is Trinitarian in outlook and the only way, in his judgment, of doing Christology in the face of the "material" challenges in Latin America today. Sobrino writes:

> Christology is possible only if the Father continues to be the ultimate horizon of reality, the Son continues to be the definitive example of how human beings can correspond to the Father, and life according to the Spirit of Jesus continues to be the authentic Christian way of acting that makes us sons and daughters in and through the Son.[21]

One cannot know God except through Jesus. But to know Jesus one must follow him in radical discipleship. Thus the Son, the

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[18]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 197.

[19]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 197-98.

[20]Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 203.

[21]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xxiv-xxv.

The definitive criterion of all praxis is the history of Jesus.

Spirit, and the Father are seen to be related to each other through the praxis of love, and both God and humankind are related to each other through the praxis of the Father in the Son through the witness of the Spirit of Jesus. Apart from such a participation in the relational dynamic of the Trinity, humanity cannot "understand and appreciate the Jesus who sends the Spirit."[22]

The definitive criterion of all praxis is the history of Jesus. Jesus' love of the Father is not a theoretical or sentimental love; nor is it a love that is mechanically exercised. On the contrary, it is a love of the Son who struggles against oppression and sin on behalf of the oppressed and suffering. This synthesis between love of God and love of neighbor was historically fashioned throughout Jesus' earthly ministry.[23] The confident love which Jesus displayed in his address to God as "Abba" "reaches its culminating point in the agony in the garden. Poles apart from some ideological optimism, it becomes a confidence that has been thoroughly tried and tested."[24]

Jesus' confident love is founded in God who is "greater" than human beings. For Jesus to have such a God means responding to the demands laid down by love. It is in and through the historical unfolding of those demands that the reality of God as someone 'greater' is made concrete horizontally in history. The ultimate test of the truth of love is incarnation and praxis. Jesus responds to the demands of love placed upon him by God by a life of radical obedience even to the point of death on the cross. The cross is the culmination of love that is fashioned in the encounter with the material world.

> Neither conflict, nor failure, nor rejection, nor death itself can set limits on God's demand. This is the way in which the greatness of God is brought out in history and respected to the very end. At no point in his history can Jesus get a "fix" on God once and for all.[25]

In the cross of Jesus we therefore see the triumph of Absolute Love (God). Such love, grounded in God and historically fashioned in the real material conditions of life, will not remain negated in suffering and death. It will ultimately triumph because Absolute Love remains its source and horizon. But in looking for God, one is not called to reflect upon Absolute Love, but upon the historically fashioned love. "In the Christian view [God's] locus is not only the resurrection but also the cross of Jesus." Today, the cross of Jesus "is to be found in the crosses of the oppressed rather than in beauty, power, or wisdom."[26] This is the praxis of the love of Jesus in the Spirit.

It is in the context of Jesus' praxis of love that the Christian learns about God and

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[22]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, xxv.

[23]Cf. Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 162, 201-217.

[24]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 174.

[25]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 174.

[26]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 201.

comes to know God through the imitating praxis of love. Christians must recognize that they cannot love God directly, but only indirectly through the mediation of a historical love. This mediating love is an unconditional and unreserved love of the neighbor. Sobrino writes:

> When Christians talk about love of God, then, they are talking *materially* about real, historical love for human beings. It is the *formal* nature of this love of neighbor that determines whether it can also be called love of God. If that love is displayed unreservedly and unconditionally, if it is done in the conviction that those who love to the utmost have lived life in all its fullness no matter what happens, then the historical experience of love for neighbour is formally meaningful as love for God.[27]

> Brotherhood [or sisterhood] is not just an ethical consequence deriving from a God already constituted and known; it is *the* very way in which God really is the Father, and in that sense, God. In Jesus' eyes, a God who does not create brotherhood simply is not God at all.[28]

The "existence" of many "false" gods is a real possibility. Sinful humanity is not easily persuaded to participate in liberating praxis for the sake of the neighbor, and thereby to come to know God. Idolatry was present in Jesus' time, no less than today. Sobrino soberly points out that Jesus presents us with a radical concept of God: "a God who stands in complete contradiction to the existing religious situation."[29] Jesus' God loves, unconditionally and unreservedly, all people, especially and including the poor, those who are without hope, and who are therefore in need of a miracle from God to transform their situation.[30] From the standpoint of Jesus' life, the privileged place of access to God—which Jesus widened—is not the temple but people themselves. "More specifically, it is the person who is poor, who has been forced into impoverishment." This salvific partisanship is precisely the way in which we come to know God. To speak of "access" to God is to speak of knowing God in the way God chooses to become known to us, which is by making contact with the very people whom many see as completely estranged from God: the alien, the heretic, the ritually impure person, the sinner, the disinherited, the poor, the orphan, the widow, and the enemy.[31]

The poor are not humanity's way to God but the medium—chosen by God—through which humanity comes to know God. One cannot experience the liberating power of God through the poor without an unconditional and unreserved love for them. Nothing short of an actual struggle to transform the material conditions of the poor to bring to them true dignity as persons, as Jesus intends, can qualify as solidarity with the oppressed and as "making contact" with the poor.

In my opinion, Sobrino is correct in his emphasis upon the ultimate triumphant power of Absolute Love, but he neglects to emphasize that the grace of God allows for failure and blindness and continues to accept the unacceptable, the proud, the mighty, and the self-sufficient, not just the poor, the humble, and the oppressed. Care should be taken that in emphasizing the inclusive nature of Jesus' love, we do not fall prey to

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[27]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 172.

[28]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 357.

[29]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 207.

[30]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 49-50.

[31]Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads*, 207.

an exclusiveness that limits the saving presence of God to the marginal people. The tendency towards such an exclusiveness arises in spite of Liberation Theology's claim that all people are the sacrament of God.

In Sobrino's presentation of the material and dynamic development of Jesus' messianic consciousness, which is characterized by "confident love," we are given a stimulating theological explication of the Marxian concept of *praxis-theoria.* Like Marx's proletariat, Jesus comes to an awareness of his messianic mission through participation in the real material conditions of life. Jesus' mission and his consciousness arise through practical-critical activity. But we should not push the Marxian parallel too far, for Sobrino states that Jesus' ultimate horizon is the Father and the Kingdom, and this includes all of humanity.

A Concluding Word

Can a contemporary Lutheran theology of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone, be faithful to its heritage and to the gospel without being intrinsically a theology of liberation?

In the foregoing presentations on Gutierrez and Sobrino, some criticisms were made of each based on the principle of justification. While we are convinced that the answer to the fundamental question under consideration is in the affirmative, we will point out some of the crucial dilemmas which remain and which must be addressed.

1. How do we avoid circumscribing the Word of the cross within the sphere of radical discipleship of *imitatio Christi?* When we turn to the development of the Christian's life under the cross in the material conditions of life, we find that both

Christians follow Christ in radical discipleship by seeking out the poor and creating human community.

Sobrino and Gutierrez use Jesus' "experience" as the paradigm for imitation. It is not that Christians repeat the life of Jesus; instead, they follow Christ in radical discipleship by seeking out the poor and creating human community. Solidarity and community are found precisely in those very situations which deny them and make talk about God seem irrelevant. But the real Word of the cross is the scandalous, foolish announcement that in spite of the failure to create community, to love unconditionally and unreservedly, God accepts us.

2. The abundant life to which God calls us through Christ cannot be *equated* with living life, in the midst of ambiguities, suffering, sin, and death, with unconditional and unreserved love for the neighbor.

3. How do we overcome the problem of reducing revelation to the findings of "critical reflection," and Christian faith to being the consequence of 'correct' praxis? Though Sobrino, in particular, speaks about the Father as the ultimate mystery and horizon beyond Jesus the Son, there is no question that Liberation theologians are primarily concerned with a God who is 'present' in history among humankind actively engaged in real human liberation in history. The

paradigm of God in the Bible shows us One who participates in Exodus, in Cross and Resurrection—always within history, not above, outside, or beyond it. Of course, this does not mean that God is wholly immanent; such a conclusion is a distortion of Liberation Theology. Rather, it means that transcendence is subordinated to immanence for the sake of humanity. To know who God is and where God is acting, we need to look for "signs" of the Kingdom. Where a situation of oppression and dehumanization exists, there we will find God. The fragmentary indications of various and incomplete forms of solidarity among the alienated and exploited masses are expressions of the presence of the Kingdom. God as divine love exists wherever we find there is solidarity among the poor. But this solidarity leads to genuine liberating praxis. God is given a "face" whenever and wherever there is a concrete expression of love for the neighbor. It is the "praxis of love," and not merely the ethics of love, which says that God is, and that God is love and justice and freedom.

The problem with this kind of discourse about God is that the primary emphasis is placed upon critical reflection and analysis of the human condition as the primary means to know where God is and where God is acting.

4. Is God no longer the *Deus Absconditus* (hidden God) as well as the *Deus Revelatus* (revealed God)? In Liberation Theology, it appears that the true God is characterized less by mystery and more by God's increasingly unambiguous presence among the poor and needy to whom God is thereby revealed. Such a conception, however, does not take seriously the inherent discontinuity between God revealed in human suffering, and God who is always more than what humanity is and who stands above humanity and its suffering.

When the indicative of the gospel is made subject to the demands of and for liberation, the result is law, not gospel.

History cannot exhaust God; and transcendence should not be seen as a check on God's immanence but rather as a check upon the euphoric triumphalism of humanity's hope to eradicate all oppression and usher in the age of freedom here on earth. In other words, without the transcendence of God, human beings will be confined to history, whether history as their own creation or history as a co-creation with God. In either case, history circumscribes their future.

5. How do we avoid distorting salvation *sola gratia, sola fide*, into an ethical quietism that allows oppressive structures to remain intact without being seriously questioned and attacked? In its own attempt to respond theologically to the challenge in the historical context of Latin America, Liberation Theology has not, however, avoided the equally distorting conversion of gospel into law: the imperative of the gospel has abbreviated the indicative of the gospel. Since the horizon of Liberation Theology is not a metaphysical reality which is known apart from praxis, but one which becomes known and proves its authenticity through *praxis-theoria*, that

horizon becomes subordinated to the dialectic of history. The dialectic of history *de facto* is given priority over any horizon which is merely a word about objective, vicarious liberation. Accordingly, when the indicative of the gospel is made subject to the demands of and for liberation, the result is law, not gospel.

No responsible critique of Liberation Theology based on an evangelical theology of the cross should attempt to proclaim "cheap grace" to those who are made uncomfortable by the socio-economic and political critique of society and the consequent radical demand for revolutionary change made by Liberation Theology. The critique of society based on Marxian sociology is very incisive and cannot be dismissed because it is Marxian. In a real sense, to do that would be to provide salve for stricken consciences by removing law and judgment. Liberation Theology has arisen out of a context of real "material" oppression which places humanity in a situation where the extravagance of a few means the poverty of many others.

This theology is not afraid of talking about the God of the oppressed, the Christ who is found in the needy, even if such a description falls prey to idolatry and ideology. It is confident in the liberation of God and in the God of liberation.

Pointing out the inadequacies and deficiencies of Liberation Theology without listening to and taking seriously its clarion call to struggle for a better world, would be unfair to Liberation Theology and an injustice to the gospel. We are free to hear criticism because it is Christ who makes us free. The theologian of the cross needs to remember, however, that the credibility and efficacy of the gospel does not ultimately depend on how much justice and freedom and solidarity are found in society. The efficacy of the gospel is the work of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Kingdom of God is present in the most sinful situations and may even be ultimately fulfilled when all the "signs" point to the absence of God and the Kingdom. This is the paradox of the Kingdom.

Priestly Pilgrims: Mission Outside the Camp in Hebrews

Edwin A. Schick
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Pilgrim and priest are not the same. The pilgrim on the move sees a destination beyond the horizon of restrictive circumstances. A life style more open-ended than locked-in is typical of the pilgrim. The priest set apart for specified responsibilities moves within the horizon of fixed times and places. A life style more locked-in than open-ended is typical of the priest.

Can someone be both, perhaps a pilgrim priest or a priestly pilgrim? Or have we begun to deal in mixed metaphors? Two recent publications point to some discontinuity between the two ideas: Vernard Eller's "caravaning as the style of the church"[1] and Urban T. Holmes' "the priest in community."[2]

According to the first, the church is a do-it-yourself walking caravan. Pastors (or even priests?) could be members of the caravan, but their functions would be nothing special in the deprofessionalized group. According to the second, every religious community has within it someone special who is not the same as the group itself. This person is the priest, an agent of illumination for the community, an archetypal shaman.

For Eller the local congregation is a community of the outward bound. The congregation pushes out on the way of *becoming* a caravan in preference to *being* a commissary dispensing good things to a select constituency. For Holmes the priest is a mystagogue, a leader who links the church to the numinous. The church is less an active-intellectual *becoming* and more an intuitive-receptive *being*.

The two dichotomies could force the decision, either pilgrim or priest, but not both. Hebrews, however, would have it otherwise. The pilgrimage theme is prominent enough for Hebrews to receive the title, "Letter to Pilgrims."[3] Equally prominent is the emphasis on the High Priest of the Christian Day of Atonement. He alone

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[1]Vernard Eller, *The Outward Bound* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

[2]Urban T. Holmes, *The Priest in Community* (New York: Seabury, 1978).

[3]Robert Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims* (New York: Pilgrim, 1981).

is priest forever (6:20), and besides him there can be no more priests. Nevertheless the most intimate relationship of the pilgrims is with Jesus their Priest. In the intimacy of this relationship the members of the community become priestly. Hence the new self-identity of "priestly pilgrims." They are pilgrims because they are outward bound; they are priestly because they are shaped by the great High Priest.

Mission Outside the Camp

In 1949 William Manson interpreted the author of Hebrews as "a fervent upholder of the world-mission gospel," one for whom the trumpet call to "go out" had sounded even more loudly than for Stephen the martyr.[4]

A decade later Charles C. West prepared a study book for an international student conference on the Christian World Mission. Whether directly influenced by Manson or not, West must have surprised a number of students by choosing as his theme and title the great metaphor from Hebrews, "outside the camp." With world-wide experiences to draw upon (some of them in uncongenial and hostile circumstances) West made the forthright assertion that the Jerusalem of Jesus' day had ceased being the camp of the pilgrim people of God and had become instead a religiously organized city of the world. "Our business," he said, was "to remind both church and world that they are not cities but camps, even if we thereby are thrown out of them as Jesus was."[5]

Another decade later, F. F. Bruce interpreted Hebrews as directed to those "inside the well-loved 'camp' of the old religion." Outside there was a different world, "strange and uncongenial." This world Jesus had moved into, claiming it for himself. Where the high priest had gone the church was to follow after.[6] At about the same time Ernst Käsemann adopted the ringing title "Jesus Means Freedom" and based his argument in part on Hebrews. Käsemann recorded the insight from Hebrews that it is the settled church which is constantly being called to "break camp." Jesus, the great high priest, summons this church "to a continual exodus" on the long road to a "perilous freedom."[7]

High Priest of the Day of Atonement

The long road to a perilous freedom in Hebrews involves a double spatial orientation. There are two movements, one into the Holy of Holies by the great High Priest, and one outside the camp by his followers.

The move inside precedes the move outside. In fact, it begins with the opening words of the epistle with a subtle but important reference to "purification of sins" (1:3). Subtle though the clue may appear to us, the author expected the readers to be familiar enough with the Septuagint to see it. This Greek expression occurs in the entire New Testament only in Hebrews 1:3, and in the entire Old Testament (Septuagint) only in Exodus 30:10 and Job 7:21. The Job reference is of little direct relevance for our present purposes, but the one in Exodus is highly significant.

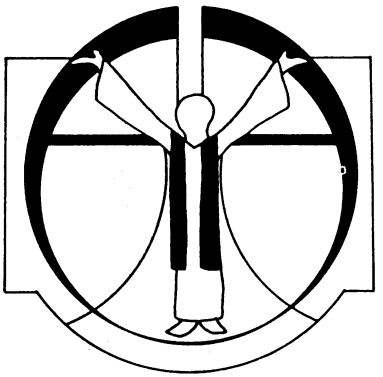
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[4]William Manson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 44 and 73.

[5]Charles C. West, *Outside the Camp: The Christian and the World* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), 140ff.

[6]F. F. Bruce, "The Kerygma of Hebrews," *Interpretation* 23 (1969):17.

[7]Ernst Käsemann, *Jesus Means Freedom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 115ff.



Exodus 30:10 refers to an annual atonement. The "blood of the purification of sins" (Septuagint) is that of the Day of Atonement, and in Hebrews 1:3 the "purification of sins" which the Son had made before he came to occupy the throne serves as the author's hint of the pivotal role which the Day of Atonement will play as the argument develops in the rest of Hebrews.

From this opening clue we can take a sizable jump to the end of chapter 6. The unique anchor metaphor (6:19-20) also belongs to this movement to the inside. As our "forerunner" Jesus has gone "in there" where the anchor holds and has become a high priest like Melchizedek. Thus even the tantalizing figure of Melchizedek is joined to the reinterpreted Day of Atonement.

From here we move to the central affirmation of this new Day of Atonement. Christ went through (*dia*) the holy place of the tent and entered once-for-all into the Holy of Holies, not through (*dia*) the blood of goats and bulls but through (*dia*) his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (9:11-12). This usage of the preposition *dia* becomes the despair of the translator, but there is more to come. It was through (*dia*) the eternal spirit that this priest of atonement offered himself in order to wash our conscience clean from dead works to serve the living God (9:13-14).

This text has brought us to the center. Structurally, the outline of Hebrews looks like this:

Preface, 1:1-4
I. Wilderness Road, 1:5–4:13
II. The Center: Holy of Holies, 4:14–10:18
III. Pilgrimage of Faith, 10:19–12:29
Appendix, Outside the Camp, 13:1-25

There has been a wilderness road. Coming into the center was a possibility only because there had been a coming out of Egypt in the first place. In this case outside had to precede inside. For the pilgrimage of faith, however, the passage by Jesus inside had to precede the passage by believers outside. To this journey to the outside we now turn.

To hint at the importance of the outward movement for the author of Hebrews we simply register the fact that the letter has no less than fifty-four *ek/exo* usages. For the moment we consider only the climactic four-step argument of 13:9-16.

(1) 13:9-10, not everything goes along. Old "tent servers" are excluded from the Christian altar. This means the exclusion of those who insist on retaining the old. They cannot have it both ways. A commitment to the radically new "once-for-all" sacrifice for sin rules out their own continued sacrifices and offerings for sin.

(2) 13:11-12, Jesus also goes outside. Note the Levitical burning of the sacrificial animal "outside the camp" and the suffering of Jesus "outside the gate." The Holy of Holies of Good Friday was located "outside the gate." There is nothing unusual about that; executions ordinarily had to be outside the city. For Hebrews this belongs to the

"outside the camp" ritual of the Day of Atonement. Gerhard O. Forde said it better than most:

> In what surely must be one of the most offensive images in all of scripture the author compares Jesus' suffering 'outside the gate' to the burning 'outside the camp' of the flesh and offal of animals whose blood had been taken into the sanctuary as a covering for sin by the high priest.[8]

(3) 13:13-14, pilgrimage to Jesus outside. Going to Jesus means going "outside the camp," because that is not only where he was on Good Friday but also where he is now. The center has shifted. The Christian sanctuary, the holiest place, is no longer inside (if it ever was) but outside the camp. Going outside to Jesus has been transformed into going to the sanctuary with Christ. But it is no longer the same sanctuary.

(4) 13:15-16, through Jesus. Christians are exhorted to continue making the three kinds of sacrifices (praise, doing good, and sharing) which alone can remain appropriate for them after the once-for-all Day of Atonement. The former sacrificial system has been brought to an end because there can no longer be any offering for sin (10:18). Through (*dia*) Jesus there must now be these new sacrifices, but they can never again be "for sin."

Going outside the camp is therefore more than simply being outward bound. It is a pilgrimage of a priestly sort because it is headed "to him," the High Priest.

Pilgrims

The importance of the pilgrimage motif in Hebrews can no longer be overlooked, if it ever could. Its modern interpretation began half a century ago with Ernst Käsemann's *"Das wandernde Gottesvolk."* This, according to his recent translators, "remains the point of departure for any contemporary study of Hebrews."[9]

Victor and Edith Turner have delineated the "liminoid" as the second of three phases of religious pilgrimage.[10] Pilgrimage begins with *separation* or detachment and ends with *aggregation* or consummation and return. In between is *limen*, the "betwixt and between." This is the stage of mid-transition, of having set out but not yet being there.

Several texts in Hebrews especially radiate this liminoid experience. In the roll call of the witnesses (not "heroes") of faith, "all these" of the pre-Christian generations belong together as liminars (11:13). They have gone out (11:15). They saw the promise and even saluted it at a distance, but they did not gain possession. They saw themselves as exiles in search of a homeland and better country, a city prepared by God (11:13-16).

The model pilgrim is Abraham. He had a destination beyond the horizon, but he had to set out without knowing where he was going. He lived in tents like a foreigner and looked out ahead to the permanent city (11:8-10). Abraham serves preeminently as the one betwixt and between.

Later in time, but earlier in the structure of Hebrews, the wilderness generation found

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[8]Gerhard O. Forde, "Outside the Gate: Atonement as Actual Event," *Dialog* 18 (Autumn 1979):250.

[9]Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God*, tr. Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 13, and William G. Johnsson, "The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978):239-51.

[10]Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), esp. chapter 1.

itself between Egypt and the promised rest but unable to enter (3:7-19). Subsequently, but again earlier in Hebrews, many generations lived between two covenants, between the obsolescence of the first and the coming of the second (8:8-13).

In intimate relationship with their high priest, Christian generations, too, exist between the times, between the once-for-all sacrifice and the enthronement of the priest himself and the subordination of his enemies as the footstool of the throne (10:12-13). To return to the climactic metaphor in chapter 13, it is the community of the outward bound which bears abuse "for" Jesus, in the absence of any lasting city "here" and the consequent search for the city to come (13:13-14). Being an outward bound pilgrim means choosing a life betwixt and between.

Message of Hebrews

Several propositional statements can now summarize the message of Hebrews.

Christ secured an eternal redemption by entering into the Holy of Holies as the great High Priest of the Christian Day of Atonement. It was necessary to do this "through his own blood" for two reasons: Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (9:22), and the blood of goats and bulls can never take away sins (10:4).

After this once-for-all redemptive act by the High Priest there are no more Christian priests but only priestly Christians. There are no more sacrifices for sins (10:18), and furthermore there can be no more temple. "Temple" terminology is totally absent in Hebrews. Tent and camp terminology has replaced it as alone appropriate for the life of the pilgrim.

Four dislocations undergird the reinterpretation of the Levitical Day of Atonement.

1. Good Friday has been dislocated from Passover to the Day of Atonement.

2. The Holy of Holies has been dislocated from inside the temple to outside the gate, the place of Jesus' execution.

3. The Holy of Holies has in addition been dislocated from outside the gate to inside the heavenly sanctuary. There Jesus entered at his exaltation, and there he now appears face-to-face with God.

4. Finally, the holy place for the followers of Jesus has been dislocated from within the camp to outside it. Jesus has preceded them, and they go out to him there.

Thus for priestly pilgrims there remains a dual presence of the High Priest, one inside the heavenly sanctuary and one outside the camp. As F. F. Bruce has expressed it in reference to the latter, "'Let us go forth' might be hard advice, but 'let us go forth *to him*' should not be a hard thing for any true follower of his to do."[11] To alter these words slightly, to be a pilgrim could be hard advice. To be a priestly pilgrim might not be so hard.

We return to the two models with which we started. Holmes' priest in community is a legitimate emphasis, but the author of Hebrews has some correctives to present. After the once-for-all priesthood of Jesus Christ there are no more sacrifices for sin, no more priests in the usual sense to offer these sacrifices, and no more temples in which to offer them, something not fully acknowledged in a more anthropological, depth-psychological approach. Eller's caravan, outward bound, is also a legitimate emphasis, but again Hebrews stands as a corrective. Outward bound needs to be carefully balanced by an inward bound, something which Eller has failed to do.

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[11]Bruce, "The Kerygma of Hebrews," 17.

"There's No Place Like Home"

Ralph F. Smith
Wartburg Theological Seminary

When Jesus says, "you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), he roots us in the world and reminds us that life is movement from place to place. If we are sent out to tell the story of Jesus crucified and risen, we do so as people with individual and community identities who tell that story to people with different individual and community identities. These identities help constitute our sense of place. Because the gospel is not just information about Jesus, not simply ideas to be accepted or rejected intellectually, but rather is a way of life, our sense of place shapes how it is shared.

The missionary task is to open possibilities for the gospel to work its transforming power. Legitimate criticism of mission efforts as 'imperialistic' arises when people from a culture that is proclaiming the gospel impose their sense of place on the people of the culture hearing it. Yet none of us can abandon our sense of place in order to speak the gospel in some disembodied, abstract way. How then do we remain true to our own identities, faithful to the story of Jesus of Nazareth as the revelation of God, and genuinely open to those of differing cultural-linguistic communities with whom we share the story?

My purpose here is to discuss the relationship between sense of place, the gospel, and mission by 1) recalling the role of religious topography in Christianity; 2) exploring rural life as a paradigm for a theology of place; and 3) providing illustrations of the theological intersection of place and tradition in light of that paradigm. A final concern will suggest how this discussion might lead to seeing the "sending and receiving" of Christian mission as a mutual exchange of "place" made possible by the gospel. My conviction as one who teaches the history, theology, and practice of Christian liturgy is that worship is a primary means by which "place" is shared and mission is given its meaning.

I. Religious Topography

What is "home" for you? The first thing that may come to mind is the place where you were born and grew up or where you live now. In both cases the content of the response is a specific place. Yet if you were to describe the place that came to mind, the rest of us would not necessarily call that "home." This is because the word home, like the word family, has no universal spatial referent. You cannot point to something and say "that's a family." All you can point to is a group of people—a wife, husband, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles. But they are merely people; something else makes them a "family."

Family is an example of what Bernard Lonergan called a reality constituted by meaning.[1] Home is also a reality constituted by meaning. Yet neither home nor family is a conceptual abstraction. Each has specific content and is linked with concrete, sensible realities of the physical world. Each gives us a foundation on which to build and move outward, and to which we often return. This coming and going—even if it occurs only in the mind—is the dynamism which impels and anchors mission. We are always sent from a place and from a people, to a place and to a people. The message we bear, that Jesus is the Christ, is bound inextricably to our sense of place and its connection with our coming and going.

Yet, historian Jonathan Smith notes that the capacity to transcend attachment to a particular place (homeland), especially when considered necessary for access to the deity, was crucial to the spread of religion in late antiquity. Mission and evangelization are hindered if one's god is geographically restricted. Judaism provides a clear example of the difficulties this can create in the history of the relationship between the promised land, especially the city of Jerusalem and its temple, and the faith of the *diaspora*. Smith argues that it was the gradual weakening of the ties between land and religion that insured the spread of a religion:

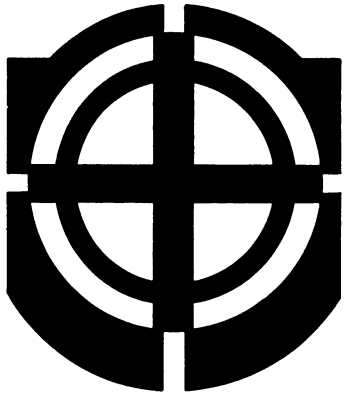
> For the native religionist, homeplace, the place to which one belongs, was *the* central religious category. One's self-definition, one's reality, was the place into which one had been born—understood as both geographical and social place.... For the thoroughly diasporic member, who may not have belonged to the deity's original ethnic group, freedom from place became *the* central religious category.... Diasporic religion, in contrast to native, local religion, was utopian in the strictest sense of the word, a religion of "nowhere," of transcendence.[2]

The *diaspora* of Judaism is so named because it is not "home"; it is not in possession of the promised land which constitutes an identifying characteristic of what it means to be a Jew. The Jewish Christians of the apostolic age did not quickly abandon this attachment to place. Jerusalem was still the mother church for other communities, as Paul's collection for it demonstrates. But between the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. and the "discovery" of the sites of the Holy Land under Constantine after 324 C.E., the connection between the land and the faithful was almost totally lost. It was only the emergence of pilgrimage after Constantine's building program that reopened for Christians the connection between geography and faith.

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[1]Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). See especially chapter 3, "Meaning."

[2]Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity, vol. 23, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), xiv.



Is a geographical locus essential to our affirmation of the incarnation's historicity? Early Christian writers were cautious in their answers. Commenting on pilgrimages to Palestine, Gregory of Nyssa articulated the danger in a privileged religious topography:

> What advantage, moreover, is reaped by one who reaches those celebrated spots themselves? One cannot imagine that our Lord is living, in the body, there at the present day, but has gone away from us foreigners; or that the Holy Spirit is in abundance at Jerusalem, but unable to travel as far as us.[3]

We can readily affirm with Gregory that God is not tied to any one, specific place, but God does not completely transcend place, either. The dilemma of Christian mission has always been to discern the tensions between the content of the gospel and the cultural-linguistic forms that bear it. Contemporary arguments about inculturation (indigenization) have focused the issues and raised new questions.[4] None of us can escape our sense of place, the question is how we understand and use it.

For Christians the question is made more complex by the role the geography of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection plays in a contemporary sense of place. To enter the story of Jesus fully we must, as someone once said, allow ourselves to be "spiritual Semites." Yet again we should remember that this is not a matter of simple geographical identification but rather of appropriating the meaning generated by connections with place. What we have sometimes erroneously believed is that meaning can exist divorced from place.

Although we have often been ambivalent about the importance of geography and topography in theology, we are certainly not indifferent toward them. At the least we spend much time during Bible study describing and explaining the places where the founding stories of Judeo-Christian tradition occurred. Often we do this solely to provide background for some other point we wish to make. A full recovery of the geographical dimensions of the tradition means reinterpreting how historical places become part of our personal sense of place and have value in their own right. This in turn leads to reexamining how such "places of memory" create bridges between cultures.

II. A Rural Paradigm

No matter where we live, our sense of place is in part derived from the land. For many of us in contemporary America the link between us and the land has been broken. The reasons vary and have been well

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[3]Gregory of Nyssa, Letters 2 and 3; G. Pasquali, ed., *Gregorii Nysseni Epistulae* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 15; Letter 2.7.

[4]See, for example, Anscar J. Chupungco, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (New York: Paulist, 1982).

documented by others.[5] In our increasingly urban society we have much to learn from rural America about our place in this world and how it undergirds our sense of mission. The church's sacramental life can also reforge the link to place. Rural ministry may offer clues concerning the ways in which worship can celebrate space and so reinvigorate mission. Rural life may provide a paradigm (although not the only one) for connecting life and mission.

"Rural" indicates expanse in the sense of lots of space with very few people. "Urban," on the other hand, with which rural is usually contrasted, indicates lots of people with very little space. In both cases there is an identifiable reality which is used as shorthand for communicating the broader and more complex phenomena which the terms describe. For urban, that reality is the city; for rural, it is the farm (although urban/city is a tighter semantic connection than rural/farm).

Yet we use the words rural and urban not to indicate *a* city or *a* farm, but to describe different ways of experiencing one's sense of place. Somewhat like home and family, rural and urban are realities constituted by meaning. It is not the contrast of the terms "rural" and "urban" that merits attention but rather the content in each locale of the relational norms between people and their sense of place. In the cluster of symbols and ritual strategies that convey relational norms one discovers the meaning which provides food for theological thought.

Jonathan Smith tells the story of a farmer he worked for who awoke each morning, washed his hands and face, got dressed, then went outside, picked up some dirt and rubbed it in his hands as he went to work. Confused by this morning ritual, Smith one day asked his boss: "Why do you start each morning by cleaning yourself and then step outside and immediately make yourself dirty?" "Don't you city boys understand anything?" was the scornful reply. "Inside the house it's dirt; outside it's earth. You must take it off inside to eat and be with your family. You must put it on outside to work and be with the animals."[6]

We have much to learn from rural America about our place in this world and how it undergirds our sense of mission.

Nothing is inherently or essentially clean or unclean, sacred or profane. Such terms refer to situational or relational categories which function as fluid boundaries that can shift according to the interpretive context. As his boss observed: "There's really no such plant as a weed. A rose bush, growing in my cornfield, is a weed. In my flower garden—thistles, mullen and goldenrod—make right smart plants, if you keep them under control."[7]

There is nothing particularly rural or natural about this farmer's words and actions. He had simply stated some of the

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[5]See, for example, C. Dean Freudenberger, *Food for Tomorrow?*(Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984); C. Dean Freudenberger and Paul M. Minus, *Christian Responsibility in a Hungry World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976).

[6]Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 291.

[7]Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 291.

rules of conduct, the boundaries and relations of exclusivity and inclusivity, the order necessary for the components of his world to have significance and value.[8] What surfaces in this description for me, however, is the provocative interplay between the givens of existence and the use made of those givens via ritual strategies. Smith expands his own analysis of his boss's world as follows:

> The world of the home and the world of animals and plants were perceived as being intersecting realms.... My boss, as homemaker and as organizer of his farm's world of domesticated plants and animals, was required to determine and map the given limits and structures of each domain. As homemaker, he had to adhere to the rules of social intercourse which constituted the community of Holland Patent, New York. As husbandman, he was not free to violate the seasonal rhythms in deciding when to plant his crops or breed his animals. What he established within the walls of his house and within the fences that surrounded his farm was the carving out of a space which was separate from other spaces and yet in harmony with his perception of the larger social and natural environments. By limiting the space over which he had dominion, he strove to maximize all of the possibilities of that space. He sought to create, in both his home and farm, a microcosm in which everything had its place and was fulfilled by keeping its place. If his ordering grid was of sufficiently tight mesh, all anomalous elements would be forced to the periphery (for example, the garbage dump which stood on his property line).... He conferred value upon that place by his cosmology of home and farm and by the dramatization of his respect for the integrity of its borders.
>
> I would term this cosmology a locative map of the world and the organizer of such a world, an imperial figure. It is a map of the world which guarantees meaning and value through structures of congruity and conformity.[9]

How is the locative map determined beforehand by the "givens" of space and time, and how is it shaped and reshaped by elements imposed artificially in a specific environment? What is the relationship between the implied need to limit space in order to control it, and the desire to expand space in order not to be controlled by it? What is the latent power in the intersection between the center characterized by congruity and conformity, and the periphery (the "marginalized") characterized by incongruity and non-conformity?

Different answers arise to such questions in different settings. Our sense of place is conditioned by the descriptive content that lies behind words like rural and urban, and that sense of place affects the value and meaning structures of our lives. Rural life is a significant paradigm because it cannot escape the daily sense of place generated by the land. But what is the theological and the liturgical import of saying so?

III. The Intersection of Place and Tradition

If a primary religious question is "Where do I belong?" or "Where is my home?" we need a fuller investigation of how our sense of place informs our theological and liturgical traditions and vice versa.[10] Let me give two brief examples of how sense of place and Christian tradition intersect.

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[8]Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 292.

[9]Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 292.

[10]Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), provides the most recent and thorough history of religions approach to the issue.

Christians have tended to say that the answer to the question "Where do I belong?" or "Where is my home?" is not spatially localized: our home is with Jesus, and Jesus is wherever two or three are gathered, wherever bread and wine are shared in his name. Yet the word "wherever" already indicates our inability to escape the localization of God's presence. This localizing is also apparent when we say that we are pilgrims on this earth as we move toward our true home which is heaven. We all know the history of denigrating material reality or of denying the need to work for justice that can arise from that perspective. But again, the home toward which we move is conceived of in terms of place. Heaven is *where* God is.

Christians are quick to claim, however, that this localization is not to be taken too seriously. Even though the incarnation is the historical self-localizing of God, the risen Christ is not restricted to place. This is the heart of the problem that plagues sacramental theology. Lutherans may recall the difficulty raised by Luther's understanding that Jesus could be truly present at many different altar-tables simultaneously in the celebration of the Eucharist. Calvin supposedly solved that problem by arguing that through the Holy Spirit we are united with the risen Lord who is in heaven, at the right hand of God. But it does not take a keen eye to discern that Calvin simply shifted the place; he did not solve the spatial dilemma raised by Christian sacramental theology.

Rural life may provide a provocative context, one rich with resources for a theological reinterpretation of how Christian symbols (especially the sacraments) function. Precisely because a rural "locative map" cannot escape the embodied rhythms of nature—in both space (e.g., death and decay, nutrient patterns necessary for growth, etc.) and time (e.g., seasons, biological clocks)—it focuses attention on an interplay of forces that can otherwise be fragmented or avoided. The issue is not the forces themselves, lest anyone fear I am advocating a return to "natural religion" and the superstitions surrounding it from which the gospel freed us. As Jonathan Smith put it, the issue is the map not the territory.

What happens in worship is a never-ending gift exchange.

Liturgy is an integrating experience for Christians at least in part because it, too, cannot ignore the embodied rhythms connecting facets of life we tend to dichotomize. Liturgical concerns with their patterns of life and rural concerns with their patterns of life bear a natural affinity—one worth exploring more fully.

My second illustration is rooted in a peculiar contrast. Our experience of both space and time is characterized by distance. Spatial distance can be traversed by humans at will (with given limitations). Temporal distance, however, cannot be overcome. If you live 100 miles from me we may one day meet; but if you live 100 years from me—whether past or future—our lives can never touch personally. Similarly, we can return to places we have visited, but we cannot go back to the past, except by remembering it, nor visit the future, except by imagination.

This common-sense distinction in our experiences of space and time is called into question by the historical incarnation of God and by its appropriation in worship. The liturgical uniting of myth (story) and ritual claims to overcome the distinction between space and time—God in Christ is present in the Christian assembly, present in the verbal proclamation, present in the action of water, bread and wine. And we believe this is no mere conceptual feat; it is not a flight of individual or communal fantasy. The historical and doctrinal claims of Christianity are mediated and actually experienced through worship.

If in rural life the ritual strategies that develop are more clearly rooted in the spatial and temporal givens of existence than in artificially created substitutes for those "givens," we have a valuable resource for assessing how the "externality" of God's communication with us, *creates* structures which provide sense of place, meaning, and value in human life. These structures are the territory we call home; the gospel reveals how the maps that lead us through them might be transformed. Worship is a means by which that transformation occurs.

Worship opens the possibility for reforging the link between the story of Jesus and us when it is rooted in the specific environments by which we have been shaped and defined. Sense of place is an integral dimension of the gospel's content since the gospel is invitation to a way of life and not simply information. This has consequences for how we think about and do mission as a church, because it invites us to abandon categories which view other cultures, times, or places as *preparatio evangelica*, implying that they have no intrinsic value or connection with the gospel's content. Mission becomes a mutual exchange generated and conditioned by the gospel, not the imposing of one "territory" on another.

IV. Mission as Mutual Exchange of "Place"

If home is a reality constituted by meaning, and home is a root metaphor for our sense of place, the theological question arises: How can Christians from a variety of cultures have a common "home" in Christ? For the church's mission the issue is how genuine mutuality in the "sending and receiving" dynamic of the gospel gets lived out. My thesis is that the "living out" is in fact the ongoing formation and reformation of the "common home" in Christ through a cultural interchange whose matrix is the worshipping community. What happens in worship is a never-ending gift exchange. What we give is our sense of place; what we receive is our sense of place. This in turn impels mission.

Lewis Hyde argued in his provocative book, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*,[11] that gifts can be agents of change, the bearers of new life:

> ...gifts carry an identity with them, and to accept the gift amounts to incorporating the new identity. It is as if such a gift passes through the body and leaves us altered. The gift is not merely the witness or guardian to new life, but the creator. I want to speak of "teachings" as my primary example here. I do not mean schoolbook lessons, I mean those infrequent lessons in living that alter, even save, our lives (p. 45).
>
> ...if the teaching begins to "take," the recipient feels gratitude... gratitude [understood] as a labor undertaken by the soul to effect the transformation after a gift has been received... it is only when the gift has worked in us that we

[11]Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

> can give it away again. Passing the gift along is an act of gratitude that finishes the labor. The transformation is not accomplished until we have the power to give the gift on our own terms. Therefore, the end of the labor of gratitude is similarity with the gift or with its donor (p. 47).

The gospel is not a commodity, it is a gift. In mission we are givers and receivers, and the thanksgiving (the gratitude) that accompanies our giving and receiving is eucharistic. Worship is the malleable text of our life in a way that the canon of Scripture is not. That is why worship's boundaries, more fluid than the textual boundaries of Scripture, allow for genuine cultural interchange. Mission finds its true home there; Scripture lives there.

The mission of the church needs both the land on which we are incarnated (creation theology) and the hope to which we are called, for both are sacramental. The popular theological assertion that we are "in, not of the world" is useful but limited in an age when we threaten to destroy the world. Perhaps it is necessary today to remind ourselves that, whether "in" or "of" it, we are to be *for* the world. The gospel's power is the power of transformation: "Do not be conformed to this world (age), but be transformed by the renewal of your mind (Rom 12:2)." Keeping with the metaphor that has informed this essay, the gift of the gospel might be described as a map which allows us to experience the territory of our lives in new ways. We are a new creation in Christ not because we lose our sense of place but because we discover what is really there.

When we take the world seriously as the locus of mission, the places we call home expand, since they are connected with the rhythms—spatial and temporal—that make us who we are from culture to culture. There is a sense of wonder in this, but not illusion. If we pay attention to the interplay between our sense of place, the gospel and mission we will find that when we say "There's no place like home!", more than Kansas and the Emerald City of Oz will come to mind.

I have tried to suggest possibilities for connecting various facets of tradition which taken together might enrich our understanding of mission. The thematic thread has been "sense of place" interpreted as a reality constituted by meaning (using the metaphor of home). I have also tried to weave that thread through four areas of discussion.

First, recalling our religious topography serves as a reminder that the gospel is not abstract conceptualizing. The meaning of the story of Jesus cannot be divorced from the specific, historical places which birthed and shaped it, nor can it be divorced from the specific, historical places of those who hear it and tell it.

Second, the rural paradigm was suggested as offering one way to reappropriate the place/land nexus that is fundamental to our existence. Implicit in this section was a call to take creation theology more seriously as Lutherans and to allow rural life to inform how we do so.

Third, the illustrations of our experience of Jesus' presence as "localization" provided examples of how the first and second areas of discussion might affect traditional theological issues.

Finally, the explicit connection between sense of place and mission was lodged in worship, where the gospel was interpreted as a "map" which transforms the "territory" constituting our sense of place. Worship creates and expresses a mutual exchange of our senses of place. I believe it is that exchange which makes mission both the Spirit's work between us and the sacramental bond that unites us and the world in which we live.

FRAMING THE QUESTIONS



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Book Reviews

BEST SERMONS I. Edited by James W. Cox. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. 288 pages. Cloth. $16.95.

This anthology presents the "winners" and the "honorable mentions" in a widely publicized sermon contest conducted last year with the support of the volume's publisher. Included as well are a number of "commissioned" sermons. The intention is to compile "some of the best efforts of contemporary preachers." The sermons appear in groups of eight or nine under the respective headings of "evangelistic," "exegetical," "doctrinal/theological," "ethical," "pastoral," and "devotional."

If these sermons *are* among the "best," contemporary preaching is in serious trouble. While the sermons are, as one might expect, structurally coherent, liberal in their use of image and illustration, explicit in biblical orientation, and relatively free of religious jargon and moral judgmentalism, they are, by and large, singularly lacking in effectiveness as mediators of transforming grace. This lack is particularly noteworthy in the sermons judged "winners." Scriptural exegesis, social analysis, pastoral concern, and personal disclosure are all in evidence, but they are seldom integrated in engaging ways. They do not reach out to the unchurched. They remind the converted of what they already know, but they do not offer much in the way of fresh challenge or fresh hope.

The sermons of Martin Copenhaver, Amy Bridgeman, and Charles Scriven are refreshing exceptions, as are a smattering of the invited entries. The book might have some value in a homiletics class as a set of exercises in homiletical discernment. The sermons of Buttrick, Burghardt, and Craddock are good illustrations of the particular theories of preaching which each has advanced.

Two anthologies which have better sermons, as well as helpful homiletical analysis and commentary, are *Preaching as a Social Act,* edited by Arthur Van Seeters (Abingdon), and *Preaching Biblically,* edited by Don Warlaw (Westminster).

David J. Schlafer
Nashotah House Episcopal Seminary
Nashotah, Wisconsin

MATTHEW AS STORY. By Jack Dean Kingsbury. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988. x and 181 pages. Paper. $10.95.

MATTHEW'S STORY OF JESUS. By Richard A. Edwards. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985. 96 pages. Paper. $4.50.

Kingsbury and Edwards both treat the Gospel of Matthew as a narrative, using the literary-critical approach to understand it. Edwards gives special attention to the reader and to the way the narrator guides or influences the reader's understanding of the characters, their relation to one another, and their development as participants in the plot. Kingsbury, on the other hand, is concerned with the story plot as it develops through conflict between Jesus and the characters John the Baptist, the disciples, and the religious leaders. According to Kingsbury, the purpose of the Gospel narrative is to depict Jesus in conflict with Israel (the religious leaders) and with his apostles—all of this to impact on the reader as to how to be a disciple of church of Jesus. While Kingsbury's approach is based on major conflicts, Edwards' is based on information the reader knows as the narrator builds impressions in the reader's mind.

Although both Edwards and Kingsbury agree that the beginning of Matthew's Gospel (up to 4:17) establishes who Jesus was, a major difference between them is how they divide the

rest of the Gospel into parts. Edwards sees five basic segments or movements in a continuing narration. His divisions are based on Jesus' change of location: (1) Jesus moves around Galilee (4:23–7:29); (2) Jesus moves between the Gentile nation and Galilee (8:1–10:42); (3) Jesus leaves on a teaching and preaching mission of his own (11:1–18:35); (4) Jesus leaves Galilee and moves into Judea on the far side of the Jordan (19:1–25:46); (5) Jesus leaves for Jerusalem (26:1–end).

Kingsbury, however, sees two major segments announced by the phrase: "From that time on, Jesus began...". These two segments are: (1) The Proclamation of Jesus Messiah (4:17–16:20); (2) The Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Messiah (16:21–28:20). In the first section, Jesus proffers God's salvation to Israel through teaching, preaching, and healing (4:17–11:1), and Israel refuses to accept the message and repudiates Jesus (11:2–16:20). The second segment has Jesus moving to Jerusalem to suffer and die; as Jesus does this, he is revealing to his disciples what his ministry is all about—suffering servanthood (16:21–28:20).

For both authors, the primary issue is the divine direction of events. Edwards states that references to the Father in heaven remind us that Jesus speaks from God's point of view; he is the fulfiller of the law and the prophets. Jesus does not act on his own, but in accord with God's plan and intentions. Edwards states: "The correlation between God's plan and Jesus' action is just as close as that between God's will and Jesus' teaching." While Edwards sees the divine direction of events as Jesus doing what God wants, Kingsbury views it as Jesus, Israel, and the disciples doing what God wants. He calls this seeing everything in the gospel story from God's evaluative point of view. The basic plot, then, is shaped by God, Jesus, and the religious authorities—all desire the death of Jesus: (1) God sees the death of Jesus as accomplishing salvation for all humankind; (2) Jesus sees his death as being a perfectly obedient Son of God; (3) The religious authorities see Jesus as a threat to Israel. Anyone who does not see things according to God's evaluative point of view is in conflict with Jesus.

As one who has studied and taught literature for years, I find that Kingsbury's book best exemplifies a literary approach to the Gospel of Matthew. I say this because literary plots move through a series of conflicts to a climax. This is exactly how Kingsbury explains the movement of the story in Matthew's Gospel, when he shows that conflict is at the essence of the gospel plot. Edwards, however, presents the narrative as an almost chronological development of Jesus' movements and teaching. Thus he leads the reader, bit by bit, through the story. The outline of Edwards' segments of the gospel story, previously mentioned, illustrates this point.

The key conflicts, according to Kingsbury, are Jesus with his disciples and Jesus with the religious leaders of Israel. Both conflicts continue throughout most of the story and are only resolved during Jesus' passion. The disciples finally come around to God's evaluative point of view, but the religious leaders do not.

Both books give evidence of the scholarship of the authors and should be read by anyone interested in the literary-critical approach to the Gospels. Edwards' book will appeal to plot readers who prefer to follow a basic story line to its conclusion. Kingsbury's book will delight those who are interested in exploring character development and interrelationships and all the nuances that move the story plot along.

Personally, as a former literature teacher, I found Edwards' approach tedious and uninteresting because much of it did not challenge the reader to think for oneself. Rather, one was plodding through it. I, therefore, recommend Kingsbury's book because of its creative approach to the rising and falling movement of the plot, as it shows Jesus in conflict with those he has come to save. It presents an insight into the Gospel of Matthew that will bring the ordinary reader to understand the story of Jesus in a different light. In addition, Kingsbury's book is written in an easily readable and interesting style.

Amy Therese Kenealy, SSSF
Chicago, Illinois

PILLARS OF FLAME: POWER, PRIESTHOOD, AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY. By Maggie Ross. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988. lvii and 214 pages. Cloth. $17.95.

Here is a challenging critique of the definition and practice of priesthood from one who has experienced pain and anger in her association with the church. Ross is an Anglican laywoman currently living as a solitary in Oxford, England. But she is also familiar with American episcopal structures and judges quite negatively what she has found on both sides of the Atlantic.

Ross uses the theology of the Syrian church to ground her critique. In its emphasis on humility, openness to God through solitude-in-community, and self-emptying love, she sees a corrective to the conceptual doctrines that undergird the Western church's power structures. She believes the Greek influence that "makes us feel we need to deny our wounds and our creatureliness, that we need to fix up our selves or others to be acceptable to God" encourages a hierarchical notion of priesthood.

To counter the destructiveness of the present hierarchical and power-oriented structure of priesthood, she suggests two forms of ordination, administrators (stipended) and discerners (nonstipendiary), to ensure a balance of powers. She argues further that priesthood is not limited to public forms of ministry but is the universal Christian calling to solitude, to developing spiritually as individuals and as community by following Christ's pattern of kenotic living.

The author's concept of universal priesthood resembles the Lutheran understanding in some ways, including the relation of priesthood and Christian vocation. Reading this book in view of current Lutheran discussions on the nature of ministry might well convince one to press for defining ordained ministry in only functional terms. But two points are worth keeping in mind while reading: (1) The author talks about what ordination *ought to be* rather than making theological sense out of what *is*. Yet any convictions about what ought to be come out of a particular limited experience and provide no guarantee that the projected alternative will not also sometimes fall prey to human sinfulness. (2) A person can develop priesthood (relationship to God and others) through solitude, but solitude as Ross describes it is more a discipline than a gift. Thus we cannot consider it a norm for faith any more than the reliance on rational concepts and institutional power.

Envisioning nonhierarchical church structures that would encourage baptismal commitment and a kenotic lifestyle for all is commendable. But by imposing conditions on devising such a structure, the author does not escape the very element she criticizes—the human wish for power and control. Perhaps this is in itself a lesson about being priests (i.e. Christians): we can only be justified through God's grace toward us as we continually strive for spiritual maturity and continually fall short, even with our most kenotic visions. At any rate, the book is valuable, precisely in its pain and anger, for indicating how institutional power structures influence our assumptions about ministry and priesthood—sometimes to the detriment of our companionate priests.

Faye E. Schott
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

All books reviewed in *Currents* can be obtained through Fortress at LSTC, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60615; (312) 752-1766.

Briefly Noted

ASCRIBE TO THE LORD. BIBLICAL AND OTHER STUDIES IN MEMORY OF PETER C. CRAIGIE. Edited by Lyle Eslinger and Glen Taylor (Sheffield Academic Press, $50.00). Craigie, a Scots-Canadian and a prolific, conservative [in the finest tradition of that word] biblical scholar, was killed in 1985 in an automobile accident at the age of 47. The thirty-six articles in this memorial volume cover Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Ugaritic and Biblical Studies, Biblical and Theological Studies, and Memorial Reflections. In my judgment his most notable achievements were his *Ugaritic Newsletter* (published in 33 volumes) and his splendid commentary on Psalms 1-50 in the Word Biblical Commentary. RWK

ISRAEL'S APOSTASY AND RESTORATION. ESSAYS IN HONOR OF ROLAND K. HARRISON. Edited by Avraham Gileadi (Baker, $24.95). Harrison has been a prolific contributor to conservative Old Testament scholarship, including a massive (1,215 pages) Introduction published in 1969 and the *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, whose conservative (but usually not reactionary) volumes have been a solid contribution to the field. In addition to twenty-four essays reflecting the title, the book also contains an appreciation written by Peter C. Craigie shortly before his own death. RWK

CANON, THEOLOGY, AND OLD TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION. Edited by Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (Fortress, $39.95). The twenty essays in this book were published to honor the sixty-fifth birthday of Brevard S. Childs. Childs, who has written the best English commentary on Exodus and Introductions to both the Old and New Testaments, has been a professor at Yale since 1958. Throughout the last two decades he has argued that the canonical shape of the text ought to be the authoritative one, and he has been a leading contributor to what might be called a post critical phase of biblical studies. The editors are surely correct when they write: "Few scholars have done more than Brevard Childs to stimulate dialogue concerning theological issues in the interpretation of the Old Testament, or to contribute to that dialogue." RWK

THE HARPS THAT ONCE... SUMERIAN POETRY IN TRANSLATION. By Thorkild Jacobsen (Yale, $40.00). Sumerian is one of the oldest known languages, and its Mesopotamian setting means that it forms one of the most significant contexts of the biblical world. J., one of the greatest Sumerologists of our day, here translates a series of myths, epics, hymns, and laments, including texts dedicated to Dumuzi (biblical Tammuz) and the lament over the fall of the city of Ur, the city from which Sarah and Abraham originated according to some biblical references. This forty-page lament attempts to calm the soul of Ur's god so that he can regain his composure and rebuild his destroyed home. A text called "The Eridu Genesis" deals with the creation of people and animals, ancient cities and their rulers, and the Deluge. RWK

AN INDEX TO ENGLISH PERIODICAL LITERATURE ON THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN STUDIES. VOLUME II. Edited by William G. Hupper (The American Theological Library Association and the Scarecrow Press, $45.00). This 500-page volume lists bibliography from the last two centuries dealing with two major topics: Ancient Near Eastern History and Modern Scientific Studies on the Ancient Near East and the Old Testament. Over 100 pages are devoted to biographical studies of ancient persons and almost

200 pages provide bibliography for specific cities within Palestine. There are 79 entries on Jericho alone! A researcher's dream come true! RWK

EXTRAORDINARY TIME. By Elizabeth-Anne Vanek (Life Enrichment Publishers, $4.95). V., who has published several poems in *Currents*, often draws on scriptural themes or characters in her poetry, but just as often she turns to "ordinary" people for inspiration. Sample this from a poem on Psalm 139:

> *You see*
> *below the surface,*
> *scan beneath the skin,*
> *probe*
> *quintessential self,*
> *stripping away superfluities,*
> *layers of ambiguity, all that shields me*
> *from the critical eye,*
> *the hostile world....*

Fifty-eight poems in all—accessible, often moving. RWK

AMOS, HOSEA, MICAH—AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY. By Philip J. King. (Westminster, $13.95). After defining archaeology and the prophetic movement, K. discusses urbanization, architecture, warfare, industry, flora, fauna, and religious rites as they appear in the 8th century prophets. The luxurious living at the time of Amos (funerary banquets, beds inlaid with ivory, inordinate consumption of wine, and anointing with costly oils) is clarified from archaeological sources. Provides background, not verse by verse commentary. RWK

AMOS: THE EIGHTH-CENTURY PROPHET. By John H. Hayes (Abingdon, $13.95). H. is one of the great exegetical popularizers of our time. Readers will find this book, too, clear, original, and easy to follow. In many ways, however, this commentary is a gauntlet thrown down at the last century of Amos scholarship since it denies that Amos was the earliest of the classical prophets (he followed Hosea) and that his speeches were originally only two to three verses long (large rhetorical units are detected). H. also denies the view that Amos proclaimed a totally pessimistic view of the future (9:11-15 is seen as authentic), and that Assyria would be the agent of judgment (Assyria was in temporary decline). A provocative reading. RWK

FROM CHAOS TO RESTORATION: AN INTEGRATIVE READING OF ISAIAH 24-27. By Dan G. Johnson (Sheffield Academic Press, $46.50). J. proposes a new understanding of these difficult Isaianic chapters, arguing that 24:1-20 was written on the eve of the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 and described that event as the return to chaos. Somewhat later in the exile, 24:21-27:1 was added to announce the imminent victory of Yahweh over the city of Babylon. Finally, in 27:2-13, the prophet announced the reunification of Israel. J. denies that these chapters are apocalyptic in character and decides that the resurrection referred to in 26:19 ("Your dead shall live") refers to national resurrection. This revised Princeton dissertation closes with a reconstruction of the Hebrew text and a fresh translation. RWK

FROM REPENTANCE TO REDEMPTION: JEREMIAH'S THOUGHT IN TRANSITION. By Jeremiah Unterman (Sheffield Academic Press, $46.50). Although many scholars detect deuteronomistic editing and updating in the book of Jeremiah, U. argues that the concepts and vocabulary found in the book precede Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, fit the historical background of the prophet's lifetime (late seventh and early sixth centuries B. C. E.), and relate to, but are essentially different from, the literature and ideology of Deuteronomy and Kings. He resists or ignores the evidence for a shorter recension of Jeremiah based on the highly divergent LXX; the classical investigation of this issue by J. Gerald Janzen is not even listed in the bibliography! U. proposes that the harshness of Israel's treatment at the hands of its attackers was a significant spur to divine mercy and to redemption. RWK

BIBLICAL HEBREW: A TEXT AND WORKBOOK. By Bonnie Pedrotti Kittel, Vicki Hoffer, and Rebecca Abts Wright (Yale, $29.95). Right from the start this grammar uses citations from the Hebrew Bible; vocabulary and grammatical features are introduced in the order of their frequency. Thus the first lesson is built around "And Yahweh said," and beginning with lesson 13 students read from extended passages such as the sacrifice of Isaac. Extended notes on eight such texts prepare the user to tackle the rest of the prose in the Old Testament. Students are only asked to learn 415 vocabulary words. Something new under the sun. RWK

THERE IS HOPE FOR A TREE. By Kirsten Nielsen (Sheffield Academic Press, $31.95). In this translation of a Danish dissertation, N. concludes that the nine tree images in Isaiah 1-39 interpret the political situation and involve the hearers so that they adopt as their own the images' interpretation of reality. In the image of the tree that is felled but sprouts again (Isa 11), the Isaiah tradition has found the key to the political situation, and this key is summed up in the book's title (cf. Job 14:7-9). RWK

ANNOTATED KEY TO LAMBDIN'S INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEBREW. By H. G. M. Williamson (Sheffield Academic Press, $10.95). W. has worked out all the exercises in T. O. Lambdin's *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*, which has served in recent years as the standard text for teaching Hebrew in the English-speaking world. His goal is to assist those who are trying to learn Hebrew on their own, who probably need all the help they can get. Classroom teachers, of course, may fear that this key could become a crutch. Along the way W. provides brief guides for using Lambdin and gives additional material on noun formation. RWK

THE ESSENES ACCORDING TO THE CLASSICAL SOURCES. Edited by Geza Vermes & Martin D. Goodman (Sheffield Academic Press, $28.00). This book provides the Greek (or Latin) texts and English translations of discussions of the Essenes by Philo, Pliny the Elder, Josephus, Dio of Prusa, Hegesippus, and Hippolytus. The editors advocate the common theory today that the people who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls were Essenes. RWK

THE SYRIAC PRIMER. By George Anton Kiraz (Sheffield Academic Press, $14.50). Here is another textbook for the self-starter! K. hopes to help people interested in Syriac Christianity or biblical and Near Eastern studies to learn Syriac as a living language, including modern vocabulary (engineering, computer science, finance minister, committee). An accompanying cassette will help with pronunciation! The book is produced from camera-ready copy in several varieties of Syriac script designed by K. himself. The English, while usually understandable, reflects the fact that it is not K.'s native tongue (e.g. "All the listed verbs are in the masculine condition"; or "He clothed the girls white clothes"; or "Contemporary writers mix between the above meters"; or "The babe likes banana very much.") RWK

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY: DOCUMENTS FROM THE BRITISH MUSEUM. By T. C. Mitchell (Cambridge, $12.95). Taste the Near Eastern flavor of the Bible by considering the 60 "Documents" discussed in this book. Some of the documents illuminate Israelite history while others illustrate the cultural milieu (e.g. inscribed arrow heads, royal stamped jar handles). Ancient inscriptions show parallel genres in neighboring cultures. RWK

BAKER ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE. Two Volumes. Edited by Walter A. Elwell (Baker, $79.95). Another competent entry in the Bible dictionary field, this work is written so lay people can use it to deepen their understanding of the Bible (no jargon, no Greek or Hebrew fonts, no scholarly debates). What sets it apart from its competitors is theology: "The entire

project is written from an evangelical point of view. This means that a conservative stance is taken on critical issues and that the biblical text is handled in such a way as to reflect its verbally inspired nature." Though about 200 scholars contributed to this work, only a few of the articles are signed. The publisher promises to remedy this flaw in a second edition. RWK

WHO'S WHO IN THE BIBLE. By Peter Calvocoressi (Penguin, $7.95). The stories of 450 biblical characters parade across the pages of this book, trailed by interesting references to their appearances in literature and art. The author seems innocent of modern biblical studies, though his uncritical summary of what's in the Bible is accurate enough. He says, however, that Deuteronomy is the second book of the law, the first being Leviticus. In truth, "Deuteronomy" is a mistranslation of the expression "copy of this law" in Deut 17:18. Of Abraham we are told: "[He was] the historical first father of the Israelites, more real [?] than their legendary father Adam." "Reni painted Lot and his daughters leaving Sodom...three fine faces, although not particularly Biblical [?]." Ponder this dated picture of Delilah: "Fierce, yet with a certain grandness, she has become a symbol of woman's wiles used to trip up good men." RWK

THE WORLD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (BIBLE HANDBOOK, VOLUME II). Edited by A. S. van der Woude (Eerdmans, $29.95). This work, first published in Dutch in 1982, surveys the history of Israel from the beginning to Alexander the Great, analyzes the various genres found in the Hebrew Bible, and provides a competent book-by-book Introduction to the Old Testament. For a review of Volume I, *The World of the Bible*, see *Currents* 15 (1988), p. 220. RWK

HANDBOOK OF LIFE IN BIBLE TIMES. By J. A. Thompson (Zondervan, $34.95). This book aims to make available in easily understood form some of the discoveries of archaeology, to compare life back then and now, and to show the relationship between life in ancient times and the Bible. The straightforward text and its hundreds of color photographs are divided into the following sections: people at home; food and drink; industry and commerce; culture and health; warfare; and religion. RWK

THE HOUSE CHURCH. By Del Birkey (Herald, $18.95). As one who worked in a house church for some eight years, I come to books like this with high hopes. I have several problems with it. First, there exists much more literature which could have served the author as resources. For example, missing are Koenig on NT hospitality, Meeks and Wilken and Grant on early Christianity. Second, the author repeats a view of church history common to sectarians, namely, that the church went downhill after the Edict of Milan and that subsequent Christian history is a history of decline. Simply repeating this view will not solve the problems for our age. Interpretation and revision are needed beyond mere repetition. Most Herald books are reasonable; this is overpriced. JCR

Interesting and useful volumes recently appeared in the Supplement Series of the Journal for the Study of the New Testament (all published in Sheffield, England by the JSOT Press in 1987).

In no. 16, **MATTHEW'S COMMUNITY: THE EVIDENCE OF HIS SPECIAL SAYINGS MATERIAL** ($37.50), Stephenson H. Brooks reconstructs the history of the Matthean community on the basis of sayings of Jesus unique to Matthew. Nineteen key texts are identified in Matthew 5:17-6:18, and in chapters 10 and 23. Stephenson recovers three phases in the history of this church: (1) a Christian Jewish group at peace with the synagogue prior to 70 C. E. develops into (2) a Jewish Christian community separated from the opposed to the Jewish synagogue. For this community Matthew (3) writes a Gospel that stresses God as Father and develops an organization under the exclusive

authority of Jesus. Sharply argued, this dissertation, written at Union Seminary in New York, deserves attention by Matthean scholars.

In no. 17, **THE PARADOX OF THE CROSS IN THE THOUGHT OF ST. PAUL** (cloth, $27.50; paper, $13.50), Professor A. T. Hanson argues that the cross of Jesus gives ministry in Paul its paradoxical character. Paul's replication of Christ's sufferings is atoning, and that function is passed on to the church. It is also eschatological, a war against the forces of evil. In his last chapters Hanson discusses the implications of his study for the contemporary church: the developments in "Early Catholicism" were legitimate, yet ministry in the sense of apostolic office is not based in the New Testament. This book is provocative, stimulating, and worth careful study and debate.

Celia Deutsch's Ph.D. dissertation is Supplement 18 (cloth: $27.00; paper: $13.50). **HIDDEN WISDOM AND THE EASY YOKE: WISDOM, TORAH AND DISCIPLESHIP IN MATTHEW 11:25-30**, written at the Toronto School of Theology, uses source, form, redaction, and literary criticism to interpret Matthew 11:25-30 in the light of writings from the Second Temple period. She concludes that the passage was originally two separate logia, joined by Matthew to interpret Jesus as the primary referent for wisdom. Jesus' issuing of an invitation to discipleship is unique; his words are the source of wisdom and knowledge of God.

JESUS AND GOD IN PAUL'S ESCHATOLOGY, by Joseph Kreitzer (no. 19, cloth, $46.50; paper, $19.50), is concerned with theocentricity and christocentricity in Paul as a contribution to NT christology. K concentrates on the roles of God and the Messiah in Jewish pseudepigraphic literature and Paul. Paul blurs the distinction between God and the Lord Jesus, ascribing judgment to Jesus as well as God. Paul speaks of the Day of the Lord, meaning Jesus, not the Lord Yahweh. In the process Jesus receives titles, descriptions, functions, and attributes ascribed to God in the Old Testament. I Corinthians 15:20-28 is examined for the relationship of Messiah and Kingdom. K concludes that Paul thinks Jesus as Lord is eschatologically subordinated to God. Paul's use of and modification of Jewish apocalyptic motifs warns against drawing rapid ontological conclusions from Paul, whose christological language is amazingly flexible and "demonstrates a clear overlap between Christ and God with respect to their roles in the eschatological drama." Heavily documented and carefully argued, this volume is an outstanding contribution to Pauline studies. Kreitzer's book is a revised form of his Ph.D. Dissertation at King's College, London. Edgar M. Krentz

F. J. A. Hort, remembered today as producing (with Brooke Foss Westcott) the epochal nineteenth-century critical edition of the Greek New Testament, was regarded by many contemporaries as "the greatest English theologian of the nineteenth century" (William Sanday). **F. J. A. HORT, EMINENT VICTORIAN** (Sheffield, $36.50) is a brief theological biography by Graham A. Patrick. Hort is described as a sensitive churchman, open to science (including Darwin) and the critical study of the New Testament. He was strongly influenced by F. D. Maurice, but remained independent in his thought. Universally respected at the end of his life, he had his tragic flaw: a perfectionism that prevented him from publishing more than two complete works (the Introduction to the Greek Testament and the Hulsean Lectures of 1871, The Way the Truth The Life). His plans and dreams always outran reality. In moments of crisis, e. g., in relation to Essays and Reviews in 1859, he was silent, expressing himself only in letters. Aware of his own "theological unorthodoxy" (Patrick's phrase), Hort rarely wrote or spoke on theological matters. Patrick's study is a sympathetic portrait of an independent, pious, immensely learned effective teacher, respected by all, whose influence was ultimately much less than it might have been. Edgar M. Krentz

Preaching Helps

First Sunday in Advent—Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany, Series A

Accidental Tourists?

In Anne Tyler's *Accidental Tourist*, Macon is a writer of travel guides for people who do not like to leave home. The last thing they want is a taste of anything foreign, even if they find themselves in Paris or Tahiti. What they desire is nothing more than a hamburger with fries and the kind of indoor plumbing that America is famous for.

Far more adventurous is Muriel. Where Macon is studied, timid, careful to a fault, she is spontaneous, direct, and free. Where Macon is tentative and awkward, she is full of energy and plunges in. Without much formal education she is coping quite nicely. What is her secret? At one point she explains, "I made A's [in high school] because I caught on to the trick. You think it's not a trick? There's a trick to everything. That's how you get through life."

The liturgical calendar with its rhythms and seasons—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost—is designed to keep us from being "Accidental Tourists." It wants to turn us into "Intentional Pilgrims." People who are not afraid (as Macon is afraid) of diving in and getting our hands dirty. And people who travel the universe with freedom and verve, as Muriel does, and yet not because we have learned any "tricks," but simply because we know where we are heading (Towards Home). And with Whom we are traveling all the Way.

To get us launched into this new "Year of the Lord's Grace," we have the good offices of Michael Aune (Professor of Liturgics at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary), Roger Berg (Pastor of Newport Harbor Lutheran Church in Newport Beach, California), and Don Prange (Pastor in Nora, Virginia, and executive director of Appalachian Ministries in Economic Justice).

Michael Aune demonstrates that he has not lost his exegetical mind as he weds biblical interpretation to pastoral and liturgical insight in nicely crafted "First Readings." Roger Berg is a parish pastor and approaches each text as a preacher, ever on the lookout for striking images, trying to tune-in the biblical author, pondering what lines of thought he will develop as he moves toward the pulpit. As you read "Pastoral Reflections," I think you will discover that he has the communicator's ability to take you on that journey toward preaching with him. Don Prange from his vantage point in the coal country of Appalachia views Matthew as proclaiming God's Advent in a startling God-involvement, stirring people up to full-bodied discipleship.

Hats off to these three friends who share their thoughts with us, as we step out into Year A. As we all go, unlike Macon,

"On our Way rejoicing!"

Robert H. Smith
Preaching Helps Editor

First Sunday in Advent December 3, 1989

Psalm 122
Isaiah 2:1-5
Romans 13:11-14
Matthew 24:37-44

A FIRST READING

Why fight it? Folk piety wins in the end, and Advent, instead of being that season that liturgical purists dream of—a season bursting with the hope and longing for Christ's return—becomes a time to get ready for Christmas. Even the framers of the lectionary threw in the towel. As we shall see in these "First Readings," the themes and motifs of waiting for Christ's second coming are intermingled with the themes and motifs of waiting for the birth of a baby. And that's all right as long as we remember some important contrasts and some all too sharp realities—God's power and our powerlessness. "Stir up *your* power, O Lord, and come!" So we begin the muddled Advent season with talk of such realities.

Isaiah 2:1-5. Certainly those for whom this passage was written were well aware of the realities of power and powerlessness. It was probably composed during the reign of Jotham (742-735 B.C.E.), a time of extreme stress for the people of Judah. The kingdom is close to political collapse and archaeological evidence is clear that the military had little or no chance to stave off the conquering kingdoms to the east. The promise of this text staggers the imagination, for it is a promise of peace. Talk about a redefinition of power! What God has in mind is an utter and total transformation of existing conditions. All nations will come to Jerusalem to know God and experience that final and fulfilling peace only God can give.

Romans 13:11-14. Believers still wait for the full and final reign of God. In this lesson, we hear of the power of expectation and of hope in contrast to the powerlessness of pessimism—it will never happen! But wake up! There is a new way to live, the new life in Christ. Instead of grousing in our pessimism and engaging in disaster-mongering, "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Be warmed, protected, and adorned to live "as if"—we know what time it is—TODAY. And that can mean being fully awake to a new set of realities, prepared and expectant. Tensions and difficulties remain, but the options are clear because Christ's coming has begun to make a difference. It has, hasn't it?

Matthew 24:37-44. Since the Lord's final coming will be sudden indeed with a corresponding radical change to follow, the call goes out: "Watch! Stay awake!" No slick transformation of horizons and no easy hermeneutical sleight-of-hand can blunt the sharp, disturbing, and intrusive images of this text. There are floods, thieves, and kidnappers. And that means that in this present moment we are weak, vulnerable, insecure—in short, powerless! Do we crumble before the onslaught? Do we mark time and chew our fingernails? Is our preference to escape the present moment with its frightening insecurity? In our powerlessness we pray, "Stir up *your* power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by *your* strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins, for you live and reign...." We can pray this prayer because the Lord has come, is with us now, and will come again. It is in our powerlessness that the One who gave up all power is to be found and who is with us in our waiting and in our hoping. *Maranatha*! MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

It's not hard to take seriously this text of watching and being ready when you live in Southern California during the days of earthquake talk. "The Big One" is coming. Everyone is certain that a huge and destructive earthquake is imminent. Once you've had a picture fall to the floor and break the glass during a 4.2 reading on the Richter scale, you pay close attention to the prospect of a 7+ earthquake in the future.

The problem is, you can't do anything to stave off the 7+ quake. Oh, you can have some bottled water and canned food on hand along

with a battery-powered radio. You certainly will instruct your family on what to do when "The Big One" hits, but the bottom line is this: all the planning in the world won't prevent "The Big One" from happening.

The same thing holds true for the coming of the Son of man. The injunction to watch has nothing to do with preventing or staying the coming of the Son of man any more than preparedness for an earthquake has anything to do with preventing or staying an earthquake. What then is the reason for being prepared? It must lie in the effect being watchful has upon life today and not in the future.

The day-to-dayness quality of faith is the central point of Jesus' sayings on the end of time. Time now becomes filled with peace of mind when relationship with the Son of man is established. That relationship establishes purpose in living now and removes fear of the future. The One who is to come at an hour we do not know is then a friend. We do not fear a friend coming at an unexpected time. In fact, we look forward to a Friend coming to us in the future. RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

When *kyrios* is understood as *owner* (and that's appropriate in Matthew 24:45-51), and when the *household* of God is portrayed as the entire human household and family, then a faithful and wise discipleship (24:45) gets us unambiguously into economics. And wherever economic systems are at work (from 'home economics' to small enterprises to national and international corporations), the God-given mandate to meet the necessities of life, "food at the proper time," seems quite clear. But where there is dishonesty (24:48) or exploitative and abusive management (24:49), the *Owner* (*kyrios*, God!) may indeed intervene at an unexpected (24:50) moment. DP

Second Sunday in Advent December 10, 1989

Psalm 72:1-14 (15-19)
Isaiah 11:1-10
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 3:1-12

A FIRST READING

"Give us strength in our conflicts," we pray on this Second Sunday in Advent. Sounds like we are still as powerless as a week ago, but the strength to be received is another promise of the coming reign of God. "Where's the power in that?" we mutter. More pie-in-the-sky when we die bye and bye? It is tempting indeed to simply write off such a promise as both unrealistic and not applicable to the stark realities of our daily lives. What possible good is there or where is the "relevance" for this sort of talk? Today's readings—Isaiah, Romans, and Matthew—exhibit a mentality which is radically different from our habitual spiritless and self-centered one. Listen!

Isaiah 11:1-10. There is unqualified good news in this reading in the midst of bad news. The community has been scattered because the house of David has fallen before the onslaught of the Assyrians. But what is proclaimed—in fact, it is one of the classic proclamations of a future king in the Davidic line—is the coming of a future king who will inaugurate a rule of peace and justice, especially for the poor. The Lord's scattered remnant will be gathered, and the conflicts are no more. A total transformation is pictured which includes the natural, cosmic sphere as well as human beings. The result is that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord."

Romans 15:4-13. The hope of total transformation is announced in this reading as well. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Yet our illusions gnaw at us. We know how fragile we are, and instead of hoping we engage in "wishful

thinking." Or, at worst, we project the future which is simply one last gasp of our desire to be in control, to have it our way. Promises do not seem to be enough. And like ancient Israel, we waver, stagger in our unfaithfulness, because we do not like to wait. Our impatience gets the best of us. But contrast that with God's patience, God's truthfulness, God's mercy, God's steadfastness and encouragement. There is hope and strength in our conflicts because the God portrayed in this reading is the God who has acted, does act, and will act in the arena of human history—our arena, our history.

Matthew 3:1-12. We are reminded, however, that we do not always want this God in the nooks and crannies of our lives. Today the hard, harsh, tough word is sounded: clean up your act; bear fruit that befits repentance. In fact, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. John the Baptist speaks some powerful "No's." He takes the measure of king and commoner, soldier and priest, tax collector and tax payer. Each one is weighed in the scales of his vision of that kingdom in which righteousness, a new world of "all rightness," prevails. So, do we feel sorry and remorseful because we do not measure up? That, of course, is much easier than responding with a total change of mind and heart. Perhaps we want to limit the relevance of John's tongue-lashing to either the religious leaders of his day or to the power-brokers of our own, both religious and political. Or, worst of all, we hide behind our own pieties. Repent and pray, knowing that God's mercy is of a piece with God's justice—that it will be enough to give us strength in our conflicts, to burn away the chaff from our lives. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

My first reflection is that the wilderness is a strange place to preach. Evangelism-wise it would make more sense to preach in the cities and populated places where the people are. The area east and southeast of Jerusalem is pretty bleak, something like the area south of Barstow, California, towards Blythe, California. Evidently someone must have been listening, because we learn later on in the text that the people from Jerusalem and the surrounding area came out in the wilderness to hear him. Word of mouth newscasting must have been responsible for the news reaching Jerusalem. The wilderness of Matthew is different than the wilderness of salvation announced in Isaiah 40:3. Matthew puts emphasis on the geographical wilderness east and south of Jerusalem.

As I think about this metaphor I wonder if the image of the dry, dead wilderness giving rise to something of life and vitality should be examined and proclaimed. It's almost like the saying of Jesus about the old wineskins and new wine. John the Baptist calls the people, in the midst of the dry and dead wasteland, out of a dry and dead religiosity, to repent—to turn away from their sin. John is not the vehicle of forgiveness; that gift can only come from Jesus. From what wilderness do we call people? What deserts in our lives prepare us for the life-giving water of God's forgiveness and grace as seen in the face of Jesus Christ?

Advent is a time of anticipation and expectation. John stands in the wilderness as God's anticipator, raising the expectations of the people. Does our preaching today raise the expectations of the people in their wilderness moments? How can the re-presentation of the gospel faithfully call forth the excitement of God planning a new thing for the lives of the people in 1989 who live their wilderness moments in the midst of crowded shops and streets? Could we further push the metaphor by asking the question of ourselves if we have made of the good news a dry and dead thing, or is that going too far? Dare we not call people to repentance today? Is there any possibility for forgiveness to be a liberating word if there is no confession and repentance? RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

A faithfulness to Owner-God economics produces the "appropriate fruit" (Matt 3:8) of a commitment to justice for "the poor of the land" (Is 11:4), a commitment to "God's preferential option for the poor." God defends "the poorest [and] will crush their oppressors and redeem

[them] from exploitation and outrage" (Ps 72:4). Discipleship is not a matter of religious affiliation. Authentic conversions to Christian discipleship are marked by far more than becoming church members. If all God wanted was numbers, we could get them by converting stones (Matt 3:9). John lashed out at people who were not "filled with the knowledge of Yahweh" (Is 11:9). An authentic rootage in that knowledge celebrates the Scriptures as the active word of God in history in solidarity with the oppressed. Those Scriptures teach us "something about hope from the examples of how people who did not give up were helped by God" (Rom 15:4). DP

Third Sunday in Advent December 17, 1989

Psalm 146
Isaiah 35:1-10
James 5:7-10
Matthew 11:2-11

A FIRST READING

Into our enslaved, dead-end, dehumanizing world comes yet another word of promise and hope for transformation and change. There will be salvation for the oppressed, courage for the fearful, healing and wholeness for those afflicted in body and mind. But we are still "betwixt-and-between," still waiting... and waiting... and waiting. Stretched between tension and anticipation, we pray this day: "Grant us, your people, the wisdom to see your purpose today and the openness to hear your will."

Isaiah 35:1-10. God's purpose for a discouraged and disabled people is portrayed in the lush imagery of this text. The expectation is of a complete reversal for humanity and for all of creation. This is God's will for the world and human history. While scholars disagree as to whether this passage should be dated near the end of the Babylonian exile (ca. 538 B.C.E.) or to a later time, the emphasis is still upon God's promise not only to bring the people home but also to transform both them and the once arid land in which they had lived. Life will be poured into both, the wilderness will celebrate, the desert will celebrate, bodies will be healed—and "they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (v.10).

James 5:7-10. But we are still waiting... waiting... and waiting. Our situation is certainly much more like this text. We grumble and become anxious because hope remains unfulfilled. Things just are not turning out the way we prefer. It is into such a situation that the word of this text comes with its call to patience. Good grief! Is that all there is? Hang in there until things get better? But this is not the message of James. For we are not being called to the practice of what one writer has termed "perpetually serene piety," but rather to a patient trust—what v. 8 describes as "establishing our hearts" (RSV) or as being "stout-hearted" (NEB). No immediate results here. The world as well as those around us still strike us as unfair. And we will still get impatient. But then, who is in charge? The One who is compassionate and merciful, *not* us.

Matthew 11:2-11. We are in good company this Sunday. We cannot see the dawning kingdom brimming with righteousness. But then, one who was there—who was even the forerunner of Jesus—did not see it either. Behind bars in Herod Antipas' filthy prison, John the Baptist is filled with grave doubt: "Are you he who is to come?" His own apocalyptic vision of that new world of "all rightness" from God, his hard summons that smashed all hallowed assumptions about self, nation, and even God, and his word of mighty judgment contrast sharply with the "peaceable kingdom" preached by Jesus. From John's dank cell comes the cry, "Where is the new world? Where is righteousness?" And Jesus' response is a summary of what he has been saying and doing: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." The stark contrast between expecta-

tion and reality reminds us of our own doubts and uncertainties. But then, we live in this world and not in some other one—in this world to which God has come "deep in the flesh" of Jesus. That is our faith. That is our hope. For God has acted and will act decisively on our behalf and on behalf of all humanity. And in the meantime what do we see? Can we see beyond our own preoccupations to the signs of new life breaking in with passion and love? MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The first thing that comes to my mind while reading this text is whether John could have asked such a question. It sounds like a question the *followers* of John would have asked. However, after the baptism of Jesus by John the unassuming and plain lifestyle of Jesus may have given rise to some doubts. Jesus seems to have no problem with the nature of the question or the doubt implicit therein. I wonder if the community of faith doesn't often build metaphysical hedges around the Word of God, both in the person of Jesus and in the Scriptures, in order to protect God when no protection is necessary.

This may be a place to share with the people the appropriateness of doubt within the context of faith. Buechner calls doubts "the ants in the pants of faith, they keep it awake and moving." More people in more places in more churches feel guilt about the doubts they have but never express than perhaps any other foible. The season of Advent is a good time to turn over the stones of doubt to see what is on the other side. John's question is more in the line of, "I just want to check my perceptions about God's plan; do I have it right?" The answer comes not as a declarative statement but rather as instructions to the disciples of John to report what is happening. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them, and "blessed is he who takes no offense at me." The answer is happening all around them, even before they brought the question from John.

Life is like the Hebrew alphabet: all consonants and no vowels. You have to sense the context in order to throw in the right vowel. Jesus' reply throws in the vowels that make sense out of what is happening all around them. His answer goes beyond the messianic expectations of the prophets when he refers to the lepers being cleansed and the dead being raised up. The miracles by themselves are just that: miracles. What lies behind the miracles is the love of God in Jesus and the hope that active love brings to the people. The concrete acts of love of the congregation to which you preach could be enumerated in a positive and helpful way in order to point out the message of hope that still continues today for the community of faith. This text might be a good point of entry into helping the faithful identify the vowels of God's grace in 1989. RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

The "Good News," the gospel, is not an abstraction. It is "Good News *to the poor*" (Matt 11:5). A faithfulness to Christian discipleship means some analysis and naming of the realities of oppression—along with naming some remedies. The good bodily realities of "seeing, walking, healing, hearing," and "being changed from death to life" are clear enough. And economic justice is Good News to the poor!

Naming injustice brings resistance from those who profit by it. It is from a jail cell that John raises questions about the Christianity of Jesus. And as Matthew tells the story, not only is the significance of the mission of Jesus as the Christ affirmed, the prophetic mission of John is affirmed as well. DP

Fourth Sunday in Advent December 24, 1989

Psalm 24
Isaiah 7:10-14 (15-17)
Romans 1:1-7
Matthew 1:18-25

A FIRST READING

The motifs of God's power and our powerlessness resurface on this Fourth Sunday in Advent: "Stir up *your* power, O Lord, and come." And our powerlessness is underscored as "the hindrance of our sins." Yet we pray that we will be ready to celebrate, to receive, and to serve the One whose birth is the earthy incarnate grace of God: "God with us... Emmanuel." The eschatological rumblings and promises of the earlier Sundays in Advent give way to the announcement of how God has brought ancient longings to present and astonishing fulfillment: "she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

Isaiah 7:10-14 (15-17). International politics again constitutes the backdrop of this well-known reading. Judah, ruled by Ahaz, has been targeted by both Israel and Syria because of his refusal to join with them against Assyria. In the midst of this situation, where Ahaz is considering an appeal to Assyria for continued safety, the prophet offers a sign. The king could care less and, in fact, prefers the facade of his own piety which is ultimately an act of infidelity. God, however, remains faithful, so much so that God will give a sign of salvation, of deliverance from military and political threat. That good news will bear the name "Emmanuel." Deliverance comes, not through last-ditch and hastily-arranged alliances and the alleged might of weapons, but from a God who is faithful. There's the power, isn't it?

Romans 1:1-7. Paul emphasizes that Christ "was descended from David according to the flesh." As with the Gospel for this Sunday, Christ is squarely placed within human history. Paul, moreover, summarizes Christian faith from the vantage point of God's age-old purpose, testified to in the Scriptures and made most explicit in Christ's resurrection from the dead. There is certainly a touch of realism in this text. There will be no eternity of Christmases. Rather, there will be the inexorable march toward Good Friday. The God-with-us will be present in our suffering and in our sickness, in our living and in our dying, mediating the power of God to us in the midst of our powerlessness.

Matthew 1:18-25. The stage is finally set for Christmas. The setting which Matthew provides, however, is altogether shocking. There is none of the usual "Christmasy" details such as the imperial edict and the crowded inn. To be sure, we will hear those details tomorrow. But for now much of the focus is upon Joseph, who knows nothing of virgin birth and wonders if his young wife is guilty of pre-marital sex. Dropping off to sleep, he decides to quietly divorce her. We know the rest of the story, however. Joseph has an extraordinary dream in which the angel instructs him that his fears about Mary are baseless. "Her child," writes colleague Robert Smith, "is not the product of any human activity whatsoever. Jesus is pure gift, holy surprise, fresh act of God, new creation." "God's own raw power in history, the Holy Spirit," as Smith comments on this text, prompts us to reflect upon the extraordinary in the ordinary, the Incarnation, and to see God's working, gracious and powerful in our own lives and in the lives of others. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

What a picture this text gives! Mary and Joseph are betrothed to each other. Before the betrothal is consummated, Joseph finds out Mary is pregnant. He is mortified and seeks to do the honorable thing. Joseph doesn't want to embarrass Mary by putting her to shame. He makes up his mind quickly to send Mary packing quietly. Understandably, Joseph is very hesitant to marry Mary.

The next part of this poignant scene points out what a man of faith Joseph was. Here is an entry into the lives of 1989 humankind. Paint

the picture in broad strokes concerning the faith required for a man to accept that his wife's pregnancy was a result of the Holy Spirit. If done tastefully, the people in the pews will have an increased admiration for the actions of Joseph. Mary never says a word in her own defense. A dream conveys the message to Joseph. Not only is the pregnancy caused by the Holy Spirit, but the angel in the dream gives some specifics which leads Joseph to accept the news: the baby will be a boy, and his name will be called Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. When Joseph wakes from his sleep he accepts everything he has dreamed and takes Mary to be his wife, even though he does not consummate his relationship with Mary until after she gives birth to Jesus.

Such faith and openness has seldom been seen. It's the stuff of which *National Enquirer* headlines are made. "Virgin to give birth to the Son of God! Husband confirms their betrothal has not been consummated!!" It's so bizarre that it's nearly unbelievable. That God should become human! That God should love humankind so much that not only does he take human flesh but also allows the world to crucify his Son in order to re-establish the relationship that humankind has broken. The world of broken images and dreams could only be glued together by the grace of a never-before and never-since event: God becoming human. That's what the virgin birth says. The birth of Jesus was a unique event in history, one of a kind. The holy God continues to come to us. RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

If Advent celebrates the spirit of God's continual coming into history, then Christian discipleship is the God-movement "conceived by the Holy Spirit" in which the presence of God is alive and active. And in its faithfulness to economic practices which bring justice and integrity for the poor of the land, it is a continuing witness to the fact that "God-is-with-us" (Matt 1:23). Its "apostolic mission to preach the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5) revolves around a theology which recognizes God as Owner: "To Yahweh belong earth and all it holds, the world and all who live in it" (Ps 24:1). And we need to go beyond the abstractions of that faith to the substance of the meaning of "earth and all its holds." It's not just "the earth" but the land, the real estate, the natural resources. These are Yahweh's. DP

The Nativity of Our Lord: Christmas Day December 25, 1989

Psalm 96
Isaiah 9:2-7
Titus 2:11-14
Luke 2:1-20

A FIRST READING

In a rugged and sordid world, the grace of God appears. It erupts in the history of a people called Israel, in the history of a people called the church and, above all, in a particular birth. Why? The Prayer of the Day provides a rather simple answer: to set us free from the old slavery of sin. Each of the readings for this festival commemorates and celebrates the coming of God to be bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh in order to set us free. What kind of freedom is this? It is freedom from the oppressors' yoke and from the rule of a foreign power; it is freedom "from all iniquity" that has consequences for the details of daily life; it is a freedom which is nothing less than the peace of God for humanity.

Isaiah 9:2-7. This well-known poem has figured significantly in our understanding of Christ's person and work. He is "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Thus, we have not always been aware of the initial context and thrust of this passage which is a song of good news for what God intends for the future. The context is a rather stark one indeed. What precedes this

poem is an oracle of doom, and the mood of darkness, depression, and death carries over into the first verse of this passage. But what is clear is that such things are not the last word God's people will hear. For God will not abandon them, nor will God renege on the promises already made. And what we hear is the powerful language of praise for God's deliverance from oppression, for the establishment of peace, and for the reign of justice and righteousness.

Titus 2:11-14. Commentators note that this passage is chosen for the Nativity of Our Lord because of the prominent "appearing" motif. The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all. Such salvation, however, does not herald the rapid departure of believers from this world. Rather, it places them (and us!) even more firmly in the details of daily life. The appearance of the grace of God creates a people for God's own possession, a people "who are zealous for good deeds." Their lives and ours are lived "betwixt and between" the two moments of God's appearing—the first in the Incarnation and the second in the final appearing of God's glory. Until then such grace is appropriated in the lives we lead.

Luke 2:1-20. Ever familiar and ever new is the story of Jesus' birth. What can be said about it that has not been said before? That the setting is world-wide and that this birth has momentous impact? That there were people who actually believed the new baby in the stable was God in human form? That the Lord of the universe cared enough about humanity to take on our flesh and to share our woes? That this birth took place in squalor and under the shadow of terror? It is all that and more. Whatever the exegetical difficulties with the chronology of this evangelist (vv.1-7), there is an incredible simplicity as well—a city, a no-vacancy sign at the inn, and a manger. In vv. 8-20, there is a plethora of messages and images and feelings and responses—the choir of angels, the excitement of the shepherds, the announcement of the good news of God's favor toward humanity, the praise and the joy, and the quiet pondering of Mary. Not quite what we expected. Nevertheless, it is Christmas again. God comes with the inexpressible gift of sheer goodness and love, to be with and stay with us—forever. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

I remember Christmas from my childhood as a time when we would open presents on Christmas Eve only after my father read the Christmas Gospel from the second chapter of Luke to the family. When I became a teenager my father asked me to read the Christmas Gospel. It was a privilege and honor I was only too happy to accept. The story of Christmas, as told by Luke, is a story that holds surprises no matter how often you've heard it.

I grew up thinking Bethlehem was a large, important city, something on the scale of Minneapolis—which to a boy growing up in Jackson, Minnesota (population 3,000, counting every dog and cat), seemed like the biggest, brightest city in the world. I remember my surprise when I discovered Bethlehem was really a backwater, out-of-the-way village, five miles south of the big metropolis of Jerusalem. Why would God bypass Jerusalem for a little town like Jackson? The next surprise is that God became human in a tiny, helpless baby in—are you ready for this?—a stable, because there was no room for them in the inn.

The next surprise: the baby Jesus is laid to rest in a manger, the feed-box where the animals come to eat. Their mouths harbor more bacteria than any other part of their bodies. So the child is exposed to germs, at high risk.

After Jesus is born, the angel announces the birth to a totally unexpected audience: the shepherds. I could understand announcing Jesus' birth to the local leaders of government and business, or to the religious leaders; but announcing the birth of the Christ to a band of shepherds sitting around the fire swapping lies and passing the bottle is hardly my idea of how to go about making known God's love for humankind. The reputation of shepherds was such that they were not allowed to testify in a court of law. Nobody believed a word they had to say. So here we find ourselves confronted by an angel telling these reprobates that for *them* "is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Who's going to believe what these shepherds say? In Luke 2:17 we read that the shep-

herds told others about what they had seen in Bethlehem, and the people "wondered at what the shepherds told them."

What it means today is what it meant even then. In order for the birth of Christ to mean anything for you, you have to be involved. The shepherds were involved. They "returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

"Glory to God; peace on earth." The God-movement principles of Advent take on concrete historical reality. Liturgy and life, theory and praxis, become one. The principles of God as Owner (*kyrios/Yahweh*), of justice and integrity for the poor, of good news in specific contexts of oppression, and of actions celebrating 'God-is-with-us' (the presence of God) begin to materialize in the birth of Christian discipleship. And discipleship is the ultimate celebration of the birth of the Christ.

The birth of Jesus brings "a joy to be shared by the whole people" (Lk 2:10), both a power which breaks "the rod of the oppressor" (Is 9:3) and a power which "establishes and makes secure justice and integrity" (Is 9:7). "God's grace" (Titus 2:11) prompts us to give up "everything that does not lead to God, and all our worldly ambitions." It moves us to want to be a people [with] no ambition except to do good" (Titus 2:12-14). DP

First Sunday After Christmas December 31, 1989

Psalm 111
Isaiah 63:7-9
Galatians 4:4-7
Matthew 2:13-15,19-23

A FIRST READING

According to the liturgical calendar, it is still Christmas. But for most of us, the festival is over and we may wonder why the Christmas mood cannot last the year round. To such questions, today's lessons offer some very provocative answers.

Isaiah 63:7-9. Although the main thrust of this passage is God's saving activity in history, there is some complaining going on as well. Commentators observe how the structure of these verses is very similar to the complaint songs or laments which are found in Psalms and Lamentations. We are very embarrassed by such naming of the negative—so much so that we have virtually excised it from our worship. But there is no selective remembering on this First Sunday after Christmas. While God is praised in terms of past actions, the community of faith reminds God of its present difficulties, and later complains (cf. especially vv. 15 through 64:12) about God's faithfulness.

Galatians 4:4-7. There are some sharp contrasts in this passage which might help us to better understand why Christmas often seems so fleeting. Christ was "born of woman, born under the law," to make us sons and daughters and heirs who are not enslaved to "to the elemental spirits of the universe"(v. 3). The Incarnation is anchored in time and history, not in a mood, not in a God who caters to our every whim. We might say this day, on the basis of this passage, that Christmas has very much to do with our receiving a new status as children of God whose hearts are now filled with the good gift of the Spirit.

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23. We are so used to Christmas as the season of lights that we often forget—or perhaps prefer to overlook—that it is also a time of dark shadows. The holy family flees to Egypt to escape the troubled, deceptive, deceived, and vengeful Herod. They flee to a land of oppression and sanctuary. What Matthew has done with such a narrative is to place Jesus squarely within the promise/fulfillment dynamic of the history of God's people and to identify him as the very Son/Child of God. We are also reminded in a very powerful way that the full meaning of Christmas is not only that Christ has come but also that he came and continues to come in the midst of an overpowering darkness. There are twists, turns, fear, faith, chance, accident, and confusion—but in the midst of it all God's hand and design are present. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

Joseph is the center of attention. He is led to take Mary and their baby and get out of town in a hurry. This instruction comes to Joseph in a dream. He follows this instruction immediately and leaves for Egypt. This is the second time Joseph has been led to do God's will by a dream (see Matt 1:18-24). Another Joseph, who was also a dreamer, ended up in Egypt interpreting dreams for the Pharaoh. Here in Matthew's account of the flight to Egypt, Joseph is also the center of attention.

The contrast between the political king in the figure of Herod, with his power and might, and the baby Jesus, who has come to draw all people unto himself, is startling and compelling. That baby would appear to be no match for Herod. However, it is the baby Jesus who is the central figure in the ensuing events. This could be a point at which to speak of the foolishness of God as wiser than humankind and the weakness of God as stronger than humankind. Even as God led his child Israel out of bondage in Egypt against the will and power of the Pharaoh, so now he would lead all people out of bondage through his son Jesus, the baby hiding in Egypt from the wrath of Herod. What foolishness! What weakness! And yet, God brings it about.

We're only one week past the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Very quickly we see how the idyllic scene of the shepherds bowing down to see the Babe in the manger with angels dotting the scene changes to escape from the specter of death. Life is like that, swinging between calm, serene moments and moments of terror and escape. The common bond between those opposites is the presence of Jesus. God incarnate holds both. In the days after Christmas, the people in the pews need to hear the words of God's presence among us. RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

God's liberating "presence" (Is 63:9) always finds a way of materializing in specific contexts of injustice and oppression. "Egypt" (Matt 2:15) and "Nazareth" (2:23) are just such contexts. Each requires its own analysis and appropriate action, its "appointed time" (Gal 4:4). What was possible and necessary in Egypt did not fit the realities of Nazareth or Galilee or Galatia. But in each context a God-movement was called into being to reflect and be the presence of God in acting out God's "faithfulness and justice" (Ps 111:7) to people in those contexts of injustice and oppression. To lift yesterday's answers out of their contexts and to apply them in some dogmatic manner to the contexts of today is irrelevant and dishonest, and denies the task of discipleship in following the lead of the Spirit (Gal 4:6, 7). DP

The Baptism of Our Lord: First Sunday After the Epiphany January 7, 1990

Psalm 45:7-9
Isaiah 42:1-7
Acts 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17

A FIRST READING

Over two hundred years before the first known Christmas celebration in the fourth century, there were believers who observed and celebrated God's coming to humanity in a festival which is called the Epiphany. Once thought to have been based on some pagan festival, perhaps initially in Egypt, it is now fairly certain that such a festival did not exist. Rather, Epiphany is the result of some calculating forward from the date associated with the primitive paschal celebration (March 25), a celebration which emphasized Christ's passion, resurrection, and glorification, together with the incarnation. Epiphany in the Christian East, however, emphasized not only the incarnation but also its consequences—the beginning of Jesus' ministry with his baptism and anointing with the Spirit of God.

Isaiah 42:1-7. In the first of these Servant Songs, we hear of the One who is given the Spirit of God and a commission to bring forth justice to the nations. The original setting of this passage, most likely near the end of the Babylonian Exile in 538 B.C.E., is one of hope in a God who is promising to do new things—both in the person of the *'ebhed yhwh* (vv. 1-4) and in the people of Israel (vv. 5-7). The roles and responsibilities of servant and of community are strikingly similar—"a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness."

Acts 10:34-38. What can happen when one is endowed with the Spirit of God and with power, as Jesus was at his baptism, is the thrust of Peter's first sermon to the Gentiles ("the nations"). The beloved Son/Child inaugurates his ministry of "doing good and healing" which is nothing less than salvation for all.

Matthew 3:13-17. Joachim Jeremias once wrote in his *New Testament Theology* that from the time of the last of the prophets until the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit had been quenched. His brief description of the baptism of Jesus was entitled "The Return of the Quenched Spirit." While troublesome to the early Christian movement because of its alleged adoptionistic Christology, the significance of the baptism of Jesus must not be forgotten or overlooked. Matthew's explanation which preserves Jesus' status (vv. 14-15) allows us to appreciate and to appropriate the full significance and power of Jesus being endowed and commissioned by the Spirit of God. Robert Smith puts it well in his recent commentary on Matthew: "So the voice from heaven designates Jesus as Son of God, Messiah of Israel, king of the new age, beloved leader, restorer of lost fortunes, fulfiller of hopes, desire of nations, servant of God. Heaven had been shut, the Spirit had vanished, and there had been a famine of words from the Lord. But ever since Jesus came to the Jordan, nothing has been the same." MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

The question is, why does Jesus present himself to John the Baptist for baptism? The answer is provided by Jesus himself: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Having heard the answer we don't know much more than we did before.

What is the righteousness of which Jesus speaks? Righteousness is normally understood as "being in the right." What then did Jesus have to do to be in the right? Somehow being baptized by John was part of being in the right. I don't get the impression that it was an action Jesus mechanically took simply because he felt he had to. Perhaps it's like learning to hit a baseball. You can read all the books in the world by all the greatest writers on how to hit a baseball, and still

not have it right. You can memorize every tip anybody ever told you about how to hold a bat and still not have it right. Until you pick up a bat and attempt to hit a baseball thrown at you at 85 miles per hour, you don't have a ghost of a chance of getting it right. Getting it right means you do it when it counts and you come through with hits when needed.

Jesus was saying that in order to get it right he was going ahead with the baptism by John. Jesus had it so right that he willingly accepted God's command which went far beyond the written law. Jesus never felt obedience to the Father was something he had to do. Rather he wanted to be obedient, enjoyed being obedient, reveled in being obedient. Not because he was forced to be obedient, but because he desired to get it right.

It all came together when rising out of the water Jesus heard, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." It was like hitting one out of the park with the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth inning. He definitely got it right! RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

Jesus was born into a religious tradition called to justice: "I, Yahweh have called you to serve the cause of justice; I have taken you by the hand and formed you; I have appointed you as a covenant of the people and light of the nations..." (Is 42:6). When Jesus came to John for baptism it was not fulfillment of a 'religious' law that was at stake. Rather, it was Jesus' recognition that a tradition with a mission of justice had a claim on who he was and what he was about. It is a good time for re-examining the meaning of a baptismal covenant within the context of Christian discipleship, for hearing again the question the traditional rite asks in one form or another: "Do you renounce all the forces of evil, the devil, and all his empty promises?" (*LBW*, p. 123). DP

Second Sunday After the Epiphany January 14, 1990

Psalm 40:1-12
Isaiah 49:1-6
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-41

A FIRST READING

If Epiphany is observed at all in our churches, it turns out to be a time to get hot and bothered about evangelism. Because our observance has been so tied to the manifestation of the Christ to the magi (the archetypal Gentiles?), our corresponding emphasis has been on rounding up converts. The question which often goes unanswered is, "why would anyone want to become a member of the Christian community in the first place?" An even more nagging question is, "what kind of community would they enter?" Today's lessons give us some answers to carefully ponder.

Isaiah 49:1-6. This second of the Servant Songs has often been applied to Jesus. An even more intriguing interpretive possibility is to regard this text as a way to understand the community of faith, especially its vocation. Some of the themes of such a vocation include uttering the sharp, prophetic word and serving as a light to the nations so that the salvation of the Lord "may reach to the end of the earth." Yet it is also possible to apply this passage to ourselves as a type of captive Israel or to those other nations to whom God's universal reign is proclaimed.

1 Corinthians 1:1-9. The second lessons for the rest of this Epiphany season are from First Corinthians. One wonders if the inimitable wisdom of lectionary makers is at work, because we are presented with a community which has all sorts of social, liturgical, and theological problems. Who in their right mind would want to be part of such a misanthropic bunch? Paul's approach is most ironic as the initial greeting and prayer of thanksgiving indicate. This feeble

church of sinners is still nothing less than the church of God whose members have been called to be saints *together*! As we overhear the ensuing conversation between Paul and the Corinthians during these next several weeks, perhaps we can gain some additional insight into the kind of community of faith we are and the one God intends us to be.

John 1:29-41. This passage, with its twofold emphasis upon the identity of Jesus and the sort of discipleship response he elicits, is very much an Epiphany message. His identity is rooted in the baptism performed by John the Baptist, although the awkward and disturbing (at least theologically/Christologically) nature of this event is dealt with rather deftly by the Fourth Evangelist. He reports only what the Baptist saw—that Jesus is the one upon whom God's Spirit descends and remains. Jesus' identity as God's unique instrument, as Messiah and Servant of the Lord, is what is crucial. The consequences of who Jesus is are set forth in the rest of this passage with its theme of following him. Yet unlike the Synoptic accounts of the call of the disciples, Jesus begins with a question rather than an imperative: "What are you looking for?" Perhaps we recognize ourselves in such a question. And once again, as is characteristic of the Epiphany season, there is the emphasis upon the deepening of insight into Jesus' identity and on the sort of vocation/discipleship that can result. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

John the Baptist delivers his testimony to Jesus. He calls Jesus the lamb of God (v. 29), the one who existed before John (v. 30), the recipient of the Spirit (v. 32-33), and the Son of God (v. 34). Pretty heady stuff. John had it right.

It makes me wonder how we do "testimony" to Jesus in this time and this place. John saw his mission as one of preparing the way for Jesus. John came as Messiah's advance man. John's whole purpose for existence was wrapped up in telling people about the coming of the Messiah, calling people to repentance in the process. Today, testimonies to Jesus very often run along the lines of "Jesus is my personal Lord and Savior." What would happen if we used the images John used in his testimony?

"Lamb of God." This image from an agrarian society may fall flat in our urban society, but I think this need not be. The image is rooted deeply in the biblical tradition. The passover lamb provided the blood to paint the door posts and lintel so the angel of death could "pass over" the protected house. Jesus is the Lamb of God who delivers from bondage by his death. The testimony on our part to Jesus using this imagery occurs during corporate worship. We hear the words of institution: "Do this for the remembrance of me." We kneel and receive the body and blood of Jesus, and while we kneel, we hear the *Agnus Dei* being sung: "Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us... grant us peace."

We give our testimony in worship in the very act of receiving the deliverance from sin and bondage by remembering his death. Two of John the Baptist's disciples turned from following John to following Jesus after they heard John say of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" John's testimony pointed people to Jesus. Our faithfulness in worship is our testimony that can point people to Jesus. RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

John and Matthew share the same perspective about sin. It stems from a fundamental idolatry which fails to give God glory and, therefore, fails to do the justice of God, especially economic justice, and fails in bringing *shalom* into the world. It is the 'sin' which creates world systems of injustice and oppression, economic systems exalting private ownership and wealth as opposed to the godly economics of meeting human need. DP

Third Sunday After the Epiphany January 21, 1990

Psalm 27:1-9
Isaiah 9:1b-4
1 Corinthians 1:10-17
Matthew 4:12-23

A FIRST READING

Throughout this Epiphany season, we hear in the Proper Preface that Christ shared our life and lived among us to reveal God's glory and love "that our darkness should give way to his own brilliant light." No gloom, anguish, and contempt at this juncture. The light now shines upon us bringing us joy.

Isaiah 9:1b-4. Release from trouble and oppression, and the response of celebration which accompanies such release, are graphically portrayed in this passage. "Darkness" is the author's way to speak of depression and death. We are certainly not strangers to such things either. It seems God's people are always waiting for their God to deliver them, to release them from trouble.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17. In our waiting and hoping, we often get bogged down in bickering with one another. The Corinthians were masters of such behavior which, when continued, can lead to doctrinal and ideological difficulties. Until recently the "quarreling" (v.11) reported to Paul was thought to be doctrinal in nature. Historians of the early Christian movement now tell us that these various factions most likely had a great deal to do with social standing and social stratification very much at odds with the Christian message's emphasis upon unity. Just what such unity is and how it comes about are concerns that Paul will continue to develop in the weeks ahead.

Matthew 4:12-23. Yet another slant on Jesus' message and the call to discipleship is presented in this reading. Such matters are placed in the context similar to that of the first reading from Isaiah—a context marked by darkness and light. But the coming of the light to people whose whole existence is one of "sitting in darkness" and "in the region and shadow of death" is portrayed by Matthew as a summons from this easy and well-known rut to a new life of repentance and righteousness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"...."Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Most likely we go kicking and screaming, because fish are dragged from their hiding places. Certainly all of this has a rather sinister ring to it. Yet the proclamation and the challenge to follow Jesus involve a radical break with what has been and radical involvement in what it is to be. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

There are several different levels in this text. The first impression I have is that John the Baptist's imprisonment is some sort of signal from God to Jesus that it's time for Jesus to begin his ministry. The verses following verse 12 and culminating in v. 17 lead to this conclusion. Jesus picks up where John left off by preaching repentance: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

It's a confusing world in which we live. The pace of living often oversteps our ability to keep up. It's very easy to become frustrated and overwrought. It would be nice if we could depend upon signals from God in order to act with authority and assurance. Jesus was sensitive to God's will for his life and thus was aware of God's signals.

Often when we seek signals from God for our lives we look for something "religious," and yet often it's something *non*-religious that conveys direction and meaning. The second level of this text tells of Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee. He sees two fishermen plying their craft and asks them to follow him. He doesn't preach to them. He doesn't ask them to bow to pray with him. He doesn't explain the Scriptures to them by the side of the Sea of Galilee. He simply asks them to follow him. There's nothing very religious about the whole scene, and yet in the very act of saying "yes" or "no" to him, the lives of

Simon and Andrew are forever changed. There are certain events in life that hold the possibility of being life-changing and life-directing. When a proposal of marriage is made, the answer given will change the direction of that person's life. The answers to these *kairoi*, moments pregnant with meaning, will signal directions to be taken.

During this season of Epiphany some thoughts about how truth and purpose are made manifest in our lives in 1990 would seem a good place to start. The mysterious promise of Jesus to make these fishermen into fishers of human beings captured the interest and imagination of Simon, Andrew, James, and John. What promises does the gospel hold that can call forth such interest and inspiration today? RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

Jesus' call to discipleship is not an invitation to say "yes" to some kind of doctrinal theology. It is a call to action, an invitation to participate in the God-movement: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand" (Matt 4:17). It is a movement of teaching and action, of theory and praxis, of "Proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom" (4:23), the Good News of economic justice, and of "curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people" (4:23). We need to push and probe the meaning of all kinds. Jesus wasn't looking for 'believers'—he was looking for disciples. DP

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany January 28, 1990

Psalm 1
Micah 6:1-8
1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Matthew 5:1-12

A FIRST READING

What has been mentioned in a more general sense in the readings of previous weeks is made incredibly specific on this Sunday. These are "classic" passages in each instance. Micah speaks of doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. Paul sets before us the theology of the cross. And Matthew ushers us into the new world of the kingdom with the Beatitudes.

Micah 6:1-8. Lawsuits are never any fun unless we are certain of winning the case. But in the instance of a lawsuit between God and God's people, we might be best advised to plead *nolo contendere*. The eighth-century prophet presents God's complaints against Israel in the form of a lawsuit. Unlike the usual procedure of prosecutor listing the charges against the defendant, the prophet begins with God's self-defense, God's list of saving deeds performed for an incredibly unrepentant and unfaithful people. "When I have done all this for you, why have you turned away from me?" is the implied accusation. The people's response, interestingly implicit, is "guilty." But no sacrifice is sufficient to atone for their unfaithfulness. God, the ever Great Patsy as one theologian once said, introduces, however, no new expectations. For God has already shown what is "good." And, thus, sentence is pronounced: do *mishpat* in all your relationships, be faithful and embrace *hesed*, and walk humbly with God.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31. That God behaves contrary to all human schemes and expectations is certainly the thrust of "the word of the cross." God's behavior is in fact absurd when measured according to the yardstick of what we regard as

power. God used an instrument of execution and utter degradation as revelation of divine power. God's foolishness is further manifested in the decision to use human beings to get the message out. This was more than the Corinthians could bear, and their arrogance knew no bounds. Paul's response, incredibly rich in irony, turns the arrogance and presumption of the Corinthians upside down and inside out—and ours as well. It is not in raw power but in raw powerlessness that God is at work to love us, save us, and transform us.

Matthew 5:1-12. The great reversal that the kingdom brings is spelled out in this report of Jesus' preaching. We have concocted a variety of responses to get us off the hook—Jesus' demands are impossible; they are interim rules; they are aimed only at the spiritual elite; they are really liberating after all. How then to proceed with this passage? Why not proceed by just listening to the Beatitudes flesh out what Jesus means by "the rule of God"? At the heart of this rule are righteousness and mercy (vv. 6-7). The great surprise is that the poor, the lowly, the sorrowing, and the persecuted are "blessed"—heartily and ultimately approved and accepted by God. Along with the surprises and the reversals which the kingdom brings, there is tension, hostility, and the grim prospect of being "done in" by the world. So, what to do? Bail out and live the rest of our lives in splendid isolation? Wait for the answer in next week's reading. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

How much there is in this text for one Sunday; enough material for fifty sermons! The view of the world Jesus gives in the Beatitudes is 180 degrees distant from the view of the world held in 1990 America. Someone once called the Beatitudes "an upside-down view of reality."

Jesus announces that God is partial to the poor in spirit. There doesn't appear to be anything the poor in spirit have to do in order to inherit the kingdom of heaven. We are told they shall possess the kingdom of heaven—or better: the kingdom of heaven will possess them. The poor in spirit have the kingdom of heaven promised to them. Jesus does not even say they have to be aware of their plight. What he does say is that God starts on the side of the poor in spirit, no matter whether they understand or accept it. This announcement comes from one who is poor himself in terms of what the world would call poor. God's Word stands before them and promises that they are being saved and will continue to be saved, appearances to the contrary. God has entered into this tired old world, and it will never again be the same. Now those who mourn will be comforted, and in fact in the very presence of Jesus there is comfort. The humble or meek are now promised the earth for an inheritance. Jesus himself stands before the people as the quintessential example of one who is meek. He came not to be served but to serve, and as such does not need power. Jesus promises to his hearers what he himself stands before them as—a servant of all!

The Beatitudes as written by Matthew are so rich that one has only to pick a spot to land and begin plowing fertile soil. The sense I have is that we back away from the powerful promises to the powerless today because they seriously call into question our value systems and priorities. For example, how do we proclaim the priority of working for peace to congregations filled with people who make their living working for the defense industry? Paradoxes abound in this upside-down view of reality. RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

This is the praxis of Christian discipleship: "Only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). *Happiness* (cf. Matt 5:1-12) is to be part of a God-movement in which this is the ultimate concern. It is to be part of a process bringing economic justice and new realities into the world. That's happiness! But there is also the unhappy reminder that there is a hostile and reactionary atmosphere in the world. The world views certain people and certain ideas as "common and contemptible" (1 Cor 1:28). The world will organize opposition to the movement, including "abuse" and "persecution" and "all kinds of lies"

(Matt 5:11). But in the midst of it all there is still a joy and gladness (5:12), a happiness beyond comprehension. DP

Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany February 4, 1990

Psalm 112
Isaiah 58:5-9a
1 Corinthians 2:1-5
Matthew 5:13-20

A FIRST READING

"You sent your only Son as the Word of life for our eyes to see and our ears to hear," we pray on this Sunday. Yet the readings continue to be incredibly specific about the consequences of our seeing and hearing—consequences such as justice, kindness, service, spiritual discernment, and the salt and light of discipleship.

Isaiah 58:5-9a. In this passage from so-called Trito-Isaiah as well as throughout this collection of oracles (chapters 56-66), a central image is that of light. The new life hoped for with the return of the exiles from Babylon has not been all it was cracked up to be. There is disappointment and an emphasis on ritual practice without an accompanying change of heart. To this situation, the prophet announces the need for ritual and life to be congruent. Otherwise both are simply a sham. God's life and care are present in the change of heart which can be seen in generosity toward all in need.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5. This week Paul's irony is focused on his own missionary preaching: "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (v.2). If the reading from Trito-Isaiah emphasized the necessity for ritual and life to be congruent, this passage insists upon the congruence among preacher, message, and life-style. While Paul downplays his own rhetorical skill (v.1) in order to underscore that it is God's power at work, we should not overlook how carefully he chooses his words and style of expression. For it is in and through the language of proclamation that God's Spirit and power are at work.

Matthew 5:13-16. No bailing out and living in splendid isolation from the rest of the world. The disciples are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. High expectations, to be sure. But there is also shocking realism. Salt is an image of covenant, a symbol of its permanence and responsibility to live in a certain way. Jesus, however, is no romantic. People, like salt, can no longer be good for anything. How can that be true? When read in the context of the entire Sermon on the Mount, these harsh and shocking words of Jesus remind us that the identity and purpose of being disciples can be absurdly denied in the face of persecution. If salt is an image and symbol of covenant, light is used to speak even more concretely of the life of discipleship—a life marked by exposure, vulnerability, and mission in a hostile world. Or, as someone said recently, as disciples we are not only enlightened but also light-giving—in on the secret but unable to keep it secret—not salting away the treasure of the good news but seasoning a world bent on going rotten. Extraordinary demand and responsibility, to be sure! But then think of the splendid newness of the kingdom, and of hearts which have been moved by God's love to do God's will. MA

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

In October of 1987 I had a heart attack. One of the changes that came about as a result was no salt in my diet. I loved salt! I had salted everything in sight, even before I tasted it. That was a tough adjustment. Food tasted like paper. As the days and weeks went by I missed the salt less and less to the point where my life is now lived without the zest of salt. It occurs to me that what Jesus says about the disciples in verses 13-16 is what many experience in their lives today vi- à-vis flavor at another level than physical. It is possible to live life without the energy of God's grace, but it's sad that many have never

known what life should really be like. Jesus wants his disciples to point people to the joy of real life—to be vehicles of love and grace. The image of living in darkness is in the same mode.

Then Jesus says something that I'm sure was very hard for the Jewish audience to hear. It comes under the rubric of, "Be careful what you ask for because you might get it." If you want to live by the law, then you'd better understand what it means to live by the law. You can't live by the law 75% of the time and expect to be right with God. To a lesser extent in 1990 the person on the street popular theology says, "If you do the best you can and hang in there, the man upstairs will take care of you." Jesus says, "No! That's not the way it is! If you relax any of the dictates of the law, you're going to fall short. You won't enter the kingdom of heaven."

The rest of Chapter 5 shows what it means to keep the law, culminating in verse 48 where Jesus says, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect."

Lest we become discouraged and throw in the towel, let's remember verse 17, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come not to abolish them but to perfect them." Jesus is saying that he is the fulfillment of the law for us. Come unto him, believe in him, and receive his righteousness. Then get on with the business of living life, pointing others to the salt and light of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to establish relationship between humankind and God. It is a word to stake our lives on! RJB

PROPHETIC VOICE

The "happiness" celebrated in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12) turns out to be the possession not of the unworldly but of the worldly. The happy are people who are salt "of the earth" and light "for the world" (Matt 5:13-16). Only in being "for the world" are disciples fulfilling their vocation; otherwise they are like contaminated salt, fit only to be thrown out with the garbage and trampled underfoot. God's Epiphany break-out is bad news for bogus disciples, but it is good news for the world! DP

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