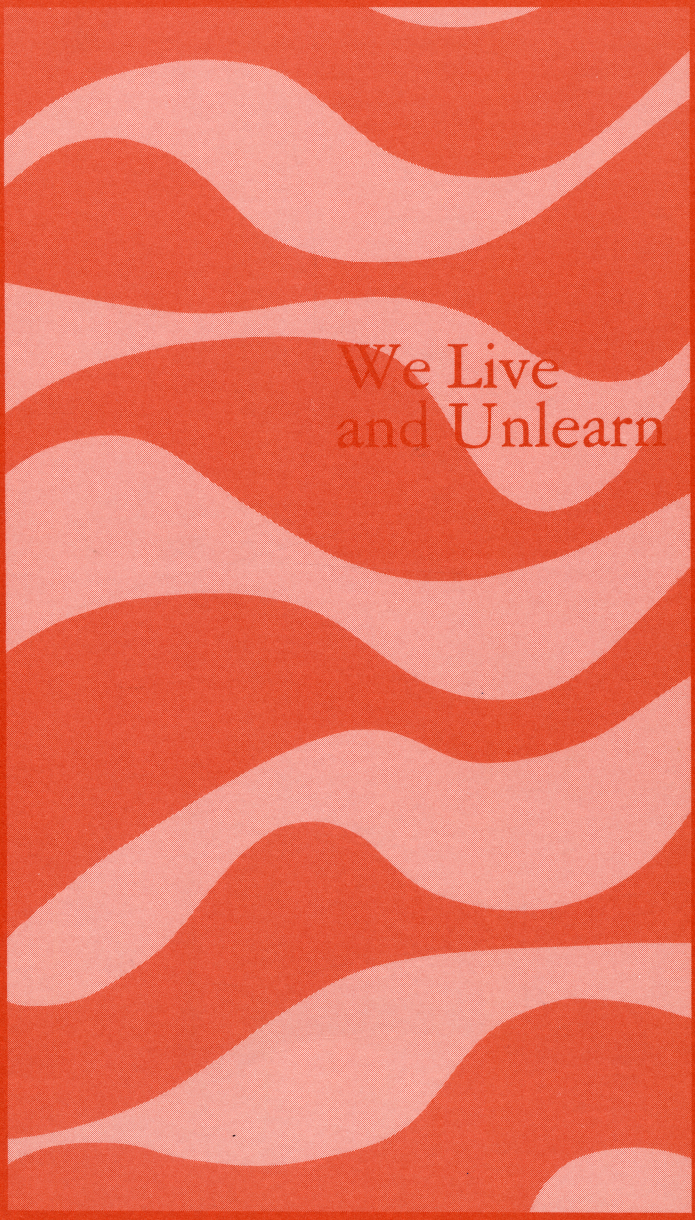
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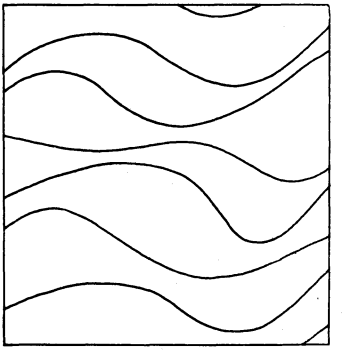
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We Live and Unlearn

Usually we say, with a spirit of resignation, that we live and learn. Experience does teach us new wisdom, and we are often caught off guard by life's surprises. Sure enough: we live and learn.

But we also need to change at times and to decide to disbelieve something we had previously learned; we have to put it out of our memory or teach something contrary to it. Most of us have unlearned much about the role of language in male-female relationships, about the legitimacy of the faith expressions of Christian sisters and brothers in other denominations, about sexual ethics, and about the role of the West in world conflicts.

Greatness is not marked by perfection, but by humility, vulnerability, and the willingness to say, "I was wrong." People who know that they have been justified by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, ought to unlearn all along.

Ernst Käsemann, a premier New Testament scholar of the twentieth century, reports on what he has unlearned in fifty years as a German theologian. His career passed through liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, the crisis of the Confessing Church in the Nazi period, and what he now sees as an unholy alliance of nationalism and capitalism. He came to disagree sharply with his famous teacher, Rudolf Bultmann, on whether existentialism or universal history was the key to the New Testament and on what can be known about the historical Jesus. The biblical canon is not the foundation for a general consensus, but rather for confessional multiplicity. Through unlearning he came to know that the Christian community becomes recognizable in the presence of the poor. Since Christ is the true Lord of the world, the gospel cannot proceed without political judgments in its proclamation. Gospel freedom, which finally demands self sacrifice, is the one thing that gives meaning to all learning and unlearning.

Craig L. Nessan points out the significance of Latin American basic

Christian communities. These communities of the poor encounter the Bible as good news for the poor, and they undertake prophetic and practical activity to alter their situation. Though unlikely to bring about a sudden revolution, these communities subvert the prevailing unjust order gradually. Do the North American churches need to be evangelized by such poor Christians of the Third World?

George L. Murphy probes the significance of Einstein's theory of relativity for our understanding of theological variety and religious truth. He suggests that theologies arising from a variety of social, cultural, and gender bases are valid. Theological formulations may be covariant, but they are not manifestly so. Dogmas which are not matters of common sense—creation, the Trinity, the full humanity and deity of Jesus—may take on roles as theologically covariant propositions. His article helps us unlearn much about the stereotypes of faith and science in our century.

Donald L. Conrad proposes that we add a fourth year to our lectionary cycle in order to give full attention to John's gospel. He tells of his own successes and failures with such a year D and lists the pericopes that he chose as the Gospel for each Sunday and festival.

Richard P. Carlson compares this year's primary gospel, Mark, to "main street" in a small town. Jesus' passion is the main street in Mark, revealing him as the beloved Son of God, but this street is intersected by Son of Man "road." This title represents his authority, his suffering, and his coming as eschatological judge. The reader of Mark is invited to follow Jesus on Discipleship Way, a way of suffering and humility, for the sake of others and in obedience to Jesus. Resurrection Boulevard means that Jesus was raised, but also that he continues to be the one who has been crucified. At the cross, a supposed outsider—the centurion—becomes an insider by confessing Jesus as Son of God. The passion is an invitation for all outsiders to see Jesus' true reality. To preach on Mark is to return to Main Street again and again.

Paul R. Hinlicky adds his own perspective on Mark's Gospel. Faith draws the believer into conformity with the one who is believed. To follow Jesus waits necessarily upon revelation (God's validation in cross and resurrection), but the historical Jesus is also a true guide for contemporary discipleship. The author finds in Mark a sustained assault on every form of Pelagianism. Mark's Gospel is the word of God, the self-revelation of the Triune God in the cross of the Son. Theology and the knowledge of God are discovered in Christ crucified.

What have you unlearned in all your years as a Christian and as a leader in the church? Life in the world for God provides all sorts of stimuli to disbelieve what we once had learned, to wipe it from our memory, and to teach something contrary to our earlier position. Such unlearning comes easier when we have determined to know one thing: Jesus Christ and his death on the cross.

If you are not learning or unlearning, your vital signs may be weak or you may be at death's door! My complimentary close, therefore, is finally a statement of faith and hope.

In the land of the living,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

What I Have Unlearned in 50 Years as a German Theologian[1]

Ernst Käsemann
Professor of New Testament Emeritus
University of Tübingen

"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways." This saying from 1 Cor 13:11 applies not only to an apostle. Where it cannot be used as we look back over our whole life, our life has been permitted to reach a dead end and lose its courage for freedom. Whoever ventures into the open, whoever really lives, has to hear to their dying breath Paul's words in Phil 3:12 as a motto: "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." In the NT the disciples of the Nazarene are called "pupils." If this is correct, one never leaves *learning* behind, and consequently also never leaves *unlearning* behind.

If I am to report publicly for the first time about my life as a German theologian, the decisive question is this: What have I learned during that time? This question applies to a professor more than to others. If professors do not remain lifelong learners, and therefore steadfastly involved in the adventure of new, better, and far-reaching experience, they are of little worth as teachers. Only as learners do they have authority, and they have given nothing important to their students if they have not taught them to learn. Yet no one can learn, who is not

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[1]This address was given by Professor Käsemann to the theological faculty of the University of Marburg-Lahn on the fiftieth anniversary of his doctor's degree, November 25, 1981. It was published in *Kirchliche Konflikte*, Band 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982) 233-244 and is here published in English for the first time with the permission of Professor Käsemann. The translation is by Pastor S. John Roth of Jacksonville, Illinois. At a few places the essay has been abbreviated to make for easier reading. RWK

prepared to unlearn. Entrance into the open air is gained only by those who break out of boundaries that have been set, who venture out of fixed paths into the unknown, and who do not let their heart and head be stunted by routine. Perhaps it may be claimed that only by what we can unlearn do we show whether and to what extent we are capable of learning.

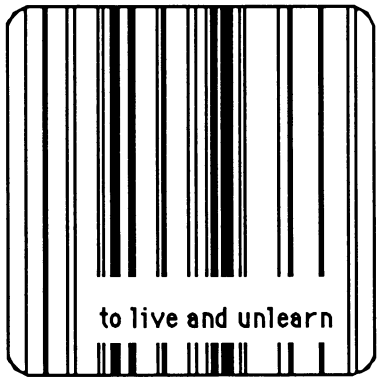
In any case, Christian faith is unthinkable without an Exodus like that made by Abraham and Sarah when they turned their backs on their parents' house and their friendships. It must be doubted whether life can be fruitful if it is not rebellious, prepared to revolt against old traditions and conventional privileges, and if it does not jettison entrenched ballast where new horizons are to be gained. My generation probably more than any before it had reason to abandon habitual paths, yes, to re-orient itself. It was forced to plow a new way or—as one learned from Heidegger, as a student at Marburg—to become radical, to press on more critically than usual to roots and origins, to that which is essential.

My Theological Journey

How did this begin in my case? Fifty years ago I would have declared without hesitation: The vanquishing of Liberalism by dialectical theology opened a path on which I had to reconsider the legacy of the previous century, and, in part, to give it up. Today I observe that the very Liberalism which we young people so hastily considered outdated has returned, and is ecclesiastically and politically indispensable in view of the dogmatism which, while claiming to be confessional, actually pushes toward fundamentalism. Throughout the world human freedom is being restricted. Out of love, Jesus' disciples must provide fresh space for freedom and oppose the arbitrariness of the powerful. What appeared to us in 1933 to be the start of a completely new epoch was in reality only the formation of a temporary buffer against the approaching doom of the Hitler times. Dialectical theology made possible a glaring antithesis between evangelical faith and fascist ideology.

Jesus' disciples must provide fresh space for freedom and oppose the arbitrariness of the powerful.

The French Revolution also decisively influenced German history. Apart from a few years at the beginning, however, it was able to inspire only a minority of us, because its terrifying violence shocked the common person. In the end, the Napoleonic wars concealed the fact that with the French Revolution the era of democratic freedom in the political and social spheres of western Europe had begun. Our political and ecclesiastical provincialism, with their attendant bureaucracies concerned only with preserving resistance to rebellious ideas, had an undemocratic effect. But we also could not evade nationalism. Nationalism became the decisive feature of the past century and finally brought about doom. Insofar as nationalism was combined for the most part with rejection of the spirit of the Revolution, it could only adopt a reactionary form. The world on the other side of their own church towers and village fortresses remained un-



known in general to the common person, at least politically. Churches viewed their temporal task to be that of training pious subjects. After the revolution of 1848, the church's patriarchalistic pedagogy expressed itself in the form of "inner mission," whereby the church's ministerial care served to maintain social status. Up to the end of the First World War middle class Christians were not able to join in solidarity with rebels holding unpatriotic and atheistic ideas, so that even today socialism appears suspect in many areas. Christians mistrusted everything that might have been able to disrupt conservative tradition. During this time, freedom and unity were not attained even though a nation came into being, economic expansion was transformed into colonialism, and economic–cultural Liberalism threw bridges across to lands to the west. Military might secured external stability; an idealistic humanism supported by the legacy from the past and a modern classical period sufficed intellectually. However, this humanism seldom saw beyond bourgeois society, much less as far as world politics. Devoted to inwardness and self-reflection, its vision rarely reached beyond the borders of its own people; its national longing was directed toward a return to the splendor of the old empire.

That was the background of normal theology in Protestantism. Family, school, university, military, state, and church took care that we grew up in this tradition, that we considered the native land to be God's order, to which our consciences were obligated and which was to be defended with all the powers at our disposal.

The Crisis of the Nazi Period

For me and for many of my generation, it was the most profound shock of our lives when National Socialism mercilessly made us experience the consequences of reactionary nationalism. It did not do this all at once. We learned painfully that the demonic disguises itself in the beginning as a messenger from heaven and promises to fulfill our wishes for a better world. Up to the battle of Stalingrad and even beyond, most Germans remained deluded. The deportation of the Jews and the persecution of communists, socialists, Gypsies, and radical Christians were accepted naively or with resignation, as circumstances which accompany the birth of a new epoch.

From the fall of 1933 on, Protestant theologians should have known better. If the debasement of all liberal perspectives, the

We learned painfully that the demonic disguises itself in the beginning as a messenger from heaven.

age-old and shameless hatred of the Jews, and the aggressive political programs had not already enlightened them, they now experienced that the churches, as was said, were forced into line and—in the words of Goebbels—organizationally diminished. It can also be noted, with shame, that only a minority considered themselves compelled by these things to firm opposition. Nationalism remained for the majority, even the majority of Christians, so strong that compromise after compromise with the regime followed the initial enthusiasm for it. Still today, we who suffered under these things can not forget the cowardice and the way human solidarity was betrayed.

The time after the war was decisively determined by old men. They were products of the past century and did not adopt the legacy of the organizational forms of the radical Confessing Church. Rather, they pursued restoration and chased further after the questionable ideal of a "Provincial Church" (*Volkskirche*). The rearming of West Germany and the accompanying prosperity lifted the fallen national emotions and advanced the current deep political polarization between the two large political parties, which reaches into Christian congregations. Obviously our opposition during the Nazi period was only half-hearted. We defended the gospel and church ordinances, but we did not completely join the political underground, though many times our common humanity demanded it. We always gave to the nation, even in its greatest disgrace, more than we should have; but to Christ and God's creatures we gave less than we owed them. Discipleship of the Nazarene could seldom break into the secularity of the everyday world because we took shelter behind holy walls of pious tradition. The long outmoded form of the Provincial Churches remained intact, as if it were still an adequate expression of "the wandering people of God," a phrase that I focused on programmatically in a prison cell in 1938 as the legitimate definition of Christianity. Only in the time that followed did my friends and I succeed in leaving "the house of our fathers," a house that had been characterized by slogans of conventional, middle-class humanism, and whose idealism still today sides with worldwide capitalism just as it did in the social struggles of the previous century. If we had liberated ourselves from the perspectives and customs of Egypt, we would not presently be drawn into the truly atheistic dance around the golden calf, into the ideology of a market economy that seeks to secure and increase the possessions, success, and gratification of the white race at the cost of the rest of the world. The promise drifts into a march into the desert.

We who suffered under these things can not forget the cowardice and the way human solidarity was betrayed.

The Break with Bultmann

In the following paragraphs, I will be briefer. They should make concrete what arose almost self-evidently for me out of the upheaval described above. If I wanted now to report on the changes in the field of theological study over the last fifty years, there would still not be enough time even if I limited myself to Germany and my particular area, the New Testament. I was fortunate,

because I became a witness to and participant in far-reaching change. Because of this, I was forced to think more intensively, to embark upon new experiments and adventures, and to break with old fronts, although that had its price and cost me many of the friendships I had in my youth. In order to offer a comprehensive picture, I would have to tell of the advent and almost fifty-year dominance of dialectical theology, of hefty hermeneutical, confessional, historical, and history of religions controversies, of reconciliation with previously almost unknown Anglo-Saxon theology, and of relapse into apologetics and historicism. Yet of them all, I single out one theme that has most profoundly affected my path, namely, my dispute with my teacher Rudolf Bultmann.

I think that Bultmann may be called the last significant representative of that radical historical criticism founded 150 years earlier by the Tübingen scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur. A large portrait of Baur in my study reminds me daily of where I belong and where I do not. In German universities, at least since the Enlightenment, schools of thought gathered around a teacher have dominated the whole enterprise. Since Humboldt's outline for reform, society decided to educate an elite. More precisely, it was decided to educate people who could think independently and, true to idealist thought, would therefore prove their worth in general. Like Socrates of old, the teacher was the midwife. He engaged in never-ending dispute about truth. One grew from discussions with him, his opponents, his friends and students, step by step toward greater self-knowledge, and with that into greater or lesser independence in the area of personal responsibility. To a large extent, such a pedagogy probably strikes one today as grotesque and completely superseded. Yet my generation devoted itself to it passionately. We cannot deny its enormous value even when we are conscious of its problems and run the risk of being considered fossils of bourgeois education. Moreover, the fact is that the life and death of a civilization depend upon the individual never giving up critical thought and the community giving the individual the courage to think critically.

I feel more and more strongly that Bultmann's central concern was too narrow.

Historical and theological radicalism united Baur and Bultmann. We learned from them that questioning never ends as long as the question is asked rationally, that one has to probe to the heart of the issue in each and every case, and that radicality therefore is not simply a scientific method but rather the presupposition of intellectual life. Baur and Bultmann differ in that the one traced the progress of world history and the other the anthropology of the faithful. Both were bound thematically to their respective times and environments. Though for a long time I was not directly influenced by Baur, I studied him more and more readily. He appears to me now to be my real ancestor, and I feel more and more strongly that Bultmann's central concern was too narrow. I cannot contest the historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of existence, one of Bultmann's main themes. Nevertheless I learned to regard the question of the meaning of *universal history* as the

key to the problem of existence and as the center of the New Testament.

It was primarily careful exegesis that pushed me back through the decades into Baur's vicinity, but contemporary events also gained greater and greater influence on my thinking. Without considering the self-understanding of the first Christians, the interpreter of Scripture would indeed lapse into a mythical-speculative explanation of history. Conversely, the issue in the Old Testament is the world-wide validity of the first commandment, and that is concretized in the New Testament by testimony to the lordship of the crucified Christ in and over the whole earth. The self-understanding of Jesus' disciples arises from the act of following, not from an idea.

My first doubts about Bultmann's exegesis arose because of his interpretation of the Gospel of John. His exegesis made the evangelist into the editor of a Gentile sayings source. In this way, his exegesis made it possible to let all mythological sayings be charged to the source. Hence, the incarnation of Christ and its derivative, the becoming-human of those who believe, could move into the center of Johannine proclamation. But the formal and material criteria for this hypothesis did not stand up under rigorous scrutiny. Even less was I able to accept a Gentile sayings source. When Bultmann even pulled Ignatius of Antioch into his existential interpretation and thus, to sharpen my point polemically, transferred Kierkegaard into the beginning of the second century, I had to break with Bultmann immediately.

Karl Barth once impressively described the relationship between teacher and student in his disagreement with Wilhelm Hermann. Barth showed how tears and cracks on the periphery gradually reach deeper and deeper until finally the dispute affects the core directly. I have to point out that Barth's experience mirrors my own development. Because I rejected the existence of a sayings source and its Gentile origin in the Fourth Gospel, the mythological sounding statements had to be explained in Christian terms, and this I was able to do only when I turned Bultmann's interpretation on its head. The Gospel mirrors and projects the Easter event into Jesus' earthly life. The Johannine Christ acts as the exalted One already on earth. Jesus is God's Son, and therefore his glory is the central theme; his incarnation is only the means for his revelation.

Bultmann and History

In the course of pursuing this in a consistent manner, there arose a second observation. Bultmann always related Christian faith to the hearing of the kerygma. He believed that we receive the new self-understanding not from our inner being, but rather only from God's Word which comes from outside us and is mediated by Scripture and the church. This genuine Reformation legacy was, however, radicalized by Bultmann in such a way that history could become almost irrelevant in the mix. In a certain way, his demythologizing, as the Norwegian Nels Dahl pointed out, was a de-historicizing and, as such, evidence of his idealistic legacy. The failure of "life with Jesus" research in the nineteenth century, the legacy of the Reformation, and anthropology as the idealistic key point were combined in his theology, which therefore—despite its classically simple language—retained a profound ambiguity, depending on whether one approached it from the Reformation or from the Enlightenment. For Bultmann, the historical Jesus is the cause but not the content of faith, even if he may possibly serve as faith's model. The gospel makes its appearance not with Jesus, but with Easter. The word of the Christian sermon, actually then

the word of the church, replaces him, just as the Paraclete of the Johannine Farewell Discourse does. For Bultmann, the incarnation is the symbol of the continually new Word-becoming-flesh. But will one not have to ask then, whether ecclesiology and the central emphasis on anthropology puts Christology in its shadow? This explains also Bultmann's treatment of Pauline theology under the two headings "Man Prior to the Revelation of Faith" and "Man Under Faith." [These headings are reproduced here as they appear in the ET of Bultmann's Theology of the NT.] It would explain even more the astounding sympathy that Bultmann, the radical critic, found among Roman Catholic theologians.

I had become aware through study of the Fourth Gospel that the NT contains various theological plans which can *not* be united by a doctrine of the incarnation and by an anthropology tied to it. The Letter to the Ephesians and the Revelation of John or the Acts of the Apostles exemplify this point with a breadth of divergence that encompasses even unbridgeable contradictions. Rather, Christology in its varying aspects will be the thing to be regarded as central, and Christology the content by which a critical assessment of the canon is practiced. So important, indeed indispensable, is Christology's relationship both to the believing and the unbelieving individual that it ought never alone or even primarily be connected to the individual. Rather, what is proclaimed and should be taken with utmost seriousness is the Nazarene's path to world lordship, which becomes concrete and observable in the individual believer. The church, as the community of followers of the Lord, is the beginning of the eschatologically new creation. Preaching is legitimate insofar as it steadfastly identifies Christ with the One who came as a human being into the inferno of earth, the crucified One, and the One exalted to be Lord of the world. That the resurrected One can be recognized only by signs of the cross divorces the gospel from ideology and myth.

For Bultmann, the historical Jesus is the cause but not the content of faith, even if he may possibly serve as faith's model.

The disagreement with Bultmann that had begun over Johannine and Pauline texts was bound to lead to dispute over the so-called historical Jesus. This dispute also began at the periphery, i.e., in the question of minimum reliable traditional material, and ended in radical separation. For me, not the self-understanding of the believer as a call to the becoming-human of the person (Bultmann), but the worldwide lordship of the Crucified became the point of preaching and discipleship. The lordship of the Crucified grounds new self-understanding, makes possible the critical discerning of the spirits, and sets Christians apart from classical idealism in all its varieties. Perhaps teacher and student were divided only in that one granted primacy to one side and the other to the other side. Then it would turn out that in all theology the issue would continually be: what should have primacy and ought not exchange its place. I am no longer prepared to give precedence to ecclesiology over Christology, regardless of possible modifications.

The Biblical Basis for Multiplicity

In the third section, I will discuss what sorts of churchly consequences my theological decision had for me. I would like to begin with the final conclusion: The ecumenical movement appears to me today to be the most important event and the real distinguishing feature of our century in Christian history. It is, at the same time, the answer to the ecclesiastical problems that had been brought to my attention by E. Peterson and that led to my dissertation on "Body and Body of Christ" [*Lieb und Lieb Christi: Eine Untersuchung zur Paulinischen Begrifflichkeit* (BHTh 9; Tübingen, 1933)]. Here, too, an upheaval took place which decisively oriented my life.

The ecumenical movement appears to be the most important event and the real distinguishing feature of our century in Christian history.

In my youth I was so very Lutheran that I would not have wanted to serve as pastor in a Reformed congregation. When conflict came, I sided with the majority of my Marburg friends and, naturally again, with my teacher Bultmann, for whom ecumenism was not a central interest. I have not forgotten Bultmann's dictum in a seminary debate over the concept "cosmos." He said: There is no such thing as humankind; that is an abstraction! I had to learn that that was totally wrong and that, more correctly, the word "individual" is an abstraction. In the church struggle of the Nazi period and subsequently in the years of university teaching, during which I had to work hard to fit in, little time remained for such subject matter.

But then came the World Congress for Faith and Order in 1963 in Montreal, where I witnessed for the first time ecumenism alive before my eyes in the persons of 500 delegates representing all denominations imaginable. I was supposed to deliver a paper on the unity and diversity of the church in the NT. To the great annoyance of most of the participants and the Geneva leadership, I presented the thesis that the biblical canon is not self-evidently the foundation for a general consensus but rather the basis for confessional *multiplicity*. Nevertheless, it was recognized in the same year that my thesis permitted finding today's ecumenical plurality already prefigured in early Christianity. The worldwide body of Christ, composed of members differing in time and space, is held together by its Lord alone, and manifests this reality at any given time in a specific manner in confession of faith and discipleship.

The Purpose of Doctrine

For me, therefore, denomination and theological school of thought were relativized, but in no way abolished. The Reformation and critical theology have never received the importance due them in the ultimately pietistic ecumenical movement. "Apostolic tradition," a notion promoted on many sides, is nothing other than a fiction cultivated by Orthodoxy in all its manifestations, unless it simply means that discipleship

of the Nazarene never ended and, according to our hope, will never end.

"Pure doctrine" takes form in every sermon that makes Christ to be recognized as Lord. Certainly historical facts argue against understanding "pure doctrine" to be a dogmatic system. "Pure doctrine" exists with

Denominations and theological schools of thought must not shut Christianity up in a religious ghetto.

vitality only when it is discovered and proclaimed afresh. Denominations and theological schools of thought must not shut Christianity up in a religious ghetto. The wandering people of God break through all barriers and do not live on canned food brought along. Tradition wants to be proven, to be ever new. But that is no longer possible if it can not be made intelligible and attractive to others. In a time and world in which old and new religions are coming to life everywhere, one has to begin to think ecumenically.

God does not give up on the entire creation, but God has the first and last word in it. The body of Christ so hearkened to God's claim for it and claim upon it that it no longer wanted to oppose its Lord. Christian mission comes to fruition in worldwide service to humanity, to whom salvation shall come. This does not happen without doctrine, and it has to develop on its own in various places and times in order to be able to gain entry in general. In this case, however, pure doctrine is instruction for the practice of discipleship, and theology a necessary function of the community, not a lord over faith.

Political Theology

I come now to the final turn in my theological path. Ecumenical vision liberated me from the provincialism widespread in my country and from the pedantry of confessionalists or pietists. I had to learn that theology connected to the world has a political dimension, whether this occurs to people or not. No area of life is out of the reach of the gospel, we said once in the Barmen Confession. Conversely, what was clearly laid out for all to see at the World Conference for Mission and Evangelism in 1980 in Melbourne can no longer be overlooked, namely, that Christendom is no longer determined by the white race. Already today the majority in terms of numbers and in terms of passion for fundamental change lies with people of color. This majority rejects not only our ties with the bourgeoisie, but also that tradition which rests on Hellenism and which they no longer understand given their own cultural presuppositions.

In the next generation more of that tradition will fall overboard than even the Christian rebels among us want. No theology and no churchly community will be secure as the forest is cleared away and the wild growth stemming from a different understanding of the Bible and different experience within discipleship takes its place. Finally, we will no more be able to shield our eyes from class struggle, which began in the previous century within the nation and now has gripped all continents, gripped them indeed as a deadly conflict between the privileged and those who have been exploited for centuries. What disguises itself as the free

market system and which promises to enrich all, is in reality the continuation of imperialism and colonialism by means of a capitalistic system. It survives by the third world delivering raw materials and taking back our finished goods, among which—and this is especially abominable—are weapons of every sort. Thus the slums grow, which are the underside of our prosperity, and for three quarters of humanity our earth becomes a hell, in which hunger, murder, and prostitution reign and everyone struggles with the other for survival.

I would be thankful if one would not see propaganda in these very reserved statements, although an ideology, which misuses existing conditions for its own purposes, appeals to me more than the repression customary among us in the West. I confess openly as well that my students helped me immensely when in 1967-68 they tried revolt against their fathers. If God will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children at the end of time (Mal 3:24), then there is indeed no disgrace if professors at least occasionally learn from their pupils and can be converted in the process.

Unlearning the Sermon on the Mount

Summing up briefly, I unlearned to spiritualize the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. They actually promise the real lordship of God, the earthly advent of which brings with it signs and wonders, sanctification and liberation from demonic possession; they promise that God wants to draw the earth out of not only our egoism and our deep-seated indolence and hypocrisy, but also out of the tyranny of powers that enslave it; they promise that God takes each of us into his service and furnishes the gifts needed for service.

I am no longer satisfied with the Augsburg Confession since the visible Christian community becomes recognizable in the presence of the poor, with whose blessing in Matt 11:6 the list of Jesus' deeds concludes, as much as in the preaching of the gospel and the use of the sacraments. Moreover, the context—from Israel's Exodus from Egypt to the revelation of the new heaven and new earth in the Apocalypse—is the message that the Father of the Crucified opposes the proud, the satisfied, and the powerful. Since the time I wrote my dissertation, I have sought to define the essence of the church in ever new ways. In view of the church's worldwide mandate and the just-as-worldwide rape of God's creations, I have reached the conclusion that, along with its preaching and ministering in our time, the church has to be the resistance movement of the exalted Christ in a world claimed by him and invited into his freedom. This is, undoubtedly, a political definition. Yet I strongly maintain that it is no less *pura doctrina*.

Along with its preaching and ministering in our time, the church has to be the resistance movement of the exalted Christ.

If the heart of the gospel, already contained in the First Commandment and concretized in the NT, is that Christ is for us the true Lord of the world, then the gospel

cannot proceed without political judgments within its proclamation. Lordship over body and soul, heart and mind, disciples and demons, this world and the world to come is a political fact.

The earth is constantly claimed also by false gods, about which only the naive can say, "they are invisible." Who is our Lord? And who should finally become our Lord? These are the central questions of existence. This earth of ours is and remains to its end a battlefield on which the decision for Yahweh and against Baal, or for the anti-Christ and against the Crucified, is played out. Our youthful opposition to the Nazis illustrates this. But opposition continues on, and whoever wants to can certainly hear that the whole creation cries out and waits with eager longing for the glorious liberty of the children of God. It is not enough simply to babble about this freedom; we must live it.

Conclusion

I will stop, though I am moved by the fact that I am inclined to turn away from scholarship. Everything has its time. An old man has to ponder this lesson daily. Everything we have done will turn to dust along with us, or it will become a fragment to be deciphered by those who follow us. I have always enjoyed life and my work, and where it was possible, tried to exceed boundaries. I have scuffled with many opponents and—unfortunately!—with all of my friends when the gauntlet was thrown at my feet. I have also paid the price for this and suffered wounds that no longer heal. Others will have to say whether something worthwhile in an academic sense has come from me in the process. This does not interest me. I have trained myself to change fronts according to my understanding of Scripture and situation, not to store my seed but to cast it to the wind, and to unlearn what others have imparted to me. So one becomes lonely, and gradually also simple-minded. Gospel freedom demands its price, ultimately life itself. Yet gospel freedom is the one thing that gives meaning to all learning and unlearning.

Basic Christian Community: Liberation Theology in Praxis

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The theology of liberation lives in a symbiotic relationship with the many basic Christian communities which dot the Latin American landscape. Both liberation theology and the basic Christian communities emerged at the conclusion of a gestation period which runs from Vatican II to Medellin. Vatican II's recognition that the church of the Third World must be "a church of the poor" prepared the way for the Latin American bishops to encourage the development of basic Christian communities at their Medellin Conference.[1] References to the basic Christian communities are peppered throughout the literature of liberation theology in order to provide a concrete expression of the kind of living theology which liberation theology seeks to promote. Phrases such as "popular church," "church of the poor," or "poor church" are attempts to describe a church in which liberation theology is not just something thought but actually lived in communities of the poor. This symbiotic relationship can be observed by the way the basic Christian communities have taken up many of the concerns of liberation theology into their life, particularly a certain way of reading Scripture. Likewise, liberation theology has itself been nurtured as it has absorbed the insights which arise from biblical interpretation and engagement of the poor.

The basic Christian communities arose from an awareness of many within the institutional church that it must develop a closer relationship with the people who compose it. In Latin America this means a closer relationship with the poor. While some have come to speak of "two" churches in Latin America with reference to the distinction between the institutional church and the basic Christian communities, such a distinction

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[1]Cf. Alvaro Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Evangelization of the Poor*, trans. Barbara Campbell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982), 4-7.

masks the fact that the basic Christian communities seek to live in an intimate relationship with the traditional church structure. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to fail to recognize the friction which can arise between the aims of the church as institution and the basic Christian communities which have their own vision of what the church can and ought to be. This is especially true where the leadership of the church, its bishops and hierarchy, do not share the emphasis on liberation as it develops in the basic Christian communities.[2]

What exactly are the basic Christian communities? A concise and colorful description has been offered by Penny Lernoux.

> Composed of small groups of neighbors (no more than twenty adults) in impoverished rural villages and urban slums, the communities usually start as a spin-off from the parish Church by relieving the hard-pressed priest of such duties as catechism classes. In sharing the responsibilities of the Church, community members often begin to share in other neighborhood concerns, such as a health center or a school. Because religious instruction emphasizes Medellin's concern with "liberating education," the Bible is read as a story of liberation. By applying biblical stories to their own situation, community members perceive an essential parallel: if the God of the Bible was on the side of the poor and oppressed back then, God must be on their side, too. This knowledge is the beginning of the end of the colonial inheritance of fatalism. Children do not die because it is God's will; they die because of lack of food and medicine and unhygienic living conditions. In understanding reality, community members want to change their situation, through cooperatives, a shantytown association, or similar intermediate organizations that enable them to have some voice in their own destiny. In effect, the communities are practicing their own theology of liberation.[3]

Children do not die because it is God's will; they die because of lack of food and medicine and unhygienic living conditions.

Other accounts of the basic Christian communities present similar descriptions of the fundamental components which make up the experience of these communities. For example, Jether Pereira Ramalho includes people's participation, the option for the people, the rediscovery of the gospel, analyzing reality, and the propriety of the interests of the community over those of "the Church" as characteristics of the basic Christian communities.[4] Similarly, Raul Vidales emphasizes a ministry in the basic Christian communities which is prophetic (vs. cultic), democratic (vs. hierarchical), "proletarian"

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[2]For a concrete example of the kinds of tension experienced between basic Christian communities and hierarchy, see Rob Cogswell, "The Church in Cuernavaca," *Christian Century* 100 (Dec. 14, 1983), 1161-64.

[3]Penny Lernoux, "The Long Path to Puebla," in John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, eds., *Puebla and Beyond. Documentation and Commentary*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 19.

[4]See Jether Pereira Ramalho, "Basic Popular Communities in Brazil. Some Notes on Pastoral Activity in Two Types," *Ecumenical Review* 29 (Oct. 1977), 395-98.

(vs. elite), popular (vs. "clericalized"), creative (vs. administrative and authoritarian), and in service to the popular struggle for liberation (vs. "feudal" and paternalistic).[5] Such descriptions suggest some differences between the basic Christian communities and the traditional experience of the church in Latin America.

In sifting through the manifold and diverse testimonies in the life of the basic Christian communities, four aspects deserve special emphasis. *First*, the basic Christian communities are *communities of the poor*. Most often the communities are not even led by clergy but by the poor themselves who have received guidance and direction from other communities and from clergy who support the development of the communities.

> Each community consists of a few poor Christians. When a group gains 15 or 20 members, it splits into two communities. Members continue to be active in ordinary church services, but, in addition, each community meets once a week to study the Bible, to pray and to talk about life in light of the Bible.[6]

What the members of these communities share first of all is their experience as poor persons who view life from the perspective of their socioeconomic condition. It is this viewpoint which is fundamental to the experience of the basic Christian communities. Most of the communities (at least in Brazil) have arisen in rural areas, but many are also located in the slum areas of cities.[7] In these poor areas, "it has been noted that the most underprivileged have been the ones most receptive to this ecclesial notion."[8]

A *second* aspect of these communities is their *encounter with the Bible as good news for the poor*. The most well-known documentation of the reading of the Bible by the poor remains that of Ernesto Cardenal's *The Gospel in Solentiname* which presents excerpts from the conversations of the poor at Solentiname, Nicaragua, on biblical texts. A more systematic treatment of the relevance of the Bible for the basic Christian communities has been provided by Alvaro Berreiro.[9] Barreiro highlights the correspondence between biblical concern for the poor and the experience of the poor who read the Bible in the basic Christian communities. Old Testament and New, Gospels and Epistles, law and promise receive an existentially relevant interpretation when read from the point of view of the poor. Barreiro provides insight into the way in which the privileged position of the poor as addressees of the biblical promises is translated into the experience of the poor as they read the Bible from within the context of the basic Christian communities today.

> The "message" which is addressed to us today, when we hear the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of God to the poor, is that we must love the poor as God loves them, with a preferential love that will liberate them concretely and historically from the unjust oppression which they are suffering. Anyone who does not strive to put an end to the suffering of the poor by becoming involved in their liberation is dissociated from and opposed to God's saving plan.[10]

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[5]Raul Vidales, "People's Church and Christian Ministry," *International Review of Mission* 66 (Jan. 1977), 46.

[6]Cogswell, "The Church in Cuernavaca," 1162.

[7]Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 8. Cf. also the specific examples of what is meant by communities of the poor, 9-13.

[8]As quoted in Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 13.

[9]Cf. Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 14-45.

[10]Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 49.

Such a conclusion regarding the partiality of God toward the poor is not just the personal opinion of Barreiro but a conviction which arises in the hearts of the poor as they read the Bible for its liberating message.

The *third* aspect of the basic Christian communities which deserves special mention is *the change in consciousness from fatalism to activism.* In encountering the biblical good news for the poor, a radical shift in consciousness takes place among those who experience basic Christian community. They learn that God is not the cause of their poverty but rather the one who gives cause to their hopes for liberation.

> Slowly they began to understand that their hunger, their diseases, their infant mortality, their unemployment, their unpaid wages, were not the will of God, but the result of the greed of a few Salvadorans and of their own passivism.[11]

Having discovered that God's will for their lives is not the enduring of poverty and injustice, the poor begin to search for and analyze the causes for their condition. Fatalism gives way to awareness of the social, economic, and political dynamics which contribute to their poverty in a process of consciousness-raising which takes place in the basic Christian communities.

> The good thing about this movement of ours is that we feel like real human beings.[12]

This quote speaks profoundly of the "conversion experience" which takes place in the basic Christian communities.

The *fourth* and final aspect here to be mentioned is *the prophetic and practical activity* undertaken by the basic Christian communities to alter their situation. The new consciousness, awakened by biblical study, gives rise to specific courses of action

Having discovered that God's will for their lives is not the enduring of poverty and injustice, the poor begin to search for and analyze the causes for their condition.

based on the needs of a given community. Constructing housing, developing a health center, organizing farmers against oppression, organizing workers into unions, serving as lay leaders in parishes, or undertaking an active part in the political process are examples of the kinds of activity which flow naturally out of the new consciousness of the members of the basic Christian communities.[13] In this way the members of the communities begin to live out the faith insights they have discovered through their encounter with Scripture and with one another.

It is interesting to note the way in which the basic Christian communities incarnate in their life the basic elements of liberation

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[11]Rutilio Grande, as quoted by Alan Riding, "Latin Church in Siege," *N.Y. Times Magazine* (May 6, 1979), 42, regarding his experience in El Salvador.

[12]As quoted by Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 54.

[13]Cf. the detailed examples offered in Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 52-61.

theology. In a lived encounter with their social environment, the poor—through commitment, social analysis, and theological reflection on the basis of biblical study—engage in concrete action to improve their lives. In the basic Christian communities the poor begin to take responsibility for their own destiny, encouraged by their faith in the God who sides with the poor.

The theologians of liberation have great hope in the potential of the basic Christian communities to alter the future of Latin America. This hope finds expression in many ways. Barreiro, for example, hopes for a mission of the poor in evangelizing both the rich and the church as a whole. In regard to the evangelizing of the rich, Barreiro says the following:

> Therefore, when the oppressed poor accept the gospel as good news of liberation, and actually strive to become liberated from the oppression that is being suffered, they are, *ipso facto*, battling against the sin of the oppressor, inviting the latter to conversion, and are making the greatest gesture of Christian love toward the latter. It is in this paradoxical way that the poor of the CEBs [i.e., basic Christian communities] proclaim the good news of liberation to the rich who are oppressing them.[14]

Likewise, the poor serve to evangelize a church which is often lured toward quantitative measures of power and success.

Gustavo Gutierrez has similarly written of the evangelizing potential of the poor, an evangelizing which begins with the church itself.

> Evangelization will be really liberating when the poor themselves are the bearers of the gospel message. Then, to preach the gospel will be a gospel "unpresentable in society." It will be expressed in an unrefined manner, it will smell bad. The Lord, who hardly has the figure of a person (cf. the Canticles of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah) will speak to us in the voices of the poor. Only in listening to that voice will we recognize him as our liberator.[15]

This theme recurs throughout the writings of Gutierrez, who sees the awakening of the poor taking place in basic Christian communities as the most profound development to which liberation theology has contributed.[16]

In contemplating the influence of thousands of basic Christian communities upon the Latin American scene (in 1979 80,000 were estimated to exist in Brazil alone), it would appear that the existence of these communities will provide a highly significant long range impact on the future of Latin America.

> Thus there are those who believe that the CEBs have become the single most important aspect of the evolution of a less authoritarian and more participatory society in general.[17]

Whereas the interest of liberation theologians in Marxism has received inordinate attention by outside observers and critics of liberation theology, the future of Latin

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[14]Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, 67.

[15]Gustavo Gutierrez, "Freedom and Salvation: A Political Problem," trans. Alvin Gutierrez, in Gustavo Gutierrez and Richard Shaull, *Liberation and Change* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), 93.

[16]Cf. the repeated references to the subversive power of the poor in Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983).

[17]Allan Figueroa Deck, "Forward to the English Translation," in Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial Communities*, xii-xiii. This judgment is shared by Daniel H. Levine, "Religion and Politics: Dimensions of Renewal," *Thought* 59 (June 1984), 133-35.

America is likely to be shaped much more by the message of the Bible as it is read in these thousands of basic Christian communities than by advocates of revolution cast in the Marxist mold. The theology of liberation through the basic Christian communities is likely to act more as a means of gradually subverting the prevailing unjust order than as a threat to sudden revolution.[18]

The emergence of the numerous vibrant Latin American basic Christian communities provides a mirror by which those in the North American churches can better view themselves. Are there ways in which the North American churches need to be evangelized by the poor Christians of the Third World? Are there biblical passages about God's demand for justice which an affluent church relegates to the periphery of Scripture? Is there not also in the North American churches a need to repent of a fatalistic attitude toward the situation of the poor? Is there not a concrete praxis for churches in the First World to undertake in advocating and implementing policies which serve the needs of those who are poor?

St. Paul employed the image of the body with its many members to portray the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). If that body is composed on a global scale, not only of the congregational life familiar to us but also the life of the basic Christian communities, we find ourselves intricately connected to one another in ways once unimagined. The basic Christian communities of Latin America give renewed poignancy to Paul's assertion, "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

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[18]Cf. the comments of Rubem Alves, "God's people and Man's Liberation," *Communio Viatorum* 14 (1971), 114-15.

What Can We Learn from Einstein about Religious Language?

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Introduction

An ongoing problem for theology is the relationship between theological variety and religious truth. Can more than one valid theology co-exist with religious truth? If so, how can we determine the limits of permissible variety? Much of the conservative Christian tradition would assert that there can be only one valid theology, which expresses the true content of the Christian faith. On the other hand, many modern theologians are willing to accept theological variety, but are either unclear about the relationship between different theological expressions and truth, or deny that there is a single "true religion."

Even a Christian theologian who is not especially concerned with epistemological questions must deal with this problem from the moment that the Bible is opened for serious study. There are different theological viewpoints in Scripture, and the way in which Matthew, for example, speaks about God, Jesus, law, church, and other important matters is not the same as the way in which Paul speaks of them. Wherein lies the expression of the "one faith" of Eph 4:5? It is not enough to say that different views can be "harmonized" unless it is made clear how the harmonizing is to be done, and what the justification for that method of harmonization is.

Theological variety is, of course, very much alive today. One's answers to current ecumenical questions will be determined to a considerable extent by the way in which one understands the relationship between theological variety and truth. The rise of such movements as liberation theology and feminist theology complicates the matter. It is no longer adequate to deal only with the theological traditions which developed directly from the Great Schism of 1054 or the Reformation.

George Lindbeck has presented a cogent discussion of this problem.[1] After surveying the traditional "propositional" understanding of doctrine and the liberal "experiential-expressive" one, he goes on to argue for a "cultural-linguistic" understand-

[1]George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

ing. This approach owes a good deal to sociological studies of religion, as Lindbeck points out. And that is certainly appropriate, for it makes sense for different approaches to religion to inform one another.

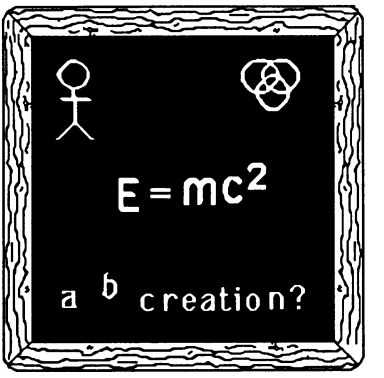
But it is also important to deal with such a fundamental problem in more than one way. Here I want to suggest an approach to the problem of theological diversity which is informed more by developments in theoretical physics in the past century than by concepts in the social sciences. This approach, motivated primarily by Einstein's theory of relativity, is concerned both with a propositional understanding of doctrine and with the languages used to express doctrine.

Relativity Theory

It is a popular misconception that "the theory of relativity says that everything is relative." Einstein's theory has often been linked with moral relativism and other denials of absolutes. As is usually the case, the truth is more complex.

Absolute space and absolute time were basic preconceptions of Newtonian physics. It was thought that all competent observers would agree on the distance between two points or the time between two events.[2] Other absolutes, such as mass, were also built into Newtonian mechanics. Yet even in pre-Einsteinian physics there was a "relativity principle." It was recognized that if Newton's laws of motion hold for one observer, they will also hold for any other observer who is in uniform motion (i.e., moving in a straight line with constant speed) with respect to the first. Thus there is no way within the realm of mechanical phenomena by which one can specify which of these observers is "really" at rest and which is "really" moving.

Consider, for example, the case in which one observer is standing beside a railroad track and the other is in a train moving along



the track at 100 km/hr. If the observer on the train throws a ball forward at 20 km/hr., the observer beside the track will see the ball move forward at 120 km/hr. They will obtain different numerical values for the velocity of the ball. However, both observers will find that Newton's laws of motion describe the movement of the ball. Those laws provide no way of singling out either observer as the one at rest, and both with equal right can say that she or he is at rest and that the other is moving. Furthermore, there is no way in which we could decide whether the speed of the ball is "really" 20 km/hr or 120 km/hr, for that is a relative matter.

But this classical concept of relativity ran into difficulties when electromagnetic theory was developed in the nineteenth century. Maxwell's equations for the electromagnetic field predict a unique speed, approximately 300,000 km/sec, for the electromagnetic waves of light, and this is, in fact, the speed at which light is found to travel in vacuum. But it is obvious that, according to common-sense ideas of space and time, the speed of light cannot be 300,000 km/sec for *everyone*. To see this, we may update our

[2]Isaac Newton, *Principia*, tr. by Andrew Motte and rev. by Florian Cajori (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1934), vol. 1, p. 6.

previous example by replacing the train with a spaceship moving past the earth at 100,000 km/sec. If the observer in the ship shoots forward a beam of light at 300,000 km/sec, it seems obvious that the earthbound observer would see this beam of light moving forward at 400,000 km/sec. It cannot have the same speed for *both* observers.

If this were true, it would mean that Maxwell's equation held true only in one frame of reference. There would be a unique state of rest picked out by the electromagnetic field, in which light would move at 300,000 km/sec. And it should be possible, by means of careful optical experiments (and especially the famous Michelson-Morley experiment[3]) to observe the change in the speed of light caused by the earth's motion around the sun. But all such experiments failed to detect the effects due to the earth's motion which were expected.

While physicists at the end of the nineteenth century believed that it was possible to determine absolute motion and absolute rest by observations of the behavior of light, their attempts to do this were unsuccessful. In 1905, Einstein showed how to solve this puzzle. Rather than having a state of absolute rest and a relative speed for light, he proposed that "rest" is a purely relative concept, and that the speed of light is absolute. Einstein's "Special Theory of Relativity" is based upon the following two postulates:[4]

1) The laws of nature (electromagnetic as well as mechanical) are the same for all observers in uniform motion with respect to one another.

2) The speed of light is the same for all such observers.

As we have seen, the requirement that the speed of light be the same for every observer, regardless of his or her state of motion, does not fit in with common-sense ideas of space and time. Einstein's two postulates taken together require, in fact, that those common-sense ideas be changed in important ways. Analyses of length measurements reveal the phenomenon of *length contraction*: An object whose length is found to be L when it is at rest with respect to the observer making the measurement will have its length measured as *less* than L by an observer with respect to whom it is moving.[5] Studies of time measurements reveal phenomena which disagree even more strongly with our intuition. Two events which appear to be simultaneous for one observer will not be simultaneous for other observers. In short, space and time are relative, and not absolute.

Minkowski clarified the radical character of Einstein's theory. He showed that reality could best be understood not in terms of our familiar three dimensions of space and one of time, but in terms of an unfamiliar four-dimensional *space-time*. The quantities which are absolute are those natural to this four-dimensional world. Relativity does not eliminate all absolutes, but means that

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[3]Albert A. Michelson and Edward W. Morley, American Journal of Science *34* (1887), 333. This is discussed in most books on relativity.

[4]A. Einstein, Annalen der Physik *17* (1905), 891. English translations of this and other original papers on relativity are in *The Principle of Relativity* (New York: Dover, n.d.). Expert though popular accounts of relativity are Albert Einstein, *Relativity*, 15th ed., tr. by Robert W. Lawson (New York: Crown, 1952) and Robert Geroch, *General Relativity from A to B* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1978).

[5]The round-about language used here is necessitated by the fact that the visual *appearance* of moving objects must be dealt with rather carefully. See J. Terrell, Physical Review *116* (1959), 1041 or A. P. French, *Special Relativity* (New York: Norton, 1968), 149-52.

the real absolutes are more abstract than had previously been believed.

If there is no preferred reference frame in which the laws of nature can be formulated, and if the basic quantities of physics such as length, time, and mass[6] are different for each observer, how is it possible to write down meaningful laws of physics? A relationship between length, time, and mass measurements which holds for one observer may not be true for other observers. Will each observer then have her or his own private laws of nature?

Physical quantities are different in different reference frames, but their values in one frame are related in definite ways to their values in another frame. The relationship between space and time values of two observers in relative motion is known as the *Lorentz transformation*, and can be derived from Einstein's two basic postulates. If a law of nature has the mathematical form X=Y, and if X and Y vary in the *same* way under the transformation from one reference frame to another, then the laws of nature can hold good in *all* reference frames. Such laws are said to be *covariant* under the Lorentz transformation.[7]

A search for the correct laws of physics is thus subject to the constraint that such laws must be covariant. Covariance in itself does not guarantee that a mathematical expression expresses a law that is true in our universe (e.g., the "law" c=200,000 km/sec is covariant but wrong!). Covariance is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the correctness of a law of physics.

To summarize, special relativity says that all reference frames in uniform motion with respect to one another may be used with equal validity, in spite of the widely different values obtained from measurements which will be obtained by describing the world from the standpoints of different reference frames. There are quantities such as the speed of light and space-time intervals upon which all observers will agree. The Lorentz transformation of space and time from one reference frame to another induces a corresponding transformation for all quantities. Because of these well-defined transformation properties, it is possible to formulate covariant laws which are valid for all reference frames.

A theological "relativity theory" may be of value even if it cannot be put into a mathematical form.

Theological Reference Frames

We return now to theology, and ask what relativity theory can suggest for our treatment of theological variety and religious truth. Perhaps it is obvious that we might try to consider different theological positions as analogous to different reference frames in physics. But it is not so easy to see how to make that analogy more precise. In

[6]The idea that mass changes with velocity provides one way to deal with relativistic mechanics. See French, *Special Relativity*, ch. 1 or Einstein, *Relativity*, ch. 15.

[7]A special case of this is the situation in which X and Y are not changed by the transformation. In this case we find an *invariant*, such as the speed of light.

physics, there is a quantitative way of specifying different reference frames (in terms of their velocities relative to one another), and there is a precise calculus for the transformation of quantities between one frame and another. Matters are rather different in theology. However, a theological "relativity theory" may be of value even if it cannot be put into a mathematical form like that of Einstein's theory.

In Einstein's theory, the velocity with which an observer moves is accidental, and the whole point of the idea of covariance is that we can find laws which are independent of the accidental value of this velocity. In theology, cultural traditions, metaphysical presuppositions, social and economic backgrounds, race, and gender are some of the factors responsible for different theological viewpoints. Such factors are also accidental. Our goal should be to achieve a covariant formulation of theology which would be true for all values of such factors. Of course we will not expect to find any quantitative transformation law, and progress toward full covariance (as distinguished from a restricted covariance in which only a certain class of reference frames is allowed) may be rather slow.

We may attempt to detail our basic analogy more closely now. Some of the points made in the following paragraphs may seem obvious, and in no need of the example of physics for support. Others are not so obvious. At the very least, the concept of covariance provides some unification for what follows.

1) All reference frames are valid. One can do Christian theology from a wide variety of viewpoints. In particular, there is no preferred language—Hebrew, Latin, German, Old Church Slavonic or any other—in which Christian theology *must* be done. The idea that Scriptures cannot really be translated from their original language may have a place in Muslim thought, but it can play no role in serious Christian theology. The miracle of tongues in Acts 2 means that the gospel can be proclaimed in all languages.

That may seem to be a commonplace, though various Christian groups have often enough insisted on their "sacred tongues." But the matter goes deeper than language. A relativity principle means that theologies arising from a variety of social, cultural, and gender bases are valid. Christian theologies which are black, feminist, or Latin American, as well as those which are middle-class Euro-American, are not only possibilities but, in an important sense, necessities.

Of course some theologies may appear to be in conflict with traditional western theological formulations. If so, it may be that one or both of the approaches absolutizes what is in fact relative. If a theological statement from one cultural or linguistic matrix cannot be transformed into a statement or statements in another cultural or linguistic matrix without conflict, then there is reason to doubt its fundamental character.

This is also true in historical theology. It is a mistake, for example, to insist that Christology must be formulated in terms of Greek philosophical concepts, which were used in the debates of the fourth and fifth centuries. On the other hand, it is also a mistake to dismiss classical Christology as part of a "hellenization" of Christianity, if that implies that it was a mistake to express Christianity in those terms.[8] Christianity had to be expressed in hellenistic terms for people in a hellenistic world. To suppose otherwise is to insist that Semitic modes of thought provide a preferred reference frame for religion.

2) As we have seen in our discussion of physics, relativity does not get rid of abso-

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[8]Leslie Dewart, *The Future of Belief* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966), 132-135.

lutes. The whole idea of covariance is that it is possible to find relationships which continue to hold true even as one changes one's viewpoint from that of one reference frame to that of another.

Theologies arising from a variety of social, cultural, and gender bases are valid.

The early Christians confessed their faith with the statement "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3). This is an expression of something that is absolute for Christianity if anything is. But is this statement the "same," in some meaningful sense, as Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (itself expressed differently by different evangelists), or the Definition of Chalcedon, or Article VIII of the Formula of Concord? What is the meaning of "Lord" for a twentieth-century American feminist? Such questions point up the difficulty of the search for theological covariance.

3) For physics, there are special mathematical languages, those of tensors, spinors, and differential forms, which can be used in relativity.[9] Physicists say that equations written in one of these languages especially adapted to four-dimensional space-time are "manifestly covariant," because their covariant character is obvious to anyone who knows the language. Einstein's original treatment of relativity did not make use of such a mathematical scheme, but was in the old language of three-dimensional space plus one dimension of time. While the laws that he wrote down were covariant, they were not *manifestly* so. It takes some mathematical effort to demonstrate the covariance of laws expressed in that older language.

In theology, we may have to be content with formulations which are covariant, but which are not *manifestly* so. Given two theological reference frames, we may be able to show that a valid theological proposition in one reference frame translates into a valid theological proposition in the other, but we may not be able to express this proposition in such a way as to make it clear that it holds in all reference frames. We may have to be content with being able to translate "Jesus is Lord" into different cultural or linguistic settings in ways that (to the satisfaction of Christians familiar with the New Testament setting, the Christian tradition, and the setting in question) introduce no distortion.

4) A charge sometimes levelled against ecumenical activity is that it tends to reduce Christianity to a "least common denominator" religion. And that is a danger to which we need to be alert. An attempt to find the truth in different theological descriptions should not be carelessly allowed to become a process of eliminating distinctive features of Christianity which cannot easily be fitted in with certain viewpoints. If we take the idea of original sin seriously, we will have to note an important difference between the physical and theological situations: there is some defect in all human theological viewpoints.

To some extent it is true that the search for covariance is a search for a common denominator. We are looking for features of

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[9]See, e.g., Charles W. Misner, Kip S. Thorne, and John Archibald Wheeler, *Gravitation* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1973).

reality which are common to different descriptive frameworks, though they may take different forms. But this need not mean a search for a *least* common denominator, in the sense of something so elementary, something so much a matter of common sense, that no one can have any objection to it. Recall that the features of the world which are common to the descriptions by different observers in relativistic physics are not the common-sense absolutes of length, time, and mass. Those are assigned relative status. The genuinely absolute features of the world are not obvious to human intuition, and can be discovered only by a combination of experiment and abstract thought.

The theological analogy is significant. In theology a search for "the essence of Christianity" often arrives at a formulation something like Harnack's:

> Firstly, the kingdom of God and its coming.
> Secondly, God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul.
> Thirdly, the higher righteousness and the commandment of love.[10]

Now these are not precisely common sense, and in the hands of Harnack had more distinctively Christian content than similar expressions by some others in the liberal tradition. Still, it is clear that Harnack's summary would not draw charges of abstruseness as the classical doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation have, and is much closer to common sense than, e.g., the *Quicunque Vult* (Athanasian Creed).

But the common sense of one time or culture is not always that of another. We need go no further than to note that an exclusive emphasis on "the fatherhood of God" would not be very attractive to modern feminist theologians.

5) It seems likely that it will be Christian dogmas which are *not* matters of common sense which will probably be theologically covariant. In physics, Einstein did not make a complete break with older ideas, but showed how to develop them in new ways. In Christian theology, such basic concepts as the doctrine of creation, the Trinity, the full humanity and deity of Jesus, and (Lutherans would expect) the doctrine of justification, may well take on roles as theologically covariant propositions.[11] Those doctrines are *not* simply to be identified with their traditional formulations. We must even be careful with the language which we use to describe them: the word "Incarnation," for example, already implies a certain way of understanding the full humanity and deity of Jesus.

It is not likely that we will soon be able to achieve "manifestly covariant" statements of even these fundamental doctrines. But we can take some encouragement from, for example, the perhaps surprising value which the doctrine of the Trinity may have for the development of feminist theology.[12] It will be in a search for different ways of stating these basic doctrines, without paying too much attention to common-sense theism, that Christian theology will be able to achieve at least an approximation to something that may legitimately be described as "theological covariance."

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[10]Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, tr. by Thomas Bailey Saunders (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957), 51. These lectures were originally delivered in 1899-1900.

[11]Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jenson, *Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), ch. 1.

[12]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, tr. by Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Trinity and Women's Experience," *The Christian Century*, 15 April 1987, 354.

Why Not Also a Series on John?

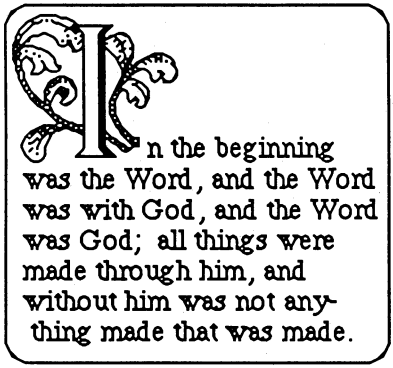
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Not too long ago the revised lectionary provided us the opportunity to put major attention on one Gospel each year—Series A on Matthew, B on Mark, and C on Luke. This revision has much to commend itself and has been widely accepted throughout the Christian Church. Far too long it was common to treat the four Gospels as if we had only Tatian's Diatessaron. All four Gospels became synthesized into one account, instead of reading one Gospel *according to* four authors. The infancy stories are still intermingled in popular usage today without regard to the uniqueness of Matthew or Luke. The beatitudes are recorded differently in Matthew and Luke. The setting of the Last Supper, the trial before Herod, the words from the Cross, the one, two or three women at the tomb are all items which suggest that we ought to explore and respect the genius and contribution of each author. In fact, any one Gospel probably circulated originally without the company of the other Gospels and must have conveyed the "message" adequately in and of itself. It is difficult to consider any one account without the others, because memories are not skilled at compartmentalizing and tend to develop a blur or synthesis of all that has been said before. We should be aware that we are permitting this to happen. The "new" lectionary begins to redress this wrong done to the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

But why were only three series proposed? There are *four* Gospels. Was there not enough material in each of the Gospels to cover a whole year? Hardly so. The new lectionary uses about one-half to two-thirds of any Gospel (depending on whether one observes all possible festivals and reads all the longer options). Whole chapters are skipped—Matthew 8, 12, 19, Luke 8 and John 5. Some of these materials are covered in parallel accounts. But appreciation of a single author is not enhanced or recognized by such practices. Hearing two stories of the feedings of the 5,000 and of the 4,000 in one year might pose problems. But does that justify eliminating entirely from the pericopes the feeding of the 4,000 in order not to have a doublet? It is interesting that the only pericope on the cleansing of the Temple appears in Series B, Lent 3, and then the text used is from John 2 (at the beginning of Jesus' ministry according to John, but not at the beginning according to the Synoptics). Why wasn't the story of the guards at the tomb, Matthew 28:11-15, included with the

Easter text of Series A? None of the series includes all three of the Passion predictions. The Evangelists thought it was important to have three. And the recital of adjustments or omissions could be much longer. The questions remain, why was not more of each of the Synoptics used? and why was John not given its own series?

One can understand that the organizers of the new lectionary faced problems for Christmas and Easter, especially with the Gospel of Mark having no birth story and only one short (discouraging) Easter account. What does one do with a Gospel like Mark that ends with the disciples saying nothing to anyone—and then six more Sundays of Easter follow? Without a Matthew or a Luke to provide Christmas stories and Resurrection appearances, could Mark have been useful and survive? It did! Still we seem to feel it impossible to have faith without more extensive emphasis on the Nativity and the Resurrection, even if such must be imported from another account. (This is to say nothing about the fun and commercialization Christmas and Easter have acquired.) Nevertheless, Mark must have served the Christian community somehow with these "shortcomings." Maybe our inclination to repair or improve was more than Mark needed. What would happen if we let Mark be just Mark?



Few notice the synoptic passages which are excluded or by-passed from the assigned readings: many miracle stories, about half of the Sermon on the Mount including the Lord's Prayer and the golden rule (though these do turn up through parallel passages), some hard sections such as Matthew 11:12-24, Luke 17:19-35, Mark 11:27-33 (and parallels) and Mark 13:14-20 (and parallels). The list of omissions also includes the discussions of the sign of Jonah and the death of John the Baptizer.

The paucity of the Resurrection accounts to cover seven Sundays in the three series may be a rationalization for importing John so heavily into the Easter lections. But notice: not only John 20 and 21 (skipping 21:15-25!) are recruited to supplement the Easter season, but lessons also come from John 10, 13, 14, 15, and 17. (Does anyone observe a Good Shepherd or a Cantate Sunday? Who in the pews even knows about them—or cares?) And, of course, Pentecost has no Gospel account for its source.

John appears in all three series, especially in the Sundays after Easter and in more than half the lessons for Lent in Series A and B. In addition, a five Sunday sequence after Pentecost in Series B reads from John 6. These five weeks can pose problems to address different matters each week—to say nothing of the possibility of missing the thrust of the entire chapter when chopping it up into little parts and leaving out a dozen verses.

Reading only the Johannine lessons in the present pericopes deprives the church of some favorite and important ideas. Examples: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30) is strategic for the church's understanding and proclamation about the Baptizer. The pericope on the adulterous woman in John 8 is part of the canon tradition, even though it has some critical textual problems. Just the same, the good news is

definitely there. The question posed by the other Judas in 14:22 deserves remembrance. That wonderful passage in 21:15-25 has theological and ecclesiastical significance, but it is assigned only the seldom occurrence of "Pastor, Bishop A B C" and the Day of St. John (Dec. 27). Of course, there are some tough passages that are nice to omit, e.g. John 8:37-59; 10:19-21; 12:37-43; 15:18-25. But is it faithful reading and interpretation of the whole counsel of God to omit passages simply because they are difficult? Indeed, I think dealing with John as we have it now helps us to avoid facing questions about "anti-semitism" in John's Gospel (and in ourselves).

If there is any rationale for devoting one series to each of the Synoptic Gospels, how much more we ought to read, study, and preach on John in terms of its own integrity and genius! John is more than a filler of gaps or occasions. It is the one Gospel account in "contrast" to the Synoptics. Logic really might propose *two* series—Synoptic and John—or we need at least one year in four to be informed out of John.

For many years I wondered, "Why is there no Series D on John?" I had hoped that someone might supply a Johannine lectionary for me and for the Church. But nothing has appeared.

For this reason, I set for myself the task of formulating a series of lessons only from the Gospel according to John for one year of preaching. How does one do that? The first issue was: how many segments does one need to have? and how does one break this Gospel into segments? Every year there will be 52 or 53 Sundays. That's easy. But then one needs to add something for Christmas, and maybe for services on Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. Add these to the 52 or 53 and one has about 58 segments. One might want to provide texts to fill in for midweek Lenten services and Ascension Day, making a total then of about 64 occasions. By reading John's Gospel and by referring to a Synopsis one can rather easily identify enough units to supply the needed 64 (and I found myself being sure every verse was included, not leaving out one or two here and there).

John is more than a filler of gaps or occasions. It is the one Gospel account in "contrast" to the Synoptics.

Festivals raised another challenge. One could use the lections, reading straight through without reordering. Such a practice might arouse more questions than one wants to deal with in a congregation during holy days and holidays. Alternatively, one could select certain passages for those special, high festival days of Christmas, Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, and Trinity (and midweek Lenten services?) and then let the Evangelist's order determine the assignments of the remaining services throughout the year. I chose an even more complicated tactic by placing my "new lectionary" selections on Sundays when John would otherwise have been used in Series A, B, or C. On second thought, such effort and manipulation was neither necessary nor particularly helpful.

Of course, one could be "brave" and leave the order of the Gospel uninterrupted and address a festival or special occasion (Christmas, Easter, etc.) from the perspective of the passage as it appears in the context

of the whole Gospel. After all, each Gospel is written with awareness of how the whole story comes out. For the early church the Resurrection was an assumption under every other story. Have we been clear and thought of the Gospels as having this ingredient implicit at all times?

If one were to take one Gospel at a time for one year, some interesting possibilities present themselves. Think of the Bible readings, study guides, and information that one might prepare each week for congregational use in reflection on the last Sunday or in preparation for the next gathering of the community. One could point to many significant perspectives and issues in a Gospel. Consider the various ways the disciples are treated by John (usually better than the Synoptics). The education for the pastor, as well as for the congregation, could help in understanding a Gospel in the light of Easter and the particular perspective each writer contributes to the witness of the early church.

Preaching on John for a year provided a concentration which drove me to the books, because I needed help and edification from a variety of sources. (I never had a seminary course on the Gospel of John.) Many scholars explore the fine points of the fourth Gospel: what is the "plot" in John? who is the audience? is John anti-Jewish? Certain concepts and ideas—light, glory, etc.—occur particularly in John. Very prominent is the emphasis on what "glory" means in relationship to Jesus. We need to understand why it is important for the church also to hear what the Evangelist presents about Jesus and glory. The relationship between Jesus and the Father is a Johannine contribution (and challenge). The portraits of the disciples, Andrew, Philip, Nathaniel, Judas (not Iscariot) and Thomas are drawn most heavily from this Evangelist, as are the persons of Nicodemus, Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The Paraclete and "I am" texts only appear in John. Interesting issues or possibilities occur when reflecting on the sacraments as they are and are not presented in John. What is the significance of John's foot washing at the Last Supper together with the omission of the institution of the Eucharist?

Interesting issues or possibilities occur when reflecting on the sacraments as they are and are not presented in John.

Some general observations:

1) A year on one Gospel did become a little long. Maybe it was my problem, trying to do so much at one time—the reading, planning, etc. It became a challenge to deal with the theme of "glory" over and over and over. How many times and in how many ways can one deal with that? Nevertheless, I count it valuable to have undergone this discipline. I was stimulated to read several commentaries rather completely, plus about ten other books on the fourth Evangelist. I also enjoyed translating John for myself throughout the year—good for the rusty Greek—though good translations are not simple.

2) I discovered that many of the readings or lessons in this Gospel are or should be long. Frequently we are "directed" to use a piece-meal tactic and we miss the thrust of the longer readings. To abbreviate a pericope or to chop a longer reading into parts is

not necessarily wholesome or required. I would personally recommend avoiding the abbreviation and taking the necessary time to read the longer pericopes. One can employ a variety of ways to read a Gospel: several readers, a dialogue, or something of that nature.

3) I appreciate more than ever the difficulty there is in integrating the Gospel text with the other lessons for the day. In the other three series, we already often notice how the second lesson does not coordinate closely with the first lesson or the Gospel. This happens because of a commitment to serial reading of Epistles for the second lessons. It would have required much more time than I could invest to find related readings for first and second lessons. Perhaps when one takes on working through a Gospel such as John a second time, it would then be possible to choose alternatives for the other lessons. Maybe it is not too serious to use the presently assigned first and second lessons to go along with a "new" Johannine pericope. The prayer for the day presents another challenge which I took on only occasionally.

While I was rather tired of John at the end of a year, I look back and say that I would not discourage anyone from tackling that Gospel for a year and possibly even doing it on a regular cycle (every fourth year?). Maybe one ought to propose that preachers undertake a discipline of this kind with each of the four Gospels. The early church used and grew with the Gospels as they were under four separate authorships. What might that fact say to us today?

If some preacher has at some time devoted a year to John (or another Gospel), I would appreciate sharing notes and learning what that experience was.

Reading List

Commentaries by William Barclay, C. K. Barrett, Raymond E. Brown (Anchor), Fred B. Craddock (Knox), Ernst Haenchen (Hermeneia), A. M. Hunter (Cambridge), Robert Kysar (Augsburg), John Marsh (Pelican), James McPolin (Glazier), D. Moody Smith (Proclamation)

Other Works:

C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel of John and Judaism*, Fortress, 1975
R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, Fortress, 1983
C. H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1963, and *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge, 1953
Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*, John Knox, 1985
Archibald M. Hunter, *According to John*, Westminster, 1968
Jacob Jervell, *Jesus in the Gospel of John*, Augsburg, 1984
Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: According to John 17*, Fortress, 1968
Robert Kysar, *The Fourth Evangelist and His Gospel*, Augsburg, 1975; *John's Story of Jesus*, Fortress, 1984; and *John, the Maverick Gospel*, John Knox, 1976
Jose Miranda, *Being and the Messiah: The Message of St. John*, Orbis, 1977
Bruce E. Schein, *Following the Way: the Setting of John's Gospel*, Augsburg, 1980
D. Moody Smith, *Johannine Christianity*, University of South Carolina, 1984

Johannine Pericopes
as arranged the first time

(article indicates it would be done differently next time)

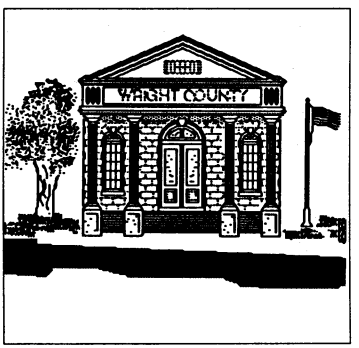
Sunday	Gospel	LBW Usage
1 Advent	John 12:9-19	
2 Advent	John 1:6-8,15	3 Advent B
3 Advent	John 1:19-28	3 Advent B
4 Advent	John 1:1-5	Nativity & 2 Christmas
Nativity	John 1:9-18	Nativity 2
1 Christmas	John 1:1-18	2 Christmas
2 Christmas	Luke 2:4-7,21-24	Nativity
Epiphany	John 3:1-17	Trinity B
1 Epiphany	John 1:29-34	2 Epiphany A
2 Epiphany	John 1:35-42	2 Epiphany A, St. Andrew
3 Epiphany	John 1:40-51	2 Epiphany B, St. Bartholomew
4 Epiphany	John 2:1-12	2 Epiphany C
5 Epiphany	John 2:13-25	3 Lent B
6 Epiphany	John 3:14-21	4 Lent B
7 Epiphany	John 3:22-36	
8 Epiphany	John 4:1-42	2 Lent A
Transfiguration	John 12:20-36	5 Lent B/Tues,Holy Week/ Holy Cross
Ash Wednesday	John 12:37-50	
1 Lent	John 13:21-30	
2 Lent	John 18:1-12	Good Friday
3 Lent	John 18:13-27	Good Friday
4 Lent	John 18:28-40	Good Friday/Christ the King
5 Lent	John 19:1-16	Good Friday
Passion	John 12:9-19 or John 19:17-30 or John 18:1-19:42	Good Friday
Maundy Thursday	John 13:1-20,31-38	Maundy Thurs/5 Easter C
Good Friday	John 18:1-19:42 or John 19:28-42 or John 19:17-30	Good Friday

Easter	John 20:1-18	Easter ABC (Mary Magdalene)
2 Easter	John 20:19-31	2 Easter ABC/Pentecost A
3 Easter	John 21:1-14	3 Easter C
4 Easter	John 10:1-21	4 Easter AB
5 Easter	John 21:15-25	St. John/Pastors & Bishops
6 Easter	John 14:1-14	5 Easter A/Thomas/Philip/James
Ascension	John 20:30-31 or John 16:16-22	2 Easter ABC
7 Easter	John 14:15-26	6 Easter A/Simon-Jude
Pentecost	John 16:5-15	Pentecost C/Trinity C
Trinity	John 17:1-5	7 Easter A
2 Pentecost	John 4:43-54	
3 Pentecost	John 5:1-18	
4 Pentecost	John 5:19-47	
5 Pentecost	John 6:1-15	10 Pentecost B
6 Pentecost	John 6:16-21	
7 Pentecost	John 6:22-59	11,12,13 Pentecost B
8 Pentecost	John 6:60-71	14 Pentecost B
9 Pentecost	John 7:1-13	
10 Pentecost	John 7:14-52	Pentecost B
11 Pentecost	John 7:53-8:11	
12 Pentecost	John 8:12-20	
13 Pentecost	John 8:21-30	
14 Pentecost	John 8:31-59	Reformation
15 Pentecost	John 9:1-41	3 Lent A
16 Pentecost	John 10:22-42	4 Easter C
17 Pentecost	John 11:1-44	5 Lent A
18 Pentecost	John 11:45-57	
19 Pentecost	John 12:1-8	Mon, Holy Week
20 Pentecost	John 14:25-31	6 Easter C
21 Pentecost	John 15:1-17	5 Easter B/6 Easter B
22 Pentecost	John 15:18-16:4a	Pentecost C
23 Pentecost	John 17:6-19	7 Easter AB
Last Sunday	John 17:20-26	7 Easter C

The Main Street in Mark

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Main Street is a common feature in most small towns. In fact, Main Street is the center of a small town's life. People do shopping and visiting there. Teenagers cruise up and down it. The school and churches are found on or near Main Street. Besides being the principal thoroughfare, Main Street holds a small town together. Other important streets flow from Main Street because the entire town was built in relationship to that Main Street. Hence to understand the life and layout of a small town, one begins and ends on Main Street.



Mark's Gospel is like a small town. It too has a Main Street which holds the entire narrative together. Unfortunately, when approaching Mark in Series B of the Lectionary, the tendency is to look at Mark only in terms of scattered pericopes. Thus preaching on Mark becomes an exercise of jumping from one side of town to another without ever stopping to see

how the whole is laid out or how these individual units and themes relate to the center, the Main Street of the Gospel.

We propose that the passion of Jesus is Mark's Main Street. Jesus' passion is not just a major theme in Mark. Rather, it is *the* major theme into which the other major themes flow.

Mark's Main Street

Scholars have long recognized the centrality of Jesus' passion in the second Gospel.[1] Even at a cursory glance one cannot help but notice the length and detail of the passion narrative. The account in 14:12-15:47 gives almost an hourly account of the last two days of Jesus' life.[2] When 14:1-11 is read as a prelude, the stage becomes set for these climactic scenes, as all the main characters, central conflicts, and significant themes of the Gospel come together.

As the passion narrative begins to unfold, the contrasts of the characters' perspectives are striking. The religious authorities (aided by Judas) plot Jesus' death in a rather unsure manner, while the disciples are oblivious to that which is taking place. Jesus, however, is part of God's plan. Just as he has foretold these events before the entry into Jerusalem (cf. 8:31; 9:12,31; 10:32-34,45), so he again foretells that which is about to happen (14:6-9,13-16,18-22,27-28,30). Thus no matter what takes place in the passion, it has been planned that way. Jesus knows it, and he is obedient to it.

In the midst of the passover meal Jesus interprets his impending death as the covenant sacrifice which atones for the sins of humanity (14:22-24)[3]. This is the God-given mission for which Jesus has come, and it is the goal of his life lived in service to others (10:45). The disciples had good intentions to follow Jesus on this path of servanthood, but like seed sown in rocky soil, they abandoned Jesus in the face of death (cf. 4:16-17; 14:29-31,50,66-72). The scene in Gethsemane reinforces what has been established regarding the passion. That which is taking place is God's will (14:36). Jesus knows it, and remains faithful to it (14:34-36,39,41-42). The disciples, however, are unable to comprehend these events.

With the arrest of Jesus, the fulfillment of events predicted by Jesus takes place in rapid succession. The betrayer does his work *as predicted*, and Jesus is arrested by the will of the religious authorities *as predicted*. The disciples abandon Jesus *as predicted*. In the

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[1]Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historical Biblical Christ*, ed. and trans. Carl Braaten (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 80 n. 11, claimed that "one could call the Gospels passion narratives with extended introductions." Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 371, credited Mark with the creation of this sort of gospel. Subsequently scholars have depicted the composition of Mark's gospel as being "a passion narrative with an extended introduction." See e.g., *IDB, Supplementary Volume*, s.v. "Mark, Gospel of," by Norman Perrin, 572 and Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, trans. Roy Harrisville (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 30-31, 132.

[2]In addition to the analyses of Mark's passion narrative found in various commentaries, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *Mark*, 2nd ed., Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 95-104; Werner Kelber, ed., *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14-16* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976); Frank J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies, Interpreting the Synoptics through Their Passion Stories* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 7-50; and Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Wilmington: Glazier, 1984).

[3]Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 132, and Matera, *Passion Narratives*, 21-22.

first trial scene (14:53-65), the conflict between Jesus and the authorities reaches its zenith under the categories of revelation and rejection.[4] Jesus is asked point-blank about his identity by the high priest. "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Most Blessed?" (14:61). Using a formula of divine revelation, Jesus acknowledges his identity as Messiah and Son of God. Then employing Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13, the Marcan Jesus reveals that God will exalt him, and he himself will come as eschatological judge. The high priest rejects this revelation. To him it is the blasphemy for which Jesus is to be condemned to death (14:63-64). Ironically, Jesus himself supplies the evidence needed for condemnation which the religious authorities had failed to manufacture (14:55-59). Yet this rejection of Jesus is the fulfillment of Scripture, while those who reject him are themselves rejected (12:1-12).

The death of Jesus in Mark 15 is portrayed as the death of the royal Son of God.[5] The title "King of the Jews" is highlighted throughout the chapter. These last events in Jesus' life are in fulfillment of Scripture (cf. Ps 22:19,8,1 and Mk 15:24,29-31,34 respectively; Amos 8:9 and Mk 15:33; Ps 69:22 and 15:36) and in fulfillment of his own predictions (8:31; 9:12,31; 10:32-34). At Jesus' death the curtain of the Temple is torn in half, producing a twofold salvific effect (15:38). First, it marks God's negation of the Temple cult in the scheme of atonement. The crucified Jesus, not the Temple, now stands as the source of forgiveness of sins.[6] Second, this event, along with the other events of Jesus' death, produces the confession that Jesus truly was the Son of God. Indeed, this is the first time in the story that a human has recognized Jesus' true identity. Now even a Gentile is able to perceive and confess Jesus' true identity in light of the cross (15:39).

The various other reactions to Jesus in Mk 15 are steeped in irony.[7] Pilate is perplexed by Jesus' silence (15:5). Such silence, however, echoes the innocent, prophetic figure of Isa 53:7 who suffers in silence. The Roman soldiers and chief priests mock Jesus as King of the Jews, and yet that is precisely who Jesus is. The passersby jeer, calling him the one who supposedly would destroy and build anew the Temple, and yet as we have seen, in his death Jesus destroyed the Temple and replaced it with one built without hands. The passersby also taunt him to save himself by coming down from the cross (15:30), and yet his death on that cross

Only the centurion and the readers of Mark are able to perceive God's reality in the death of Jesus.

[4]For detailed studies on the trial scene in Mark 14:53-65 see John Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark*, SBLDS 10 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1973) and Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*, SBLDS 31 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977).

[5]On this theme in Mark 15 see Kingsbury, *Christology*, 124-33, and Frank J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus, Composition and Theology in Mark 15*, SBLDS 66 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

[6]Kingsbury, *Christology*, 132.

[7]On the irony in these scenes see Matera, *Kingship of Jesus*, 21-34. The trial scene in 14:53-65 is also teeming with irony as has been shown by Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, 47-48.

is the decisive act of salvation. Other bystanders want to wait and see if Elijah will come to take Jesus down from the cross (15:35-37), and yet that is not necessary. In the person of John the Baptist, "Elijah" has already come to prepare Jesus' way, and he too has been handed over and treated with contempt (1:2-8,14; 6:14-29; 9:11-13). The religious leaders want Jesus to come down from the cross in order that they might see and believe, and yet it is the centurion, a supposed outsider, who is able to see the events of Jesus' death and to believe that he was the Son of God. Only the centurion and the readers of Mark are able to perceive God's reality in the death of Jesus. In contrast to the male followers who abandoned Jesus, the women who served Jesus throughout his ministry are the only followers at the cross (15:40-41,47). Unlike John, who was buried by his disciples, Jesus is buried by a respected Jewish official (15:42-46; 6:29). His own disciples are nowhere to be found.

In these passion scenes all that Jesus predicted has come true under the direction of God's will. The royal Son has been rejected by those who supposedly were the authorities of God's will. Yet while the scene of death draws to a close as the rock is rolled in front of the tomb, Jesus' vindication and exaltation loom on the horizon since that too has been predicted by Jesus.

Having walked Mark's Main Street, we now move on to other important streets in Mark in order to see how they flow to and from the passion as Main Street.

Son of God and Son of Man Roads

Some scholars argue that Mark is using the term Son of Man to correct the title Son of God.[8] Some claim that Son of Man is the only title which adequately describes Mark's Christology.[9] Others claim that in Mark Son of God focuses on the secret identity of Jesus while Son of Man focuses on Jesus' outward interaction with the world in his ministry, death, resurrection, and role as eschatological judge.[10] There also remain disagreements on whether Son of Man is a title or is to be translated as "this specific human being."[11] While an analysis of Mark's passion does not decide these issues once for all, the passion story does reveal how Mark intends the reader to relate Son of God and Son of Man to Jesus.

The reader is informed of Jesus' identity as Son of God at the very start of the story (1:1).[12] Even more significant is the fact that God proclaims this sonship at Jesus' baptismal anointing. Because God understands Jesus to be the Son of God, the reader is to think the same of Jesus.[13] At the Transfiguration, God again proclaims Jesus to be "my beloved Son" (9:7). The demons also know

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[8]Hans Dieter Betz, "Jesus as Divine Man," in *Jesus and the Historians: In Honor of Ernest Cadman Colwell*, ed. F. T. Trotter (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 114-33; Leander Keck, "Mark 3:7-12 and Mark's Christology," *JBL* 84 (1965), 341-58; Norman Perrin, *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); and Theodore Weeden, *Mark: Tradition in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

[9]Achtemeier, *Mark*, 53-65.

[10]Kingsbury, *Christology*, 142-55, 173-76.

[11]See the discussions of this issue in *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Son of Man," by Reginald H. Fuller, 981; *IDB, Supplementary Volume*, s.v. "Son of man," by Norman Perrin, 833-36; and John R. Donahue, "Recent Studies on the Origin of 'Son of Man' in the Gospels," *CBQ* 48 (July 1986), 484-98.

[12]Following the 26th Edition of Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, we read "Son of God" as part of 1:1.

[13]On the reader's evaluative point of view and God's declaration of Jesus' sonship in 1:11; 9:7 see Kingsbury, *Christology*, 47-50, 65-68, 98-100.

Only by looking at Jesus' passion is one really able to perceive that Jesus is the beloved Son of God.

this to be Jesus' true identity (1:24; 3:11; 5:7). Significantly, no human being is able to penetrate this secret identity of Jesus as Son of God until his death on the cross. Mark's point is clear. Yes, the reader is informed of Jesus' secret identity as Son of God from the start. Yes, the reader is to think of Jesus as God thinks of Jesus, i.e., as beloved Son of God. But the reader must also see, understand, and confess Jesus as the Son of God in the same manner as the centurion. Only by looking at Jesus' passion is one really able to perceive that Jesus is the beloved Son of God.

Yet this sonship is precisely what the religious authorities have rejected (12:1-12; 14:61-64). Either one stands beside the centurion and confesses the crucified Jesus as the Son of God, or one joins ranks with the opponents and rejects Jesus' identity as God's beloved Son.

The title Son of Man is also to be interpreted in light of the passion. When it is first used in the Gospel, Son of Man helps depict Jesus' authority. Jesus presents himself as the Son of Man who has God's authority to forgive sins (2:10) and is the lord of the sabbath (2:28). Indeed, throughout the first half of Mark, Jesus' authority as teacher, healer, wonder worker, exorcist, representative and interpreter of God is on display.

The tone suddenly shifts near the end of chapter 8. All of a sudden there are overt predictions of rejection, condemnation, suffering, and death. At the center of these passion predictions stands the title Son of Man. Mark has purposely juxtaposed Son of Man as a depiction of Jesus' authority and of his suffering. Mark is showing us that the one who suffers and dies is none other than the one who has God's authority. The cross does not negate Jesus' greatness. In point of fact the cross demonstrates the true meaning of greatness. To be great, one must be a servant, just like the Son of Man, who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many (10:43-45).

The title Son of Man also denotes Jesus' role as eschatological judge. The Son of Man, who will be seen coming in the clouds with great power and glory, is none other than the Son of Man who was condemned, who suffered and died on the cross. Again Jesus' power and suffering are juxtaposed. One properly understands Jesus as coming judge only when one understands his path to the cross. The one who rejects and is ashamed of Jesus' path of the cross will be the one of whom the Son of Man will be ashamed at the eschaton (8:31-38).

Thus it is in relation to the passion—Mark's Main Street—that one understands rightly Jesus' identity as beloved Son of God and his God-given authority and suffering as Son of Man.

Discipleship Way

Discipleship is another significant Marcan theme that must be interpreted in relationship to the passion. To be a disciple means that one is called and obediently follows Jesus. Jesus' way is the way of the cross, the way of suffering and humility for the sake of others in obedience to God. That means the disciples' way is also the way of

the cross, the way of suffering and humility for the sake of others in obedience to Jesus.

The disciples seek positions of greatness, but Jesus teaches that the greatness and glory of discipleship are found in following his way of the cross. Yet the disciples remain ignorant of this reality because Jesus has not yet suffered and died. They abandon Jesus as he is handed over to his enemies. But there will be a reunion between Jesus and the disciples after his death and resurrection so that the disciples will be able to follow Jesus' way of the cross.[14] Indeed, not only is the cross the signature of following Jesus; the cross creates a new reality, so that Jesus' disciples (whether of the first or twentieth centuries) are able to pick up their crosses, deny their own desires, and follow the crucified one. Thus if one seeks to preach on the way of discipleship in Mark, one must start at and return to the passion as Main Street.

Kingdom and King Avenues

Jesus' first words in Mark concern the kingdom of God that has drawn near (1:14-15). He calls for people to repent and to believe in the gospel because of this. As part of this "in-breaking" of God's rule, Jesus has bound Satan and is freeing those formerly held captive by Satan. Yet this dawning of the kingdom in Jesus is a mystery which only the disciples are able to see and to perceive (4:10-12). In terms of outward appearances, one cannot tell that in Jesus God's rule is dawning. Rather, it is like a seed that when sown appears to be small and inconsequential. But just as abundant growth and great harvest may come from that seed, so too there will be the growth and ultimate harvest at the complete arrival of God's kingdom at Jesus' parousia (cf. 4:3-9, 26-32; 13:14-27).[15] The dawning of the kingdom through Jesus must be approached through faith or else it will be missed.

This is precisely what occurs in Mark's passion narrative. As noted above, Jesus is the king of God's people, but the soldiers, the passersby, and the religious authorities fail to perceive this. Instead, they judge by outward appearances. They see the weak, suffering, crucified Jesus and use the title "King" as a cruel joke. Only the centurion sees the events of Jesus' death and perceives Jesus' royal identity. In the character of Joseph of Arimathea, Mark adds another connection between kingdom and passion. Joseph is not only a respected member of the religious council, he is also described as a man waiting for the kingdom of God (14:43). And what does Joseph receive? The body of the crucified Jesus (14:44-46). Essential to the kingdom's mystery is Jesus as the crucified king. When one approaches the crucified Jesus with the eyes of faith, one sees the kingdom of God.

Conflict with Jewish Authorities Street

The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities starts early in the narrative, picks up momentum (especially when Jesus enters Jerusalem), and reaches its climax in the passion. From the start of the story Jesus is different. Unlike other religious leaders

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[14]Achtemeier, *Mark*, 112-13; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 135-37; Matera, *Passion Narratives*, 64-65; and Norman R. Petersen, "When is the End not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative," *Interpretation* 34 (April 1980), 154-57, 161-63. Contra Werner H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 74-77, 84-87, who claims that once the disciples abandon Jesus there is no hope of a post-passion reunification of Jesus and the disciples in Galilee.

[15]Achtemeier, *Mark*, 72-73, 79-84 and Matera, *Passion Narratives*, 74-75.

Jesus has teaching authority (1:21-28). He claims God's authority to forgive sins (2:1-12). He associates with unclean outsiders and acts in a startling new manner (2:13-22). He claims authority as lord of the sabbath. Consequently, the religious authorities begin to conspire against him (3:6) and judge him to be in alliance with Satan (3:22-30). They consider Jesus to be blasphemous (2:7; cf. 14:64). Ironically, because they refuse to perceive Jesus as God's Son who has been anointed by the Spirit for mission, they will be the ones who are guilty of blasphemy.

This conflict with the Jewish authorities does not mean that Jesus is rejecting the revelation of God's will in the law and prophets. Just the opposite is the case. Jesus is *the* authorized and correct interpreter of Scripture. Part of his correct interpretation means the negation of the role some Jewish authorities had prior to Jesus' coming. This is seen especially in the cleansing of the Temple and in the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants. Regarding the former in Mark, Jesus does not really cleanse the Temple. Rather, he abrogates the role of the Temple.[16] The Temple is like the figless fig tree that is cursed by Jesus. As the fig tree withered to its roots shortly after Jesus' curse, so too is the Temple's actual destruction imminent because of Jesus' actions. In Mark the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants (12:1-12) explains in advance the reality of the passion.[17] As the tenants kill the beloved son of the owner and in turn are destroyed by that owner, so too will the Jewish authorities reject the beloved Son of God and in turn be rejected by God.

Interrelated with this theme of rejection is the inclusion of outsiders as members of God's people. Jesus came to call sinners, though the authorities are contemptuous at his actions (2:13-17). Whereas the Temple should have been a house of prayer for all nations, the religious authorities have turned it into a haven for forgiveness without repentance (11:17).[18] In the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants Jesus teaches that on the one hand God will reject those who have rejected the beloved son, and on the other hand God will include others among the special, chosen people of God (12:9). So as one group is excluded from membership as God's people, another group is being included as members of God's people.

Such themes of negation, rejection, and inclusion reach their climax in the passion. As has been noted above, the Jewish authorities have rejected Jesus as a blasphemer and have handed him over to death. They mock him as being powerless and call on this so-called Messiah-king to come down from the cross in order that they might see and believe. Yet at the moment of his death the Temple curtain is torn in two so that God has negated the place of the Temple in the forgiveness of sins, and the revelation of Jesus' secret identity has gone out so that a Gentile is able to confess that Jesus was the Son of God. In the passion a supposed outsider becomes an insider by confessing Jesus as Son of God. Once again an important Marcan theme flows into Main Street where it receives its climatic interpretation.

Resurrection Boulevard

In Mark there is a sense in which the passion gives meaning to the resurrection as a separate event. In 16:6 the young man announces that "Jesus the Nazarene, the one

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[16]On this understanding of Mark 11:12-25 see Achtemeier, *Mark*, pp. 23-25 and Kelber, *Mark's Story*, pp. 59-62.

[17]Kingsbury, *Christology*, pp. 114-18; Matera, *Kingship*, pp. 74-84; and Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), pp. 213-17.

[18]Achtemeier, *Mark*, p. 24.

who has been crucified, was raised." The perfect tense is used to depict Jesus as the one who has been crucified. Conversely, the aorist is used to depict the fact that Jesus was raised. (Note that in the RSV these two verb tenses have been incorrectly inverted.) In other words: Jesus was raised, but he continues to be the one who has been crucified. The resurrection does not undo or overturn the passion.[19] In the resurrection the crucified one is vindicated and exalted. The rejected stone is made the keystone (12:10). Hence Resurrection Boulevard flows out of the passion as Main Street.

> Jesus was raised, but he continues to be the one who has been crucified.

This helps us comprehend Mark's abrupt ending. It is really an ending which serves as a beginning. As noted above, it is assumed that Jesus and the disciples will be reunited so that the disciples are able to begin picking up their crosses and following Jesus. The reference to Galilee also serves to return our attention to the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee (1:14-15). Likewise, this ending confronts us as Jesus' disciples. We who read the gospel are called to pick up our own crosses and follow the crucified one. We are not to let our fear silence our obedience or proclamation. Rather, we are to proclaim the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and to follow his path of the cross regardless of our own fear.[20] The resurrection does not mean that disciples do not have to follow Jesus down Main Street.

Return to Main Street

As Main Street in Mark, the passion holds the narrative and its theological themes together. In the passion we discover who Jesus is, what his mission entails, and how we are to follow Jesus. The passion emphasizes those authorities (and their institutions) who have rejected Jesus. It also serves as an invitation for supposed outsiders to see and to perceive Jesus' true reality. Such an event is a mystery and a paradox. The suffering one is the one endowed with power and authority. Greatness means servanthood. Following Jesus becomes a matter of denying one's own wants and needs in order to follow the path of the cross. The king is the crucified one. He remains the crucified one even after being raised from the dead. To preach on Mark is to return to Main Street again and again. All the important streets, avenues, and roads in Mark's gospel find their ultimate meaning and interpretation in their relationship to Mark's Main Street, the passion of Jesus.

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[19]Kingsbury, *Christology*, 134

[20]Thomas E. Boomershine, "Mark 16:8 and the Apostolic Commission," *JBL* 100 (June 1981), 236-37. Also see Petersen, "When is the End Not the End?" 151-66 and Robert C. Tannehill, *A Mirror for Disciples: Following Jesus through Mark* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1977), 114-18.

Conformity to Christ in the Gospel of Mark

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Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark means conforming one's life to Christ. To understand discipleship in Mark this way, theocentrically, is to set sail against the prevailing winds, not merely of Liberation Theology, but of Pelagianism as well. Undoubtedly the *sola gratia* threatens far too severe a salvation for us, and the *sola fide* seems far too pointless, unless, in the spirit of the Gospel of Mark, we focus with equal singlemindedness on the story of Jesus. Faith is to be understood as a way of life, in which pure grace marks the Christian's existence in its entirety. To borrow words of J. Louis Martyn from another context, "The gracious line [of the history of salvation] finds its beginning . . . in God's sovereign election through Jesus Christ." A canonical and narrative reading of the Gospel of Mark tells of discipleship as "God's gracious election through Jesus Christ."

Jesus and John the Baptist

The Gospel of Mark begins with God's word about Jesus' sonship. Next John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus by preaching repentance and the coming mightier one: "He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit." After God's word is addressed to Jesus at his baptism, "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," the Spirit "casts out" Jesus into the desert to be "tested by Satan." The word *cast out* is the same word used for Jesus' exorcisms; it is also used for Jesus' cleansing of the Temple (11:15). A war is underway. Satan and his hosts are the enemy of Jesus. One or the other must rule.

Within Mark's story, the disciples' true knowledge of Jesus also begins with God's word about Jesus. The demons never succeed in revealing Jesus. Rather, Jesus' presence provokes the demons into revealing *themselves*. In both of these stories, when God speaks, it is about Jesus. In the Transfiguration, the identical word about Jesus that had been spoken at the baptism is addressed to the disciples: "This is my beloved Son. Hear him!" Notably, there is testing by Satan that occurs just prior to the Transfiguration in the exchange of rebukes between Jesus and Peter (8:32-33). Jesus' testimony about himself as the Son of Man who will be crucified and raised is put to the test in Peter's "rebuke." Jesus prevails because he acts in accord with the baptismal revelation,

"Get behind me, Satan! You are thinking as people do, not as God!"

The disciples' true knowledge of Jesus begins with God's word about him and the command to hear him. Yet God's attestation of Jesus cannot be fully understood until the events of Jesus' death and resurrection have actually taken place (9:9-10). This delay of full understanding of Jesus' identity until after Easter is bound up with the other identity mystery in Mark, that of the Baptist as Elijah.

> Faith is to be understood as a way of life, in which pure grace marks the Christian's existence in its entirety.

The relationship of Jesus and John the Baptist is a unifying theme of the Gospel, bound up with the knowledge of who Jesus really is. The Gospel begins with the contrast between John's baptism with water and Jesus' with the Spirit, and this contrast is carried on throughout the entire Gospel. The story of Herod's execution of John in 6:17-29 is prefaced in 6:14-16 with Herod's speculation that Jesus is really John come back to life. In the descent from the mount of Transfiguration, Jesus identifies Elijah with John the Baptist (9:11-13). In the Temple at Jerusalem, Jesus deflects the question about his authority by asking the opponents about John's authority (11:27-33). Finally, the crowd at the cross mishears Jesus' cry, "Eloi, Eloi," as an appeal for Elijah to deliver him. By the device of this contrast with the Baptist, Mark portrays unbelieving knowledge of Jesus which is merely in awe at him. Jesus' identity as the Son, who in his being depends on his Father and who obeys him in his strange work of suffering, requires God's own revelation.

For Mark, repentance-and-faith is not a form of human insight into "the being of God in Jesus" (Schleiermacher). Rather, faith corresponds to God's new deed for human salvation manifested in the sending of Jesus the Son; repentance-and-faith is an element in the event of revelation itself. Faith is the triumph of *God's* claim in and for humankind. Christology begins from above.

Jesus and Satan

The "gospel of God" comes "into Galilee" with Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God. Just as God asserts his royal claim for human allegiance in Jesus' words, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men," so also Jesus' coming flushes the enemy into the open (1:24).

What is at issue in this battle is the validity of Jesus' proclamation, its truth as a word about God. Declaring that the "time is fulfilled," Jesus takes a sovereign position in the interpretation of Scripture, the Word of God. Announcing the nearness of God's reign, he forgives sins, summons a tax-collector, and shares table with the forgiven sinners. He appoints and commissions the Twelve to administer his claim upon "the sheep without a shepherd" and transgresses the boundaries of Israel to find faith among "the dogs beneath the children's table" (7:28-29).

Jesus' word about God is the theme of the first part of Mark's Gospel (1:14-8:10). His demand for silence from the people he heals indicates tension between the report

about Jesus (1:45) and Jesus' own message about God (2:2bff.). Jesus is unsuccessful in silencing the people's talk about him (e.g., 7:36), while it is precisely Jesus' silencing of the demons that the people talk about (e.g., 1:27b-28). Why does Jesus want to suppress the celebration of his power over the demons?

The word about God which Jesus speaks is addressed to sinners; the reign of God draws near to them mercifully. The forgiveness of sins and the dethronement of the usurping, demonic powers are not several acts of salvation, but one and the same assertion of God's sovereignty. The story of the paralytic drives home the point that the word of healing and the word of forgiveness are one and the same act.

Jesus, who is identified by his cross, can be "seen" by faith precisely because of his resurrection.

The call of Levi, the tax collector, and the table-fellowship with sinners (2:15) make clear that the word which Jesus speaks is addressed to sinners (2:17). The freedom Jesus brings in forgiving sinners provokes conflict with the Law. Mark is no antinomian (7:1-13). Jesus resolves his conflict with the Law by his sovereign reduction and radicalization of the Law to the love commandment (12:28-34). So to acknowledge God's law shows that one is near to the reign of God. In radicalizing the law, the conflict between Jesus' word about God and the law of God is not resolved but accentuated (10:23-27). The pronouncement of the word of God's mercy precipitates the conspiracy to destroy Jesus (3:6).

Hence, Jesus' word about God confronts the world by distinguishing between faith and disbelief, or—more precisely for Mark—between faith and fear. Strangely (to us), disbelief is provoked by the miracles of Jesus: "By the prince of demons he casts out demons!" (2:22b). Such disbelief is characterized by Mark as fear, awe, or astonishment at Jesus. Peter's bumbling reaction at the Transfiguration is explained by Mark, "He did not know what to say, for fear had fallen upon them" (9:6). The women conclude the Gospel of Mark saying "nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (16:8).

Faith, by contrast, is for Mark the confident trust which breaks out as the gospel of the dawning reign of God breaks in. This faith in God is powerful in that it *dis*believes "false christs" (13:21). Faith for Mark is the appropriate human response to the sovereign triumph of God over human faithlessness in the cross of the Son. By the midpoint of Mark's Gospel a darkness begins to fall upon the called and chosen. As Jesus' course is set towards Jerusalem, Jesus' word about God becomes Jesus' self-attestation as the crucified, risen and coming Son of Man. But Jesus is now an opaque riddle to his disciples. He who had bidden them come after him now leads where they cannot follow.

Jesus and the Disciples

What occurs in the middle section of the Gospel, introduced by the Pharisees' request for a "sign from heaven" (8:11) and concluding with the disciples' request for "the sign when all these things are about to be fulfilled" (13:4), is Jesus' explanation to his

disciples of the parable which he himself has become to them. The presence of Christ with his people, under the cross, is a kind of "seeing" of "the coming of the reign of God in power" (9:1=14:25). Jesus, who is identified by his cross, can be "seen" by faith precisely because of his resurrection. The Transfiguration story is meant by Mark as an instance or type of that "seeing." For Mark the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the inauguration of the reign of God (12:36).

It is "seeing how Jesus died" that triggers the Centurion's confession (15:39a). At the tomb, the announcement similarly promises sight: "There [in Galilee] you shall see him, just as he said to you" (16:7). The resurrection of Jesus is understood by Mark as the epochal word of God, God's validation of Jesus' self-testimony. The Easter faith is prefigured in the Transfiguration episode. But just as Easter does not for Mark abolish the scandal of the cross but establishes it, so also God's validation of Jesus' self-testimony in the Transfiguration confirms Jesus' exclusive requirement of repentance-and-faith: "If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (8:34). Such discipleship cannot be understood at all in any moralistic fashion as an imitation of Christ. Jesus bids them not to bear his cross, or even others', but rather their own. Consequently, discipleship is precisely not an honoring of a noble cause in remembrance and imitation. Rather, faith in Christ draws the believer into conformity with the one who is believed.

Jesus does not want faith-in-general, but faith as allegiance, faith which confesses and does not deny Christ (9:38). Because Jesus' self-attestation occurs in his redemptive death (10:45) and victorious coming (15:62), discipleship cannot be an *imitatio Christi* (10:37). To ask to be like Jesus is necessarily to put the question wrongly (10:38a). As the working out of God's sovereign claim in the risen and present Christ Jesus, discipleship can only be a mysterious conformity to Christ (10:40).

Following Jesus waits necessarily upon revelation, God's validation in the cross and resurrection.

The dismay of the disciples at Jesus' comment about the rich young ruler may be compared with Jesus' statements on the night of his betrayal. The man had failed to follow Jesus, but Jesus' comment is, "Children, how hard it is to enter the reign of God!" (10:24). At his last supper, Jesus speaks of his own entrance into the reign of God (14:25). Jesus had confirmed the suspicion of the disciples. From a human perspective salvation is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God (10:27).

Following Jesus waits necessarily upon revelation, God's validation in the cross and resurrection. Blind Bartimaeus' irrepressible cry to Jesus for mercy prevails over those "rebuking him to silence." Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has healed you." And immediately *he could see again* and *he followed Jesus on the way*" (10:52).

Jesus' testimony about himself to the disciples concludes in the 13th chapter in his response to the disciples' request for a sign of the end. Such a sign is never given. Jesus' testimony about himself is the only "sign" which is given. Mark's Gospel is indeed *the apocalyptic Gospel*: Mark has a *revelation*. But it does not occur in the 13th chapter. The

revelation of God unfolds in the narrative of the passion.

Jesus and God

Until recently, modern scholarly research has been preoccupied with the question of the value of the Gospels as historical sources. The form-critics have spoken of Mark's Gospel as "pearls on a string," i.e., as a somewhat haphazard collection of stories about Jesus. The "pearls" are the "stories" and the "string" is what is called the "hellenistic kerygma" about Jesus as the divine man who walks on earth lording over the demons and the cosmic powers. In this view, the Gospel of Mark is a rather crude synthesis of two divergent religious impulses.

The history-of-religions school, beginning with Wrede, credited Mark with greater intelligence but at the cost of discerning in him rather more sinister motives. Wrede correctly argued that the motif of secrecy about Jesus' identity dominates the Gospel and signals the intention of the author. Yet incorrectly, Wrede thought the secret to be about Jesus' messianic self-consciousness. Wrede's reading imputed to Mark the christological presupposition of liberal protestantism. He thought that Mark was concerned with the "historical" basis in the "life of Jesus" of the church's proclamation of Christ. Wrede drew the conclusion that the messianic secret is Mark's retrospective cover-up of the historical fact that Jesus had no such consciousness. Many scholars believe that the image of the "historical" Jesus yields a legitimation and guide for contemporary discipleship.

Mark's Gospel is nothing if it is not a sustained assault on every form of Christian Pelagianism. Everything aims at the miracle of grace in 16:7: the redemptive death of Jesus is valid precisely for the disciples who have abandoned and denied him.

Mark writes of God's word about Jesus, of the preaching of Jesus about God, of Jesus' self-attestation, and now at the end, of Jesus' death in obedience to God. Such narrative progression indicates that Mark's Gospel is the Word of God. The resurrection of Jesus is the divine decision which from the beginning determines who Jesus is. Mark can be so astonishingly abrupt and unnervingly ambivalent in his report of Easter morn because the resurrection of Jesus is the presupposition of the whole.

Conversely, the reader's identification with Jesus can only be that of revelation and faith. So as a literary work, the Gospel of Mark is a proclamation of the gospel. The Gospel of Mark is the Word of God. The Spirit is not given apart from the Word; but without the Spirit, the Word is but a door closing tightly against us (Kermode).

Mark's Gospel announces the self-revelation of the Triune God in the cross of the Son. It is at Gethsemane that God is revealed, the Father of Jesus (14:36). As the Son of the Father, Jesus is the revelation of God, which unfolds as insiders betray, abandon, and deny him; as the council labels his claim of sonship as blasphemy; as he is mocked and executed, in the place of a rebel, as "the King of the Jews."

Despite his rejection by God, Jesus suffers obediently as the Son of the Father. The Centurion's conversion tells it all: "Seeing how Jesus died, he declared, 'This man was truly Son of God'" (15:39). As Luther said, "Truly, theology and the knowledge of God are discovered in 'Christ crucified.'"

Book Reviews

RELIGION AND REPUBLIC: THE AMERICAN CIRCUMSTANCE. By Martin E. Marty. Boston: Beacon, 1987. 391 pages. Cloth. $25.00.

E pluribus unum. The Latin phrase in the Seal of the United States expresses both the American experience and the dream: "out of many one." Not only did a federal union emerge out of separate colonies/states. Diverse people became American while maintaining discreet and distinctive heritages. Martin E. Marty, Fairfax M. Cone Professor of the History of Modern Christianity at the University of Chicago, analyzes the many and the one in describing the relation between religion and republic in America.

May we speak about American religion or only about religion in America? Marty marshalls the evidence for both. The "lively experiment" of religious liberty, which visitors to America have uniformly observed and reported, has produced both a public religion and a civil religion that continue to permeate American life. Depending on one's outlook, it promises or threatens to replace the many religious outlooks with one distinctively American faith, for which the Bible is icon in the republic.

Yet Marty's emphasis is not on the one but the many. He presents his chapters as "celebrations" of pluralism. He describes how "a new tribalism" has emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, revealing skeletons of ethnicity that have borne the sinews of commonality all along. He describes the particularity present in religious groups, whose differences presumably are ignored in the system of denominationalism. He looks at Roman Catholic and other ghettos, asking penetratingly if the WASP experience is in fact not one ghetto among others. He deals separately with the experience of evangelicals, fundamentalists, and Mormons.

Most of the material in the book appeared in other forms either as articles or as chapters in the books of others. Yet the book has coherence as it moves back and forth between unity and plurality in looking at American religion and religion in America. It engages the historian in dialogue over how to understand the data. It helps us Americans appreciate why we are the way we are.

John H. Tietjen
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FOR ALL THE SAINTS: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF MARTYRDOM AND SAINTHOOD IN THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION. By Robert Kolb. Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1987. xii and 186 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Meet Ludwig Rabus, student of Luther and Melanchthon at Wittenberg, erstwhile Lutheran cathedral preacher at Strassburg, later at Ulm, martyrologist. In a compact masterpiece of miniature historiography, representing a decade of labor, Robert Kolb introduces the reader to a key, albeit obscure transition figure in the Lutheran Late-Reformation. Rabus attempted a compilation of lives of the "martyrs," i.e., of all witnesses to God's Word, biblical, patristic-medieval and Reformation-era, including those whose lives were demanded of them and those who confessed the gospel at the near peril of their lives. By contrast with the medieval *Golden Legend* hagiography, however, Rabus and his tradition shift the emphasis on sanctity from the cult of the holy person to the hallowing Word of God in the church.

Rabus' two-tome *History of the Martyrs* was not a best-seller. Puritan, Calvinist, and Huguenot authors such as Foxe, Crespin, and Van Haemstede could count on a ready market of readers who were themselves threatened with persecution and thus hungry for accounts of the

bloody witness of their correligionists. The Lutheran Reformation resulted in comparatively few fatalities (among the Lutherans!), and Lutheran readers were far less thirsty for the details of witness unto death. Even before the Reformation, the Germans for whom Rabus wrote had had few local heroes among the canonical saints by sharp contrast with their Christian neighbors in Britain, France, and the southern Hapsburg lands. The German Lutheran Reform had not overturned as much of the medieval commemoration of the saints in art, worship, and the marking of time as had the parallel Reformation emanating from Zurich and Geneva. There was thus not the same void in popular piety among the Germans as that left in the wake of Reformed iconoclasm.

Such need as there was among Lutherans for hagiography was satisfied by the Luther biographies of Spangenberg, Mathesius, Lappaeus, and others (among them, Rabus), and by hymn-writers such as Stiefel, Walther, and Selnecker. It was the Word itself that interested Lutherans and "Saint Martin of Wittenberg's" fidelity to that Word in the face of death. The history of confessing the gospel, the history of dogma, proved to be the true Lutheran medium for recounting God's mighty deeds in the church. It would be the Magdeburg "Centuriators," rather than the Evangelical hagiographer, Rabus, who would capture the Lutheran imagination and reading market.

Kolb's book, though rigorously historical, could not be timelier. The current round of U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic talks on Mary and the saints stands to profit from the precise scholarship the author brings to bear on early Lutheran attitudes toward sanctity and the saints. The story of Ludwig Rabus and the mild reception his martyrology received among Lutherans helps to explain what must puzzle some ecumenists. The veneration of the saints is not so much an issue of controversy as it was and remains a subsidiary, almost a *non*-issue for most Lutherans. This fact of Lutheran life with which ecumenical dialogue partners must reckon has its roots in the Wittenberg Reformation itself, not in Enlightenment secularism as might be supposed. The speaking God alone is holy in Word and Sacrament. God's Word in Christ is the central and final reality in the church's life, a reality which indeed has its faithful witnesses. On the ninth of April, a Christian commemoration is occasioned by a death for the sake of that Word. Others may commemorate a blood-martyr, but, small wonder, the one Lutherans remember is: "Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *teacher*."

Kolb's book, affordably priced and handsomely bound by Mercer, is a good addition to the private or academic library. Renaissance and Reformation specialists will get good mileage from Kolb's copious notes, bibliography, and appendices detailing the contents of Rabus' *History*. A combined name and subject index makes the book useful for ready reference. The theological thrust of Kolb's prose may limit access for social historians, but the book will fit nicely in syllabi for graduate seminars in late-medieval and Reformation historical theology.

Guy C. Carter
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WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE? THE OLD TESTAMENT CALL TO SOCIAL WITNESS. By Bruce C. Birch. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985. 119 pages. Paper. $8.95.

This is an amazing little book. Birch invites fellow Christians to take the often neglected Old Testament seriously as the basis for individual or communal Christian social action. But Birch is careful to stress that according to the Bible, "Alongside the concern for the ethics of 'doing' lies an ethics of 'being.' Christian social concern requires not only that we ask what we should *do* in a broken world but also that we ask who we are to *be*. The shaping of the decision makers is as important as the shaping of the decision" (p. 14).

Birch takes Micah 6:8 as the leading theme and pursues it through the Old Testament from creation, exodus, covenant, royalty, exile, and servanthood to return and restoration and to Jesus and the witness of the church of today.

The book grew out of studies with the Sojourner Community in Washington, D.C., which were subsequently published in a revised form in

the journal *Sojourners* during 1984. It concludes with "Questions for Discussion" and "Suggestions for Further Reading." It is ideal for small study groups or for anyone who has the mistaken notion that the Old Testament is *old* and irrelevant and need not be consulted for Christian social witness.

The list of books suggested for further reading is excellent and might be improved by the addition of the following books: to ch. 1: C. Westermann, *Creation* (Fortress, 1974 [1971]); to ch. 5: A. J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Harper & Row, 1962), and to ch. 6: D. S. Russell, *Between the Testaments* (Fortress, 1965 [1960]).

Walter L. Michel
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

UNDERSTANDING THE ATONEMENT FOR THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH. By John Driver. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986. 288 pages. Paper. $19.95.

This book could challenge and expand your understanding of the work of Christ measurably. Driver writes from "a radical evangelical approach to the doctrine of the atonement," by which he means an approach to the atonement which stresses the concrete and historical event of salvation in the life of God's people, expressed through a number of biblical images and metaphors, and remembering that the terms "image" and "metaphor" do not render the portraits less real or literal in their meaning. By image Driver means a concept derived from the action of Christ on our behalf which is not exhausted by its literal meaning, and he is intent on our understanding the overlap between figurative and non-figurative meanings. Further light is shed on his view of "a radical evangelical approach" when we refer to his critique of theories of the atonement in which the effects of sin are forgiven but not sin itself, which theories render us culpable of a certain irresponsibility in our Christian actions. Lutherans would do well to ponder the words of this Anabaptist scholar. Ten different, but overlapping, images of the atonement are discussed from the New Testament evidence following a lengthy chapter in which Driver critiques the principal historic theories of the atonement (the classic dramatic view popularized among us by Aulen, also called the *Christus Victor* motif; Abelard's subjective view of moral influence; and Anselm's objective view of satisfaction). Each theory comes under criticism for its failure to comprehend the whole biblical imagery of atonement, with Anselm's receiving the most strenuous criticism, particularly for its potential inhibition of mission because the view tends toward universalism. We should note that Driver takes the view, common among Anabaptists, that the Constantinian settlement held disastrous consequences for the life, faith and mission of the church. In particular he claims that the principal atonement theories reduce faith to an individual concern and thus overlook the covenantal structure of faith and God's call for a new humanity. He stresses throughout the book that the reconciling work of Christ creates a reconciling community where all the barriers that divide humankind break down. He concludes with chapters on the relevance of atonement theory for the present and, in particular, for the mission of the church. The book contains minimal endnotes, and all the Greek terms are given in transliteration to render it more accessible.

Jay C. Rochelle
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VATICAN II AND ITS DOCUMENTS: AN AMERICAN REAPPRAISAL. Edited by Timothy E. O'Connell. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier. 260 pages. Paper. $10.95.

A book cannot always be judged by its cover, but this book can be fairly judged by its title. It is just what it claims to be: a systematic reappraisal by American Roman Catholic theologians of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. The volume is the result of a three year series of discussion among scholars and religious leaders from the upper Midwest.

Twelve essays each discuss one or two conciliar documents, presented chronologically in the order of their promulgation. Each presents

a short discussion of the background and history of the document, an outline and analysis of its contents, and a consideration of its impact, with particular regard to the American church. The essays on the individual documents give accurate and fair pictures of the conciliar decrees. Since they average slightly less than 20 pages each, however, they are not detailed. (No essays are included on the decrees on the Eastern Catholic Churches, Christian Education, or the Instruments of Social Communication.) Two additional essays discuss the de-clericalization of American Catholicism (as an appendix to the essay on the decree on the laity) and present a summary by the editor.

While the careful reader will note differences of emphasis among the authors, a broad consensus emerges from the different essays. The evaluative stance is uniformly moderate or moderate-liberal. A common thread in the various appraisals is the transitional character of Vatican II. Many of the documents inevitably had to be compromise documents. This compromise character creates an interpretive problem. As Carolyn Osiek notes in her essay on the Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, a tension is created between "classicist interpretations" that view the documents as norms limiting how far change can proceed and "dynamic interpretations" that view the documents as indicating the directions in which further change should be pursued (p. 85). As the phrasing of the distinction hints, Osiek favors the latter interpretation, as do the other reviewers. Nevertheless, the volume soberly and realistically recognizes that the letter, if not the spirit, of Vatican II is not an unmixed blessing for those working for reform in the Roman Catholic Church.

While any reader will have quibbles with style and format (e.g., the three missing documents), this book allows those without time or inclination to read all the official documents to get a contemporary American sense of the content and significance of the most important texts of modern Roman Catholicism.

Michael Root
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MORALITY AND ETHICS IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY. Translated and edited by Jan L. Womer. Sources in Early Christian Thought, edited by William G. Rusch. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987. 135 pages. Paper. $7.95.

THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE. By Francis X. Murphy, CSSR. Volume 18 in Message of the Fathers of the Church, edited by Thomas Halton. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1986. 224 pages. Paper. $9.95.

Source books on early Christian thought threaten to flood the market. These two works cover roughly the same topic, ethics in the early church, but with sharply contrasting formats. Father Murphy has revised his own previous articles and added considerable expository material to provide an extensive running commentary on two dozen church fathers whose works are liberally quoted in small doses. The result is a wide-ranging survey based upon Murphy's decades of study, even if his introduction repeats itself verbatim (pp. 15 and 19).

Womer's volume is more modest, but more satisfying. After a competent introduction, he presents longer quotations, even major sections, of fewer authors: *The Didache*, Aristides of Athens, Clement, Tertullian, Cyprian, the Council of Elvira (fascinating church laws of 306 C.E. revealing the moral dilemmas of daily life in Christian Spain), Basil, Ambrose, Augustine, and Theodoret. Murphy's book is a secondary survey; Womer's a primary resource.

Paul Rorem
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

AUGUSTINE. By Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986. Cloth. $14.95. Paper. $3.95.

Of the writing of books on St. Augustine there is no end, but here is something different. This volume in Oxford's "Past Masters" series comes from the eloquent and learned present

master of early church theology, Henry Chadwick. A chronological survey of Augustine's complex thought in less than 120 pages is only slightly less miraculous than publishing the book (paperback) for under four dollars!

The book is not biography, which is amply supplied by Peter Brown's *Augustine of Hippo* (also masterful, and in paperback). Nor is it a full-scale treatment of Augustine's theology. It is a sketch, beautifully written, of "the making of his mind" (p. 1). The concern of the series for the history of great ideas and great thinkers in general, especially in the history of philosophy, influenced Chadwick's investigation of Augustine's mind. Thus he seems to slight such specifically Christian material as biblical and sacramental interpretation. Augustine also comes out slightly white-washed, as if Jerome, his "pen-friend" (pp. 36 and 84), had only praised him when he was well known (p. 117) and had not first chided the young upstart. Augustine also ends up sounding rather Anglican in his reservations about honoring Mary and the pope.

Minor quibbles aside, this book is one of a kind. For professionals and amateurs alike, there is no better brief (and cheap!) introduction to the complicated mind of the great Bishop of Hippo.

Paul Rorem

BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS: A PROVOCATIVE CHALLENGE TO THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS. By Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985. 144 pages. Paper. $10.95.

In five chapters Kikawada and Quinn provide many exciting and welcome new insights into the interpretation of Gen 1-11. In Ch. 1 they take Gen 1-11 as a paradigm of biblical diversities; in ch. 2 they discuss some parallels in ancient primeval histories to the biblical flood account; in ch. 3, the most important chapter, they show how Gen 1-11 can be understood as a seamless whole; in ch. 4 they study the coherence of the flood story, and in ch. 5 they take Gen 1-11, as they have explained it, as a paradigm of biblical unity, especially of the Pentateuch.

Their work could be used as an introduction to literary and rhetorical studies. Each chapter is followed by instructive notes and bibliographic references. The final chapter is an epilogue in which the authors summarize their position and illustrate it with a discussion of the Book of Judges. The book concludes with a bibliography.

It is the claim of this book that the many inconsistencies in Gen 1-11—repetitions, discrepancies in chronology, use of different divine names, change of vocabulary, different numbers of animals entering the ark, incompatible genealogies, double creation of humans, and the many other contradictions, according to the modern mind—need not be explained as a composition from various sources, but as a skillful masterpiece of an author who used literary and rhetorical devices which were common in the ancient Near East.

There is nothing wrong with a literary-rhetorical study of Gen 1-11, or of all of Scripture. This book is a welcome addition to this area of study (see esp. the tables on pp. 22ff., 46ff., 50, 58, 60, 64-66, 95ff., 108ff., 118, 123). What is wrong with this book, though, are the many disparaging and often incorrect and misleading comments about the claims and the function of the documentary hypothesis and its proponents. A particularly disturbing comment appears on p. 127: "The documentary analysis of the Bible, whether intentionally or not, has gone hand-in-hand historically with an ethical condescension to, or even a rejection of, the Bible. The documentary analysts conclude that the Bible is literarily primitive; cultural critics conclude that it is morally backward as well."

No evidence is provided to substantiate this comment. M. Noth and G. von Rad are quoted often throughout the book as chief examples of those who have tried to explain the difficulties in the text of the Pentateuch by using the documentary hypothesis. Would Kikawada and Quinn be able to point even to one sentence in the extensive publication record of Noth and von Rad to prove the truth of the statement quoted above? It is not true that the *use* of the documentary hypothesis (as a correct or incorrect window to the understanding of the text) necessarily leads to a condescension or rejection of the Bible. Christians have

nothing to fear from any methodology (including the documentary hypothesis or rhetorical criticism).

References to the physical sciences, which the authors use to support their claims, are also inappropriate. On p. 125 they state: "One thing, if anything, we are certain of: the documentary hypothesis at present is woefully overextended .... Think of the table of chemical elements in the late nineteenth century, just before radioactivity blew it away with the kind of transmutations the Renaissance alchemist had sought." The analogy of this sentence is both misleading and wrong. "The table of elements in the nineteenth century" has become the Periodic Table of today—an essential tool for learning the properties of elements, reproduced in every general chemistry text book and adorning the walls of all teaching laboratories. The discovery of radioactivity did not "blow it away," but did lead to the discovery of a number of elements which are added to it. Alchemists sought transmutations—a procedure by which to change base metals into gold—but the true purpose of this endeavor was not to transmute elements, but to make a profit from the gold. Nuclear reactions do transmute elements, but to make gold in such a way would be so expensive that no one even considers doing it. These are not the kind of transmutations which the alchemists sought. The authors would have improved their book if they would have refrained from such analogies.

This book will challenge the reader to study the *Hebrew* text of Gen 1-11 and to exercise great care and accept neither the results which have been gained through the use of either the documentary hypothesis or the literary-rhetorical criteria, without a critical look at the material. Methodologies come and go, but the text, with all of its difficulties, remains. No matter which methodology or combination of methodologies is used, it behooves scholars to cultivate an attitude of humility before the text and never impose a particular methodology upon the text.

Walter L. Michel

THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH. A STUDY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AND CONTEMPORARY ECUMENICAL DOCUMENTS. By Nestor Beck. St. Louis: Concordia, 1987. 222 Pages. Paper. $15.95.

Although the label is Missouri, the vintage of this volume is imported. The author is a native Brazilian of German Lutheran heritage, academic superintendent of Canoas Colleges and professor of the history of education at Ijuí University, São Leopoldo. Beck did much of the research for this book as a resident stipendiate of the Institute for European History, Mainz, Federal Republic of Germany. A historical and theological affinity between the author and the Director of the Institute's Division for Religious History is evident. In Lutheran Beck, Roman Catholic priest and self-confessed "Luther-loving theologian" Peter Manns has a staunch ally in the battle to prevent a deradicalization of Luther and his reforming movement in the inexorable progress toward Roman Catholic dialogue in its various moments and expressions up until the present. Beck's connection with Mainz and Manns makes the form and content of *The Doctrine of Faith* less than surprising.

That is not to say that the book is predictable, for it is anything but that. Readers who expect the Concordia-educated Beck to expound the Augsburg Confession (AC)through the spectacles of Lutheran neo-scholasticism will not fail to note the biblical and deliberately devotional tone of Beck's prose. Those who are not surprised to find the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue roundly criticized in a Concordia Publishing House imprint will be caught off guard by Beck's careful and emphatic positive assessment of over twenty years of ecumenical work.

In eight closely reasoned and very demanding chapters, Beck gives a detailed historical and theological explication of what he insists upon referring to as "the doctrine of faith" (rather than "doctrine of justification") in the AC. For Beck, the historical context is important (a late-medieval church which was *not* Catholic in the sense of focusing clearly on the saving work of Christ always and everywhere), but the christological context is even more important for understanding

the central teaching of the AC. A high Christology and the doctrine of salvation which comes by the grace of believing in the saving work of Christ as sole mediator and expiation for sin is the indispensable axiom of Reformation theology, without which the corollary of a right relationship with God by faith *in* Christ simply does not follow and cannot be confessionally sustained.

That is the problem, as Beck sees it, with the whole series of ecumenical reports dealing with "justification" produced under LWF auspices or with Lutheran participation from Helsinki (1963) to Malta (1972) to Leuenberg (1973) to Augsburg (1980) to the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Joint Commission's "word" on "Martin Luther, Witness to Jesus Christ" (1983). Beck unfortunately did not incorporate discussion of the U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue, and especially the report, "Justification by Faith" (Milwaukee, 1983) or the "Final Report of the Joint Ecumenical Commission to Examine the Condemnations of the Sixteenth Century" (Maria Leach, 1985). The documents on which he does comment reflect in his view an understated Christology—on *both* sides of the ecumenical divide!—which quite naturally finds difficulty in dealing authentically with the AC in its original controversial context or with its central doctrine in the full radicality of the Reformers for whom everything in theology, church, and life literally depended on faith in Christ. The Malta Report in particular comes under heavy fire from Beck for systematically leaving out the church's confessional witness of twenty centuries while attempting to come to grips with "justification by faith" without clearly stating in whom or in what justifying, reconciling and saving faith is to be placed.

According to Beck, contemporary ecumenists—both Lutheran and Roman—have difficulty hearing or speaking the language of the AC, a personal language which speaks of a personal Savior and Lord. Instead, contemporary ecumenics, like contemporary theology itself, has invested heavily in the Heideggerian/Bultmannian/Tillichian parlance which replaces Christ with "Christ event" and the message of the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake with the story of "God's saving deeds." In the process of approaching the AC from this post-liberal starting point, the radical evangelical doctrine of faith in Christ alone has been bypassed, replaced with a fairly sterile debate about the passive notion of "justification by faith." As Beck points out, the failure to come to grips with the doctrine of faith in the AC has been noticed by both participants and observers. For the author, this in itself is a positive signal that the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue has entered a new phase. Now that the common ground has been thoroughly explored, the time has come in love and courage to explore what the Reformation movement was all about: the doctrine of faith in Christ alone which stood and stands as a sign of contradiction to the churches, Lutheran and Roman.

Beck gives a brilliant treatment of the theology and history of the AC. His critique of the contemporary ecumenical documents, though cutting to the root, is fair and not without its positive valuation of the work that has been accomplished. It is fascinating to see the same rigorous historical approach used in tracing the history of the AC as applied to a document such as the Malta Report. Beck's clear English prose is sometimes given to polemical overkill. Christological understatement is not always the same as outright heresy, though the end result may be the same. The sexist language (persistent use of "man" in the universal sense) could have been corrected with some editorial oversight, apparently not forthcoming from CPH.

This is a major contribution which deserves a careful reading and measured response from ecumenists. The book is well adapted for use in a graduate theological setting, especially because of its focus on a central theme and because of the methodical way in which the texts under consideration are discussed. Preachers may find it a provocative and refreshing challenge to a theological and homiletical lingo which makes it difficult to make the connection between "the Christ event" and the believer in the pulpit and pew. The connection is Christ, and believing in him is our righteousness before God.

Guy C. Carter

THE BOOK OF JOB, A COMMENTARY. The Old Testament Library. By Norman C. Habel. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985. 586 pages. Cloth. $39.95.

Habel has already distinguished himself as a very fine Job scholar. Now comes a full commentary, which is a masterpiece and an instant classic (after many years of hard labor). Without a doubt this is the best major commentary on Job.

The strength and beauty of this work is the unusually great emphasis on the literary features in Job which include envelope constructions, chiasm, adaptation of traditional forms or formulae, wordplay, double entendre, irony, repetition and others. The meaning of Job "is found in the interplay of literary design and theological idea" (p. 9). Habel is the only scholar who has brought the discussion in this area up to date and has used the insights gained from these studies for a truly unique treatment of Job. My only regret is that Habel has not exploited as fully as possible the many new insights into the store of poetic devices used by the ancient Hebrew poet, which have been rediscovered through Northwest Semitic studies. (For a comprehensive list of these devices one must still refer to "Syntax and Poetic Devices" [410-456] in "The Grammar of the Psalter" by M. Dahood and T. Penar in Dahood's third volume of his commentary on the Psalter [1970] in the Anchor Bible series.)

The structure of the book is clear. The Introduction covers 1) Scope and Format, 2) The Narrative Plot, 3) Integrity, Setting, and Date, 4) Literary Features and Their Significance (Form and Focus; Structure and Parallelism; Repetition, Allusion, and Irony; The Legal Metaphor; Imagery and Analogy), 5) Message and Meaning, and includes also an Appendix: "The Narrative Plot: An Outline." The Commentary proceeds chapter by chapter. A Translation is followed by 1) textual Notes, 2) Design (the unique and most valuable feature of this book; it "focuses on those literary features which contribute to an understanding of the nuances of meaning and thought conveyed by the artist's creative combination of theological ideas and literary technique" [p. 23]), 3) Message in Context (here the "textual, literary, and thematic considerations are brought together in the interpretation of a given passage" [p. 25]). A "Selected Bibliography" (restricted to only 6-1/2 pages) competes the book.

The book does not conclude with a summary statement. It also lacks indexes—a usual feature in the Old Testament Library series—which is particularly annoying in this case. Indexes would have made this indispensable book much more usable and would save the serious student and scholar a tremendous amount of time. I urge the author and the publishers of the OTL series to include appropriate indexes in a revised version.

Habel uses basic literary techniques of plot analysis "to explore the contours of that plot" (p. 25). Never before has this been done in such a brilliant fashion. Even for those who know the Book of Job well, a rereading according to Habel's plot outline will become an exciting adventure. He summarizes his results as follows: "A literary analysis of the major narrative elements of the book of Job reveals a coherent plot developed in three major movements, each with formal introduction and closure. Within these three movements a series of significant conflicts is developed and resolved, anticipated and recapitulated. These conflicts are developed within the framework of the eternal tension between the will of heaven and the happenings of earth, the plan of God and the program of mortals.... With great artisitic ingenuity the author has constructed this work by incorporating ancient legendary styles, rich poetic language, and diverse sapiential traditions. All elements of the work are given coherence through a forceful underlying plot which extends beyond the so-called prologue and epilogue" (p. 35).

It is not a surprise then that Habel is able to argue for the integrity of the book as a whole and to accept even those parts of the book which have usually been thought of as disruptive or as later additions (i.e., Prologue, Epilogue, Elihu Speeches, and chapter 28) as part of the original book. He is unable, though, to make sense of the sections at the end of the third cycle of speeches without recourse to some rearrangement. Here it may be better to follow the lead of J. G. Jansen (*Job*, Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985) and interpret the confusion in chapters 25-27 as the breaking down of the dialogue.

Habel's plot analysis and understanding of Job rests upon his treatment of the Hebrew text and the resulting translation. He respects the ancient versions, rarely emends a consonant, but more often suggests a revocalization. It is clear from many examples that he is quite familiar with the extensive philological discussion of the last decades, but it seems that he puposely suppresses a full accounting of the hundreds of new insights into the Hebrew text of Job (see the Textual Notes). He does accept a few suggestions made by M. Dahood and some of his students, but it is not clear what the methodological reasons are for his erratic and inconsistent treatment of these new proposals.

One example of the interdependence of text, philology, translation, and plot analysis may suffice. In Job 31:1 *btwlh* may mean "girl" or "Girl, Virgo," used here as a technical term for the goddess Anat as in the Ugaritic texts (see W. L. Michel, *Hebrew Studies* 23 [1982] 59-66). If Anat is meant by *btwlh*, then Job would begin his oath with a denial of the sin of idolatry (vv. 1-6) and the number of sins would be twelve (!) and not eleven, as Habel maintains.

The study of Habel's *Job* provides endless hours of intellectual and spiritual delight and elation, and brings one closer to the Spirit which tries to burst from word into Word. I hope that those who will not deny themselves this treat will be many.

Walter L. Michel

JOB: A BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING. Interpretation. Ed. by J. Gerald Jansen, et. al. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985. viii and 273 pages. Cloth. $18.95.

If one wants only *one* book on Job, I recommend Jansen's without any reservations. It is a most sensible, sensitive (to text and reader) and useful (for study, meditation, teaching and preaching) commentary, without technical jargon and on only 269 pages. Amazing!

I agree with Jansen in spite of the fact that he decided not to include many new insights into the ancient Hebrew language which have been gained on the basis of the discoveries of the Ugaritic (since 1929) and the Eblaite (since 1974) tablets. My own work on Job uses these insights extensively, and therefore I disagree with any standard translation of Job at numerous places. If one tries to make sense of Job on a traditional reading of the Hebrew text, then Jansen's exposition is one of the best, rivaled only by N. Habel's more extensive work (*The Book of Job*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985).

In the Introduction he gives a synopsis of the book, discusses its setting in the history of religions of the ancient Near East, the place of Job in the history of Israel's religion, and clearly spells out his approach to the text, translation, and interpretation of the book. Jansen gives us an excellent literary reading of Job.

Jansen states: "In our view, the interpretation of Scripture has tended to move prematurely to questions of historical fact and literary prehistory ('matter'), and/or to questions of theological meaning ('content'); it has moved too quickly to *what* Scripture means apart from *how* it means. The present commentary no doubt often suffers from these faults of impatience, but the attempt is made, under the limitations of space and the writer's competence (and patience!), to move in the direction of greater attention to *how* the Bible means" (p. 15). On every page, though, Jansen attests to the fact that he has mastered the demanding and tedious task of *exegesis* and that an *exegetically* uninformed reader would hardly be able to appreciate the *matter* or *content* or the *what* Scripture means and *how* it means unless the reader would have access to a translation, a teacher, or to an excellent guide such as this book.

Jansen states that two *existential* questions are primary in Job: "From the human side arises the question as to the meaning of innocent suffering for one's understanding of one's own life and of human existence in general, and for one's understanding of the divine character and purposes. However, this human question is correlative to—and in Job is presented as arising within the context of—the divine question as to the motivation and character, and therefore the meaning, of human piety and rectitude" (p. 20).

Of special interest is Jansen's treatment of the following passages:

1) Job 25-27. Scholars usually claim that the end of the third cycle of speeches is badly damaged and cannot be interpreted meaningfully. Jansen is able to make sense of this section by assuming that some verses are quotations by Job from the speeches of his opponents and to interpret the confusion here as evidence for the breaking down of the dialogue.

2) Job 28. The chapter is usually interpreted as an independent poem on Wisdom which is inserted at this place. Jansen interprets the chapter as Job's own meditation on the human search for Wisdom and a part of Job's soliloquy (Job 28-31).

3) Job 32-37. The Elihu speeches are usually interpreted as an intrusion into the text and as contributing nothing new. Only a few scholars (among them esp. R. Gordis, 1965, 1978, and Habel, 1985) have countered this negative evaluation of Elihu and his speeches with a positive assessment. Jansen understands the Elihu speeches as integral to the plot and "as a further means of bringing under critique certain longstanding religious attitudes and traditions."

4) Job 42:6. Jansen provides a detailed discussion of the problems of this verse and proposes the following translation on p. 251: "Therefore I recant and change my mind / concerning dust and ashes." He is correct in stating that the Hebrew verb and preposition usually translated "I repent *in*," should be more appropriately translated "I change *concerning*." He does not inform his readers, though, that the verb often means "comfort," and that the phrase might mean "I am comforted *concerning*." The expression "dust and ashes" may be a description of the human being or a reference to "Dust and Dirt," i.e., to the underworld, the place of death. If the latter is the case, Job would then claim that, after hearing and understanding God's speech, he is now comforted concerning the forces of death, including innocent suffering.

The reading and study of this book can provide hours of meditation and recognition of one's self in the lines of a superb ancient Hebrew poem.

Walter L. Michel

JOB: A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY. Text and Interpretation. By A. Van Selms. Translated from the Dutch by J. Vriend. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985. viii and 180 pages. Paper. $8.95

The Text and Interpretation series aims to provide clear, concise, and practical explanations of every book of the Bible, based on familiarity with contemporary scholarship.

In the Introduction, Van Selms discusses the origin and form of the book, its place in the Old Testament; gives a brief survey of the content; surveys some of the views of the Book of Job and its teaching; states his method of elucidation clearly; and provides a short bibliography for further study.

He then summarizes each section of Job and concludes with a Postscript: The Book of Job and the New Testament. The Postscript is brief, but will help readers appreciate how some of the themes in Job are continued in the New Testament.

Van Selms provides the summary of each section of the book in a way that apparently has never before been used in commenting on Job. He lets the speakers, including God, speak for themselves. He paraphrases the statements of each speaker without entering into a discussion of various differing scholarly opinions. The advantage of this approach is that the readers are forcefully drawn into the discussion and are tempted to participate in it. The disadvantage is also clear: readers receive Van Selms's view exclusively, and are not introduced to the vast array of problems in the ancient Hebrew text, the difficulties of translating the text, and the many different solutions which scholars have provided over the years. Readers are strongly advised to consult other books on Job.

Van Selms writes this pertinent statement about Job: "Job is involved in a struggle with his friends but, without his or their knowing it, God is also involved in a dispute with the Adversary. If Job were to lose his battle, God would lose his. In the celestial dispute it is Job's performance that is at stake. At stake, too, is God's honor, that is, his existence as God. God wants to see vindicated

his confidence in his servant Job. To that extent the book is a kind of *theodicy*, a justification of God: God must be vindicated against the Adversary. But at the same time, and in no less a measure, the book is an *anthropodicy*, a justification of man: a justification of this one man Job. To generalize, then, God's vindication consists in the fact that there really are people on earth who do not serve God for the sake of any material or spiritual advantage but for his sake" (p. 16).

Walter L. Michel

THE MESSAGE OF JOB: A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY. Augsburg Old Testament Studies. By Daniel J. Simundson. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publication House, 1986. 160 pages. Paper. $9.95.

Simundson's book joins other timely and practical volumes in the series *Augsburg Old Testament Studies*. According to the editor, the series "is designed for students of the Bible, especially for pastors and teachers of the community of faith. The volumes have been written with a specific view of the pressing needs of those who use the Bible in the various tasks of ministry. While being responsible to the scholarly study of the Old Testament, the authors seek to address those issues presented by the text in such a way as to touch base with contemporary experience."

Simundson involves the reader in the intricate thought world of the book of Job without using technical jargon. He shows a deep concern for the sufferer of the past and today, but also empathy for the counselor. The book is recommended to all persons who are in contact with suffering people, or who suffer themselves in some physical, intellectual, or spiritual way.

The organization of the book is clear and straightforward. He comments on all major sections of Job, concluding each one with a very helpful summary of "Theological and Pastoral Implication/Insights/Points/Considerations/Concerns." It is not clear, though, why he uses five different expressions which apparently intend to say the same thing. Brief *Notes* and a *Selected Bibliography* conclude the volume.

It is clear from the bibliography that Simundson has decided to exclude the vast amount of information for the understanding of ancient Hebrew which scholars have gained particularly during the last few decades. A brief explanation of this neglect would have been welcome. But Simundson is honest about the many difficulties in the Hebrew text, and he uses words such as "seem," "perhaps," etc. quite liberally throughout the book. It comes as a surprise, therefore, that he throws caution to the wind and presents Elihu in a very negative light. A brief summary of a more positive view of Elihu as given, e.g., by R. Gordis (1965, 1978), would have been appropriate.

The most startling aspect of the book is the introduction on pages 13-31. Simundson begins with Two Introductory Questions: A. Does Job Deserve This? B. Why Should Job Repent? Simundson does not treat the topics which are usually discussed in an Introduction (i.e., authorship, form, origin, etc.). He responds immediately to the *one* question which people raise about the innocent sufferer and then moves on to the next logical question: if Job is innocent and therefore should not have to suffer, why then should he have to repent? Repent of what? On pp. 20ff. Simundson helps the reader to appreciate the difficulties in understanding and translating the Hebrew Text of Job 42:6. But then he states: "With most passages in Job, textual problems are not determinative for the meaning. We can get the idea of the message, the feel of it, the overall sense" (p. 22). Oh, how I wish that Simundson were correct! My experience with ancient Hebrew, and the difficulties of understanding and then of translating it, has almost destroyed my confidence of ever being able to make sense of the ancient, exotic, oriental literature which is our Old Testament. Instead of the usual translation of Job 42:6, "therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (RSV), it is equally likely that the verse should be translated (without any changes of the text): "I accept (You, i.e., God) and I am comforted concerning Dust and Dirt (i.e., suffering and death)."

I hope that this book will find a large readership.

Walter L. Michel

Briefly Noted

JUDAIC PERSPECTIVES ON ANCIENT ISRAEL. Edited by Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Fortress, $34.95). "Jews in biblical studies, such as those represented here, feel free to write articles that, lacking the author's identification, no one will have known came from a Jew." This statement from the Preface indicates some of the ecumenical importance of the fourteen essays to follow. Yet these fourteen Jewish scholars share three major and distinctive characteristics: they take up texts neglected by others (essays on Leviticus and Numbers); they draw on a different corpus of exetical traditions (history of Jewish exegesis; deep mastery of biblical and Israeli Hebrew); Judaic perspectives on ancient Israel lead to a particularly Judaic inquiry into a biblical text or problem (the final essay is entitled, "Why Jews are not interested in Biblical Theology," and notes, among other things, the way in which Liberation theology has ignorant and stereotypical depictions of the Judaism of Jesus' time and the way in which von Rad interpreted Gen 15:6 from the point of view of Reformation Christianity rather than within its original context). RWK

GENESIS. By Claus Westermann (Eerdmans, $16.95). This "practical commentary" is roughly one-fifth as long as the same author's three-volume commentary on Genesis published by Augsburg. Missing in this shorter version are the philological reasoning behind the translation, the discussion of the historical and religious background of the text, and the vast bibliographies. The result is a kind of Reader's Digest version of the three-volume, expensive version. W. isolates J and P materials in the primeval and ancestral (patriarchal) histories, with a series of supplements in the ancestral history that he wishes to disassociate from E. The Joseph story is held to be a unified account by an anonymous author of the early monarchy. RWK

FROM THE MACCABEES TO THE MISHNAH. By Shaye J. D. Cohen (Westminster, $20.95). "The goal of this book is to interpret ancient Judaism: to identify its major ideas, to describe its salient patterns, and to assess its relationship to Israelite religion and society" (p. 13). C. holds that the Pharisees were pietists who separated themselves from their co-religionists, but who saw themselves, and were seen by others, as virtuosi and elites. Though the Pharisees were important already before 70 C.E., they did not control the institutions of the state, and their ability to enforce their opinions was limited. Hence the New Testament, Josephus, and the rabbinic literature exaggerate their power. The rabbis of the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods saw themselves not as the creators of something new, but as heirs of the eternal promise that God had sworn to Israel and its ancestors. Rabbinic Judaism, however, had to thrive without a temple, a priesthood, or a sacrificial cult. Jewish society of the second temple and rabbinic periods consisted mostly of the poor and very poor. The aristocracy and the learned elite, who wrote most of the literature, represented a small percentage of the population. The war of 66-70 C.E. was a civil war between regular priests and the high priesthood, between the poor and the rich, and between the country and the city. This volume is a thorough, interesting, and non-technical treatment of the history and institutions of early Judaism. RWK

THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY ISRAEL IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. By Robert B. Coote & Keith W. Whitelam (Almond, $16.50). The authors hold that archaeological data and social scientific method should take precedence over biblical texts in reconstructing the history of early Israel. From a survey of settlement patterns in Palestine and their relationship to political, economic, and social conditions, they conclude that Israel emerged in the highlands and margins of Palestine in response to the collapse of Mediterranean trade.

The monarchy in turn was the result of shifts within Israel brought about by pressures on circumscribed resources. When Solomon was unable to relieve internal demographic pressures through military expansion or the opening up of new economic resources, the state disintegrated into northern and southern monarchies that were subject to the whims of interregional powers. The authors hold that the real story of the emergence of Israel—an adaptation of various groups to the economic decline suffered at the end of the Late Bronze age—did not serve David's need to emphasize the unity of Israel and to play down social conflict, and so this "real" story was suppressed by J and other biblical writers. The biblical pictures of Abraham and Joshua, in this telling, are legitimizing propaganda for David and Josiah; they tell us little about the actual emergence of Israel. The authors' polemic against the presuppositions of German, American, and Israeli biblical scholarship seems touchingly unaware of their own bias and animus. If the Deuteronomistic History, for example, was an original composition in the exile, as I hold—and not a propagandistic work for Josiah as they believe—a good part of their polemic against the Bible and its theology is simply illegitimate. RWK

THE EARLY BIBLICAL COMMUNITY IN TRANSJORDAN. By Robert G. Boling (Sheffield Academic Press, $25.00). The 80 pages of this book are a highly technical review of archaeological conditions in Transjordan in the second millennium and a reconstruction, within the Mendenhall-Gottwald orbit, of Israelite history, based on old poems preserved in the Bible. A number of surface surveys have modified the conclusions of Nelson Glueck about Transjordan, showing that the population stayed about the same in the Middle Bronze and Late Bronze periods, though it shifted to different locations as the result of different religious and political alignment. B. argues that Genesis 49 reflects a 14th-century league of 12 tribes, which he calls Earliest Israel. This Israel was still dedicated to El rather than Yahweh. Other poems show the emergence of "Early Israel," an egalitarian people shaped by the Yahwistic "mutation" (revelation?) in the history of religions and polities that occurred first in the Sinai wastelands. Numbers 21ff., for all their obscurity, seem to presuppose the population alignments in Transjordan uncovered by archaeological findings. RWK

1,2 CHRONICLES. The Communicator's Commentary. By Leslie C. Allen (Word, $24.95). This homiletical commentary on the books of Chronicles suggests that the 4th century biblical author wanted to show that the old Mosaic covenant had been subsumed into the new, royal covenant, and that the temple was a place of answered prayers, especially prayers of confession and repentance. Allen is able to draw from Chronicles implications for ecumenism, worship, obedience, and pastoral assurance of divine grace. "Seeking" God is dramatically contrasted with its polar opposites, "forsaking" God and "being unfaithful." The commentary is based on the New King James Bible. RWK

A PROMISE OF HOPE—A CALL TO OBEDIENCE. A Commentary on Joel by Graham S. Ogden and A Commentary on Malachi by Richard R. Deutsch (Eerdmans, $7.95). **WRATH AND MERCY.** A Commentary on Habakkuk and Zephaniah by Mária Eszenyei Szeles (Eerdmans, $7.95). These two paperbacks are part of the International Theological Commentary series, which aims to emphasize the theological implications of the Bible. The commentators are international in background: Ogden serves in Taiwan; Deutsch, of Austrian Jewish origin, works for the Basel Mission in Switzerland; Szeles is professor of Old Testament in Romania. RWK

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

Preaching Helps

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day, Series B

Homeward Bound

Sam Zumwalt is pastor of Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Texas, and the author of the "Pastoral Reflections" in this issue of "Preaching Helps." As he pondered the task, he found himself in search of a theme. He reflected on the fact that in the final third of the Pentecost season pastors are busy with rally day, fall pledge drive, local Reformation festivals, new member classes, and even the first rehearsal for the children's Christmas program. How can we all keep our eyes on the figure of Jesus, described in Mark's Gospel as driving and driven forward to the cross? What does it mean for us to walk behind him as he blazes the trail? Somehow Sam began to think of us, as we move toward Christ the King Sunday, as being "homeward bound." The challenge is to remember where we really are (on the way home) as we experience the push and pull of existence in our towns and cities and parishes. The great and astonishing goal orients us in our journeying.

Was it Robert Frost who said, "Home is the place where, when you get there, they have to take you in"? Sam is a student of literature, and he will know. Anyhow, Christ is King, standing at the end of the road with outstretched arms, absolutely victorious but with hands still bearing the marks of his love. We are still on the way, in the midst of struggle, confusion and pain, but we are homeward bound. The lessons are stars in the sky, pointing the way, showing us not only where we travel but how to travel.

Blessings to all of you, as you struggle to build a spirited community and to move it along towards home.

Yours,

Robert H. Smith
Preaching Helps Editor

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost September 18, 1988

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

A FIRST READING

Isaiah 50 opens with the affirmation that Israel, while she suffers separation from God in exile because of sin, has surely not been divorced forever. Then the third of the Suffering Servant Songs declares that the Lord brings help through suffering, but such a lesson can itself be learned only by means of divine help. But God does in all our exiles raise up some whose tongues are taught and whose ears are opened by the finger of the divine hand.

James is such a one. He boldly fingers our captivity to a theology of glory, our dedication to a church of glory, and the difficulty we have in letting the cross inform our heads and hearts and relationships. With terrible sarcasm he castigates the ease with which we substitute lipservice for the genuine article.

Mark continues the story of Jesus' struggle with his disciples. Like the blind man of Bethsaida (8:22-26), Peter sees at least the vague outlines of the truth about Jesus when he calls him "Christ" (v. 29). But Jesus needs to lay his hands on Peter (and all of us) yet again (cf. v. 24), indeed as often as we and Peter continue to "rebuke" Jesus (v. 32) for talking to us about his cross and ours.

The deepest mystery of the Christian faith is announced in these verses: the way of the cross is the way of life. As we move on our path between birth and death, we can use up time and give up our energy in one of two ways. We can try to preserve our lives and fight against dying by increasing our wealth and power, and we can gloss over our aging and our dying by distracting ourselves with luxuries. Or we can in the midst of dying come alive to God and neighbor more and more by sharing our lives. Paul paraphrases the language of cross-bearing when he speaks of the exhilaration of carrying in his body the death of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10). That is to say, he uses up his life with Jesus, freely spending his life, moving along life's way with joy, heading not towards annihilation but towards God. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "VINDICATION"

The Gospel lesson offers us a fascinating jumping off place for this last third of the Pentecost season. Mark says a mouthful with the phrase, "Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi..." As Eduard Schweizer puts it, "This is the place where Jesus must decide whether he will abandon Israel or do the exact opposite—set out on the perilous journey to Jerusalem" (*The Good News According to Mark*).

Our own journey homeward is fraught with perils, and we likewise are tempted to view our lives as our own to do with them what we will. Yet every day our Lord asks insistently, "But who do *you* say that I am?" Will it be the cross today, or will it be glory?

Peter, like St. Thomas the Lutheran, can see that following a Messiah who gets dead is not nearly so inviting as one who can deliver cushy patronage to his cronies. "Jesus, don't talk about suffering; it won't play in Dallas, much less Peoria."

Jesus responds passionately: "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God but of men."

From there he lays out the paradox of our journey home. Surrendering our freedom gives us true life. Clinging desperately to life in the world is deadly to us. One way means being occasionally surprised by joy in the midst of suffering. The other means spinning off like a child's top that captivates and entertains until we fall over.

The cross hurts. It can bring derision upon us. Folks may actually do violence to the people of God, though that seems less likely to some of us where we live. But when we dare to name the

name above all other names, the rulers of this world may actually feel threatened and strike back.

How can this be? What was the response the last time you actually spoke a courageous "NO" to a powerbroker? Who withheld funding or personal support, because you dared to tell the truth? The risk managers of this world may well deem us dispensable.

On the other hand, moving from glory to glory sells so well. The Hour of Power comes across crystal clear in comparison to cross-bearing, losing, suffering stuff. ("Let's see, if we can only throw in a few more upbeat hymns, add an altar call, talk about self-esteem, the folks will come flocking in. That's how to be the *Evangelical* Lutheran Church!")

Today we commemorate Lutheran peacemaker, Dag Hammerskjöld. During his ten years with the United Nations, "...he had to deal with the end of the Korean War, problems in the Middle East, and the crisis over the Suez Canal" (Philip Pfatteicher, *Festivals and Commemorations*). While negotiating peace in the Belgian Congo, Hammerskjöld was killed in a plane crash.

The posthumous publication of his diary *Markings* revealed a person of deep faith who quietly but boldly lived the cruciform life in the real world. Many of his admirers were embarrassed to read this man's prayer: "Not I, but God in me."

The uniting theme in the lessons for today is vindication. In God's grand scheme of things, faithful crossbearers like the Suffering Servant, the Suffering Son, the Sensitive Secretary-General, and struggling sinners like you and me, get raised up. We can trust this because the Savior did not opt for stardom; he lost his life for us. He helps us lose our lives daily, too.

It ain't easy, but it's the way of life. Keep moving towards home! SZ

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 25, 1988

Jeremiah 11:18-20
James 3:16-4:6
Mark 9:30-37

A FIRST READING

Jeremiah knew from personal experience the cost of fidelity to God. Powerful enemies sought his life, and he was like a "gentle lamb led to the slaughter" (v. 18; cf. Isa 53:7). The voice of prophecy in Anathoth (Jeremiah's hometown)—or New York or Sheboygan or Los Angeles—inevitably generates hostility.

James speaks of peace, peace, peace. God's children, begotten by wisdom from above, are agents of peace and wholeness (3:16-18). And yet even the people of God are caught up in fighting and killing, as they try to get comfortable in the world and seek the things of the world. What a terrible, blunt word: "Friendship with the world is enmity with God" (4:4). And so friendship with God implies at least a loosening of our desperate grip on things.

In Mark 9:30-37 once again (as in 8:31-35) a prediction of Jesus' passion meets with lack of understanding, followed then by a summons to the disciples to give up the ways of the world and to adopt a cruciform style. Jesus turns the world upside down (cf. Acts 17:6). He praises the servant (*diakonos*) and the child (*paidion*), neither of whom had any standing or power in the ancient world. And he calls disciples to be servants and to take their stand with the children and the vulnerable. To welcome the child and the defenseless is to offer hospitality to the Christ (cf. Matt 25:31-46). RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "COST"

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." James'

words speak to that familiar question, "Pastor, why doesn't God answer my prayers?" God does. We just don't like the answers.

It's part of the cost of being a child of God. We have a God who knows our needs before we ask, who loves us in spite of our often childish prayers, and who knows intimately "the pattern in the seed" (*LBW* #314).

Jeremiah is for the Old Testament what Paul is for the New, a self-disclosing struggler who isn't afraid to show passion or which demons are making his life hell. He can pray for God's vengeance upon those of his family who plotted against him at Anathoth. We, too, in anger have prayed for "worthless" souls to be gathered unto the mothers and fathers.

How much harder to pray aright: "Gracious God, remove from me my pride and arrogance in this situation. If I stand firm, let me do so for your sake and not my own ego."

The fact that God troubles us with detractors and other great pains-in-the-posterior may well be the unexpected answer to regular prayers for faithfulness. Who among us has not been challenged to move off center in a certain area of life because of an abrasive personality who pursued us like a bird of prey?

Perhaps God wants no one else to know that we are being taught about the cost of discipleship. Like the Twelve hearing the second passion prediction, we do not want to understand out of fear. An old Fleetwood Mac song explains such fear: "Don't ask me what I think of you, I might not give the answer that you want me to."

God knows we always expect things to work out "right." Jeremiah felt seduced that God would call him into such a lousy job. We sit around at pastoral conferences and lectionary studies jockeying for position, demonically competitive with one another. But we still have to go back to the places where they take us in and must face the dirty feet in need of washing and bandaging.

The cost is often more than we want to bear. Or can. That's precisely why Jesus took a child and put her in the midst of them. We are needy. Dare we forget that "The Pastor" is not a well-spring of spiritual wealth? Carl Braaten told our synod pastors that he despairs to see no new books on a pastor's shelf. So much more distressing when our prayer life is also out of whack or when no local mentors speak to the emptiness or arrogance in *our* souls!

Today we commemorate the most beloved saint of all Russia, Sergius of Radonezh, founder of Holy Trinity Monastery in Moscow. Like Francis of Assisi, he loved animals and sought simplicity in lifestyle. His devotion to prayer and to peace issues led to wide respect. But, most pointedly of all, Sergius refused the office of Patriarch of Moscow. Servanthood and the cost of discipleship included, for him, renouncing the pinnacle of his "career" (Pfatteicher).

Bearing one's cross on the homeward journey is not be be romanticized like some transcontinental Amtrak trek. As Luther observed, where you find the Church, you find suffering. So James admonishes, "where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice." The fall of several TV preachers provides object lessons for this text. A voice tells us: "Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest."

Greatness in God's plan looks like a cross and a humbled servant. Once we get clear that we really *are* beggars to a person, the cost is bearable because, of course, the Lord Jesus never stops bearing us in his arms. Thus the prayer that hits home: "I pray thee, ne'er from me depart" (*LBW* #325). SZ

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 2, 1988

Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29
James 4:7-5:6
Mark 9:38-50

A FIRST READING

Numbers describes the pitiful hunger of the people for the meat and fish of Egypt, for the

cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic of the land of bondage. They developed a "strong craving" for their old diet (v. 4) and they were sick and tired of having "nothing at all but this manna to look at" (v. 6). They preferred slavery with plenty over freedom with a boring diet. And Moses, God bless him, was sympathetic and prayed God to give the people meat, reminding God that the grumbling multitudes are, after all, not Moses' people but God's people: "Did I conceive them? Did I bring them forth, that thou shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child?'" (v. 12). No, says Moses, they are God's offspring and God must nurse them! And God accepts Moses' challenge.

James speaks of the rich (5:1-5) who have bricked themselves into prisons of prosperity, insulating themselves from the desperate lives of their own laborers and harvesters, forgetting that all our lives are a mist (4:14) and that we will soon be summoned to render an accounting before the Lord of Hosts.

Mark 9:38-50 is a continuation of the conversation between Jesus and his disciples set in motion by the second passion prediction (9:31). This week's lection opens with the incident of the "strange exorcist" (cf. Numbers 11:27-29). The point is twofold: 1) Pious insiders are often jealous of their privileges, while Moses and Jesus are full of awe and gratitude at the mystery of God's omnipresent workings in the world even through unlikely channels. 2) The highest value is not some form of administrative control (Numbers 11; Mark 9). What is essential is that demons are cast out, evil is overcome, and the possessed are set free. Test the prophets, as Paul said (1 Thess 5:19-20), but do not quench the Spirit!

Jesus (like James 5:1-6) suddenly breaks into vivid speech about the last judgment. All the threatening language of vv. 43-48 backs up Jesus' appeal to the disciples in v. 42. Followers of Jesus must be careful how they deal with "these little ones," the weak, the vulnerable. The final sayings in the paragraph are difficult but seem to depend on the fact that sacrifices were salted before being offered, and salt was shaken over bread at the ceremonial beginning of meals. If we have salt among ourselves, if our lives are sacrificial offerings to God and, if we welcome one another as table companions and members of one family, then we will dwell in peace, rich and poor alike, strong and weak alike, "big" and "little" alike. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "CHARISMS"

The age of specialization came easily to Nordic Lutherans with their penchant for categorization. How I discovered that in my early days of seminary! God forbid you should say something serious lest others immediately seize upon it and brand you for all time and eternity, satisfied that you had been categorized and summarily accepted or dismissed. Painful days.

We have tended to do that in the Church catholic, assigning various roles to the many churches. Certainly we each have our unique accents, but we do not own sole franchise rights to theological insights, practices, styles of serving, or terminology.

So it is in the case of charisms and charismatics. Those who self-consciously call themselves charismatics have scriptural support for their practices and do indeed have one definition for the word charismatic.

But those who do not necessarily desire glossalalia or a sometimes less structured worship experience are not without charisms or without claim to the name charismatic. We are all, by baptism, charismatics. The gifts are surely given: "The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in God's presence."

Naturally, the newly baptized who are not nurtured in their faith are akin to newborns abandoned in trash cans and dumpsters. Such fragile new life is not beyond hope, but she has two strikes against her.

God gives charisms; the greatest, Paul reminds us, are faith, hope, and charity. They come by baptism, but others by genetic makeup, and still others by the loving care of parents and

other nurturers. So if the wind blows where it wills, why not the Spirit of God?

We can argue all day among ourselves about whether ordination brings with it special charisms and indelible marks. I must say that the best argument for such a view tends to be that God gets wondrous things done in spite of some of the prissy ordained. Nevertheless, all God's people are "ordained" to ministry in baptism. Primarily, callings are out in the world. But as Numbers and Mark inform us: those who have been set aside to special callings, such as Moses and the Twelve, nevertheless need all the help they can get.

This does not relegate the baptized to unimportant ministries. Rather, clergy should be restricted to the precise ministry of Word and Sacrament for which they have been set apart. Ministries of caring, evangelism, serving, administering, counseling, and teaching are all ministries of the whole people of God. Some persons have more charisms than others (often more than the ordained). And all need training if they do not bring it with them to the parish.

Joshua was indignant that others should prophesy, but Moses' response anticipates Pentecost. God forbid, then, that those who lead should mutilate the body of Christ by killing the Spirit wherever it pops up.

Our youngest, Joshua Paul, grabbed my hand after worship one day last spring. He led me to the sacristy where the Christmas crèche was stored. "Daddy," he said, "do you want to see the baby Jesus?" He was two and a half at the time. I felt the heartfelt Word from his tiny lips. My eyes moistened.

On the journey homeward, we are less leave-takers and more embracers in our posture towards the world. Our charisms are given not for our own spiritual titillation vis-a-vis the "New Age" facelift of the same old gnosticism. Rather, they are given for the sake of the sibling in Christ and for the other one for who Christ died.

Teach loved ones to be proud of the label charismatic. For indeed we are "graced" every day. God puts his Spirit upon us that in our sufferings and struggles we can resist evil in order to be blessings to those we touch. SZ

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost October 9, 1988

Genesis 2:18-24
Hebrews 2:9-11 (12-18)
Mark 10:2-16

A FIRST READING

In Genesis 2, the Lord God declares that "it is not good that the man should be alone" (v. 18). Human life is life in relationship with God, the ground of our being, and with other humans as companions and partners. In concrete language Genesis describes how Eve is made, not from some inferior material but from the same stuff as Adam. And she is taken not from a bone in Adam's hand or foot but from his side, near his heart. Seeing her, Adam sang his song: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." They are indeed "one flesh" (v. 24), and that is more than a statement of physical fact.

Hebrews 2 is not so closely related to Genesis as is the Gospel for this Sunday. Hebrews celebrates not the links connecting men with women but the connectedness of Creator with creatures. The Lord God, "for whom and by whom all things exist," in and through Jesus participated in flesh and blood, experiencing all the vulnerability of humanity, including suffering and death. The path traveled by Jesus is a great parabola, starting on high, plunging down into earth's depths, and mounting up again to heaven's high ramparts. He traveled that way as "pioneer of salvation" (v. 10). The author of Hebrews uses three scriptures to comment on three stages of Jesus' way: 1) Ministry: He was not ashamed to walk the earth and call frail human beings his brothers and sisters (vv. 11-12). 2) Crucifixion: He met fearful resistance but continued to the end to put his trust in the Lord (v. 13). 3) Glory: Mounting up by resurrection and ascension, he presents himself to God together with the human sisters and brothers he has gained with the cry, "Here I am, and the children

God has given me!"(v. 13). The bottom line is that "we have a merciful and faithful high priest" (v. 17).

Mark 10:2-16 seems to be filled with old rules and regulations, or antiquated advice about marriage and divorce. But from the beginning, Mark's Gospel has been all about the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, and that means the advent of a whole new world order. And the same is true here. Jesus is speaking of relationships and behaviors appropriate to the new world. Satan is being dethroned. New powers and energies are being released by the work of Jesus, and they are soaking down like water onto the dry roots of every human relationship. By way of illustration, Jesus speaks here of the intimate relationship of husband and wife and of the freighted relationship of adult and child. Jesus rejects the old rules by which men controlled women as if women were their property (v. 4), and he criticizes his adult disciples for acting towards children according to the old habit of treating children like insignificant baggage (v. 13). He calls for a reversal in habit and thought to match the newness of God's own work.

God is working in the world through a Savior who is heading towards the cross as his service of liberation for a humanity imprisoned in its smug self-importance. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "MARRIAGE"

Brevard Childs says the Decalogue functioned both as outer boundary for the people of God and as positive content for the inner circle, thus indicating the path leading to death and to life. That's a helpful way of seeing the OT lesson and the Gospel for today. Genesis 2 gives us a positive expression of God's will for humankind, while the expressly harsh word of Jesus in Mark 10 points to the obedience God demands.

Obviously this is a sensitive but important issue to be addressed in our churches. The dissolution of marriages remains at a crisis stage among us. And we simply may not stay in an "ain't-it-awful" stance.

Yet one caveat: a Lutheran lay leader who is also a divorced mother of teen-agers told of the pastor who preached a Law/Gospel sermon on this text. Before the pastor ever got to the Good News, several persons had walked out in tears of hurt and betrayal. Apparently, even gentle post-homiletic care was tough work and yielded weak results.

How then to balance the positive word of life with the clearly negative evaluation against divorce?

My wife, a one-time divorced Roman Catholic, has helped me immensely to feel both the excruciating pain she lived with in her ill-begotten first marriage and her frustration with churchly pronouncements that, however well-argued theologically, tend to exclude rather than include. She has taught me that pain that never gives way to a healthier marriage finally becomes masochistic and meaningless. Yet we both share disdain for the almost casual attitude towards the lifelong pledge of faithfulness evident in the high national divorce rate!

Maslow's oft-mentioned Hierarchy of Human Needs declares survival the basic concern to be met in life. Curiously, the divorce rate in Dallas (once recurring national divorce capital) has dipped since the local gods of success and big money have died. This suggests that survival needs in a bad economy are promoting longer-lived marriages. One wonders if the character of such reaches any closer to Genesis 2. The greater incidence of family violence doesn't seem to reinforce such wishful thinking.

What's needed in the Church is not some simplistic "Just Say No To Divorce" program. Rather, Genesis 2 urges us to see our marriages as the primary relationship in life after our baptismal covenant, so that we have as our model the faithfulness of God towards his people. To aid us, it might not be a bad idea to continue to encourage more "mentor couples" in the churches.

One dear friend with 47 years of marriage teaches me: "He still does some of the same irritating things he did when we were newly-weds. But then he can turn right around and make me feel more loved and valued than I've ever felt. What would I do without him?"

The challenge is as always to afflict the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted. Divorce is a sin, yes, but so is a destructive marriage. Yet there is no shortcut around pain in marriage. Our suffering Lord is with us, challenging and renewing, forgiving and accepting.

Pastorally, the heavy emphasis then needs to be on preventive maintenance and tender loving care. There is no condemnation after all for Christ's family.

Divorce, however undesirable and contrary to God's design, is not an unforgivable sin. Sometimes, it just feels that way! SZ

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost October 16, 1988

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Hebrews 3:1-6
Mark 10:17-27

A FIRST READING

"Seek the Lord and live," cries the prophet (Amos 5:6). And the immediately preceding verse makes it clear that he does not mean that his hearers should trudge off to the sanctuaries (Bethel, Gilgal, Beersheba) and perform some ritual there. For Amos, to "seek the Lord" (v. 6) means to "seek good and not evil" (v. 14). What a terrible indictment it is that the people of God should have to be reminded to "hate evil and love good" and to "establish justice" in the courts of the elders meeting at the gate of the city (v. 15).

Hebrews 3 honors Moses as a faithful servant in God's house (=among God's people). But as great as Moses is, Jesus is greater still, for he is both the "builder" (=founder) of God's house, and he is "over" God's house as "Christ" and "son" (cf. 10:21). But the author does not stop with a comparison of the relative merits of Moses and of Jesus. He wants the readers to know that they are "God's house." That word "house" pictures God's people as a family, enjoying full and free access to God. Or the word "house" may be understood as a temple, picturing God's people as standing in the presence of God like priests, with hands uplifted in the rapture of worship. Jesus has already passed beyond death into the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 8:1-2). Those who cling to Jesus as "high priest of our confession" (3:1) can face with confidence the issues of each day, knowing that they are heirs with him of indestructible life.

A certain "man" (Mark 10:17) came racing up to Jesus one day, eager to inherit eternal life. Perhaps he expected Jesus to recommend a series of meditations or retreats, fasts or sacrifices. Anything reasonable. Anything in his power. Jesus surprised him by recommending something mind-boggling, something that would cost him his power, something that would make him vulnerable and open to hurt: "Sell all that you have, and give it to the poor" (v. 21). Only at the end of their conversation do we learn that the man "had great possessions" (v. 22).

Did that man possess great wealth, or did great wealth possess that man? Power and possessions make it hard to enter the kingdom of God (v. 24). "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God!" (v. 25). Since we all have at least some power and some possessions, the disciples are shocked: "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replies, "With humans it is impossible, but not for God." What kind of an answer is that? God has come among us not simply clothed in flesh but in lowly flesh, the flesh of one who serves, who stoops low to embrace the child, touch the leper, lift the wounded, feed the hungry, die with the accused. The rich and powerful wall themselves off from contact with that kind of lowliness and weakness. They may pity it or throw alms at it, but if they do not really touch it or in some genuine way share it, they will be like camels unable to pass through the eye of the needle. But the mystery of God's working is odd enough and unpredictable enough to reach some people of every social and economic class, for "all things are possible with God" (v. 27). RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "FAITHFULNESS"

Who are God's people, and how are they to be faithful to that designation? This is the dominant theme of the lessons. As we journey towards home, Robert Frost's famous lines beckon us to leave the beauty of meditation and worship to be faithful to our callings in daily life. Frost urges: "The woods are lovely, dark, and deep. But I have promises to keep. And miles to go before I sleep. And miles to go before I sleep."

The call to be God's people is inextricably linked with ethical conduct in the world. Amos, shepherd become prophet, rails away at the subversion of the legal system in the northern kingdom by those exploiting the poor. Their breaking the divine command against false witness is a rejection of God's worldly reign. Such liars will be unable to plead innocence before God. They have made a choice against God. Punishment is certain. Only the handful who turn around and love God with a passion for justice will be able to say God is with us and for us.

Amos' chilling words remind us that our successes in filling the nave or paying full benevolence are not the mark of faithfulness. Neither is espousing the "correct" causes, getting all the "right" people into office or power, or even meeting all the ELCA quotas! In short, there is no substitute for personal ethical conduct in day to-day-relations with others.

This does not have to lead to quietism and the private faith of a "me and Jesus" Christianity. Rather, it means that responsible living begins at home and moves outward. The private adulterer who is a marvelous advocate for the poor cheapens his witness by such unethical behavior and may well lose his place among God's people by being "above" the radical call of God. Whoever is faithful in "a little" may well be given grace to be faithful in "a lot."

The pericope from Hebrews resonates with the Gospel lesson in declaring that it is God who builds his house—his people. The call to discipleship calls us into the cross-bearing life of that Jesus we confess with our lips. The *lex orandi* compels us to walk the *via crucis*.

We see in Jesus the emptying, the constant emptying of himself, so that he can point beyond himself. How difficult it is to walk that walk in daily life, where we struggle to be faithful to all our callings as parents, spouses, workers, friends, and citizens!

Again, discipleship is what God does with us. My God, we are slow learners! And forgetful ones at that!

Yet, praise God, being God's own is a communal thing. Thank God for sisters and brothers in the faith who demonstrate to us that God can do the impossible with us. We have those mentors who admonish and encourage. We have those friends who are soulmates seeming to share identical struggles simultaneously.

A public faith, indeed public faithfulness, begins with the foundational stuff of Word and sacraments and always moves outward. Even though we have miles to go and promises to keep, our cruciform community helps to keep us going. It's all God's doing! SZ

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost October 23, 1988

Isaiah 53:10-12
Hebrews 4:9-16
Mark 10:35-45

A FIRST READING

Isaiah 53:10-12 concludes the fourth of the Suffering Servant Songs. These verses focus on the sublime and mysterious power of innocent suffering. His bruising, his being cut off from the land of the living, became a kind of sin-offering, a ransom (LXX: lytron, cf. Mark 10:45) paid for the release of others. Because of this one's suffering, patiently borne, "by his knowledge" or full experience of the human condition (cf.

Hebrews 5:8), this righteous one will share his righteousness with many others, covering their iniquities and granting them the right to stand in the presence of God. In colorful images borrowed from the language of warfare, the prophet declares that God will give the servant a privileged place among the victors, enjoying the spoils. God will exalt the servant, "because he poured out his soul to death" (cf. Mark 14:24), "and was numbered with the transgressors" (cf. Luke 22:37).

From its opening verses (1:1-4) Hebrews has been extolling the absolutely unique character of the Word spoken in and through Jesus, the Son. That Word is incomparably greater than all previous words spoken by prophets or angels or even by Moses. God's final Word, spoken in the life and suffering of Jesus, brings the promise of "Sabbath rest," of rest like God's own rest on the seventh day.

The promise is great, but the verses of the lesson focus on the dread consequences of turning a deaf ear to God's Word spoken in the Son. Five adjectives qualify "the Word of God" in v. 12: living, active, sharper, piercing, discerning. Sharper than any sacrificial knife or warrior's blade, it lays open not only the flesh but reveals the heart. The word of promise, when scorned, becomes an instrument of dread judgment. These verses call readers to wake up.

Mark 10:35-45 contains the third of the three Passion Predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) punctuating the central section of the Gospel, which runs from 8:27-10:52. After the first prediction, Peter displayed misunderstanding and resistance to the idea of Jesus' suffering (8:32). Now it is the turn of James and John. The brothers imagine that Jesus will establish a kingdom with all the usual apparatus of kingdoms: court and throne, advisers and officers, army and treasury. And they ask that they might sit as high officials, one at his right and the other at his left, when his reign commences. They really do not know what they are asking. Two will indeed sit flanking him, one to the right and the other to the left, when he is crucified (15:27). But James and John think of power without suffering, kingship without a cross, "the good life" without serving and loving. As Peter was criticized for thinking in human fashion (8:33), so James and John are criticized for thinking like Gentiles (10:42). Once more Jesus turns upside down all ordinary thinking: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (v. 44). And he points to himself as pattern: "Even the Son of man came not to be served but to serve," and he spells out his service as the offering of his life "as a ransom for many" (v. 45). RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "SERVICE"

What is the mark of the call to ministry? Whether lay or ordained, the answer is the same—service!

R. N. Whybray cautions against reading too much vicarious atonement into the text from Isaiah. Rather, he points to an important word for those in any form of Christian ministry: those called by God share the suffering of the people they serve (*Isaiah 40-66*).

I choose to see this as a tender image of the intercessor who suffers with and prays for the people. A beautiful octogenarian in our parish says: "I can't do anything else for the church, pastor, but I pray for you all everyday!" How unlike the attitude of Zebedee's boys in the Gospel. God love them, they are just like all of us. We wonder when payday is coming. When is recognition going to rightfully come our way? Are we going to get a plaque? More perks?

God knows that those laboring among alligators and those working tirelessly in the church can become dispirited and feel the need of strokes. The temptation is to parlay the losses into gains by playing the martyr, or the angry young prophet on a mission from God, or the bitter soul shouting, "I've got it coming, I paid my dues!" Others become couch potatoes, sitting back on their laurels as if there were a Hall of Fame in the Church militant.

Jesus' response to us all is clear. Bearing the cross is what those who follow him do. We serve as he served.

John Tietjen's favorite image of ecclesiastical power is the inverted pyramid: the more "power" you have, the more responsibility you bear. Such an understanding is intended to offset the ambitious longing for greater office. Thanks be to God, the Lord Jesus is holding up the whole Church. Some days that's the only thing helping a parish pastor out of bed!

Hebrews brings it all home with its image of the Word of God as two-edged sword, "discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." There just aren't any secrets.

God knows what battles dog our days on the journey home. We are caught between wanting to serve faithfully and longing to get some glory from time to time. Our old sinful selves want something independent of the divine approval given in baptism. (Of course, it doesn't help a bit if other old sinners in the Church twist these passages to their advantage to keep some of the sisters and brothers from fair compensation. I am blessed where I am, but I hear many trying to be faithful servants *and* faithful parents. I add my prayer for the so-called Australian salary system! It is just!)

Today we commemorate James of Jerusalem, our Lord's brother or cousin and a witness of the resurrection. Philip Pfatteicher says that Jewish Christianity exalted him above Peter and Paul, since he was the authoritative leader of the mother church. Josephus reports that James was stoned to death in C.E. 62 by priestly authorities.

Thus, we have two Jameses to remember today. One sought glory without the cross, the other found that his cross was the price of glory.

Our great high priest knows our needs as we journey home. He not only intercedes for us; he grants us his gracious presence in bread and wine to strengthen us for the days the cross is heavy!

That's five star service. SZ

Reformation Sunday
October 30, 1988

Jeremiah 31:31-34
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

A FIRST READING

The words of Jeremiah on the new covenant sum up his entire message and are quoted in key passages of the New Testament: Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Hebrews 8:8-12. God will inscribe the new covenant not on tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18) but on human hearts. People will know God in the depths of their being. No longer will scribes and teachers need to busy themselves with scolding or reminding or interpreting the will of God to a reluctant or forgetful people, admonishing them, "Know the Lord!" The promise is that "they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." And this knowledge is the deep experience of one personal being for another, life open to life. It is founded on forgiveness. God will "remember their sin no more," blanking it out and embracing all people in love.

Through the first three chapters of Romans, Paul has been showing how both Jews and Gentiles stand under the verdict of guilty, exposed as sinners by the law of God. Paul wraps up his argument in 3:20: "no human being, neither Jew nor Gentile, will be justified in God's sight by works of the law." A new section opens on a triumphant note: "But now," now at last, now that Jesus Christ has done his work, "the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." God has acted in Jesus, and Paul focuses especially on Jesus' "blood," his death. Paul here interprets the dying of Jesus "as an expiation," as God's way of dealing with human sin and of accomplishing the forgiveness Jeremiah prophesied. The death of the beloved Son, as precious to God as Isaac was to Abraham, shows that forgiveness is not easy but costly, and that God mysteriously bears the cost in the pain suffered at Golgotha.

Biblical Studies

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Harold Coward

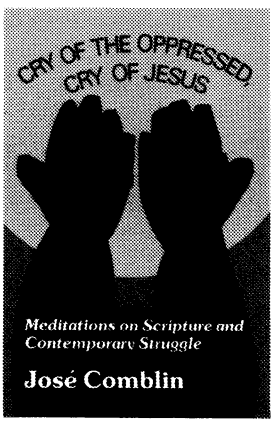
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In John 8, Jesus speaks of the remarkable freedom of the children of God. "If you continue in my word, you are my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (8:31-32). In the Gospel of John, bondage always means slavery to sin, and that may sound like a simply religious condition. But for this Evangelist, sin means a distorted view of reality. Sin means a mistaken perspective on self and world and God. And freedom means knowing the end and meaning of life. Freedom means being open to God and trusting God rather than one's own status or tradition. Freedom means living with eyes opened to the abundant grace of God which reaches out to embrace all creatures in love. Freedom means being a loving participant in the great pageant of life. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "WEAKNESS"

The lessons remind us that the weak are on the journey home, too. Indeed, they are us!

Dear brother, Karl Bliese, witnessed to me daily in seminary. His genuine piety, sense of humor, courage, and drive were born out of his struggle with cerebral palsy. He lived his sermons. I was moved to anger then by his account of those who chided him for having too weak a faith when he came away the same from healing services. Through his emotional pain, Karl shared that he heard God saying, "My strength is made perfect in your weakness." Yes!

Hebrews tells us that the Lord Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered." Robert Smith wisely observes, "...people learn all kinds of things at the hands of suffering...bitterness, resentment, or self-pity" (*Hebrews*).

I remember my father locked in his battle with lung cancer saying from his sixth floor hospital room, "Satan has been telling me to jump out of that window." I saw the pain in his eyes. He didn't jump, but agonized two more months before drowning before my eyes in his own bronchial fluid.

Songwriter John Prine reminds us,

> A heart stained in anger grows weak and grows bitter.
> You become your own prisoner as you watch yourself sit there
> Wrapped up in a trap of your very own chain of sorrow (*Bruised Orange*).

Why is it that the dying, the sufferers, the ones the world deems weak are still marching home, while others crushed by the changes and chances of life stay locked "in their very own chain of sorrow?"

Blind Bartimaeus shows us the persistence of one who despite his detractors begged for Jesus' help. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Just as persistently, our Lord seeks him out, having already drawn near to him. "'Go your way; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way."

Hebrews tells us that the high priest "can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness." What a lovely way to introduce how much more our great high priest is "there" for us. The One who touched Bartimaeus pressed on to Jerusalem and his cross, where his utter abandonment meant healing and hope for all the weak who persistently cry, "have mercy" with their own bitter tears and cracking voice.

O, "sing aloud with gladness" amid all sadness. He's bringing us home, gathering us "from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in travail, together."

That's not pie in the sky. It is the only story in life that keeps us from throwing ourselves out the window when in the throes of despair. Papa taught me that. As did Karl. As do all the cloud of witnesses whose weakness and persistence helps my sometimes weary feet down the road.

Jesus, Son of God, have mercy! SZ

Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost November 6, 1988

Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Hebrews 7:23-28
Mark 12:28-34 (35-37)

A FIRST READING

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 are the opening words of Israel's fundamental prayer or creed, the Shema, recited daily by pious Jews. These verses are written on parchment and enclosed in tiny leather boxes called phylacteries. At the hour of prayer the boxes are tied to the forehead and to the upper part of the left arm (hence near the heart) in literal fulfillment of Deut 6:6 and 8.

Everywhere in Hebrews that which is permanent is contrasted to things that are repeated, transient and temporary. Permanence and oneness belong to God and the heavenly world above. Change, decay, and manyness are the marks of the earthy world of everyday. Earthly priests are many in number, dying off and succeeding one another, offering an endless round of imperfect sacrifices, day after melancholy day. Jesus lives forever and is priest forever (v. 24). Once and for all he offered up the perfect sacrifice, forging an indestructible link between God and humanity (cf. Hebrews 9:24-28, 25th Sunday after Pentecost).

Is Mark 12:28-37 anything more than an impossible demand (vv. 29-31) followed by a piece of word-play (vv. 35-37)? Where's the promise? Every paragraph in Mark's Gospel should be read with the cross alongside it, and this paragraph is no exception. When this paragraph and the cross are read together, each casts light on the other. What happens when Jesus goes to the cross? What is the meaning of the cross? One of its many meanings is that Jesus at the cross is loving the Lord God with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. Another is that he is at the cross loving the neighbor as himself. Among other things, the cross of Jesus is an astonishing act of love on the part of Jesus, climaxing all his prior acts of love (cf. John 13:1). Then comes his question to the scribes about "the Christ, the son of David" (v. 35). David according to Psalm 110 said, "The Lord God said to my Lord Christ, 'Sit at my right hand.'" How can David call the Christ (Messiah) his "Lord," his superior, if our tradition says that the Christ is his "son," his descendant, one like him? The expectation was that the Christ would be like David, only more so, establishing a kingdom like David's, only grander. Jesus calls that expectation into question. The Christ will not be a chip off the old Davidic block. The Christ will be different. How different? The cross tells us. The cross is the Christ's throne, the cross inaugurates the new kingdom, and the cross is the only weapon in the hand of the Christ. RHS.

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "ACCESS"

How to get through to someone? How to get past the alienation? This seems to be a major problem of the 80's.

New parishioners from the frozen north find the warmth of the Southwest to be highly overrated. They say, "Why do these people all have wooden privacy fences?" Until Mammon got terminally ill you needed to come home to your island to psyche yourself for the next day's battle. Now you hide out in hope the world won't find your door.

C. S. Lewis envisions hell in *The Great Divorce* as a gray city where you keep moving, because you can't stand your neighbors. Everyone in her own gray castle. Alone. Isolated. Resentful.

People marked with the cross, and bearing others, march right through such a world where lots of people live in hell. We Christians even get our own taste of it, the cross being no talisman warding off trouble. Unredeemed whole sections of our lives cause us pain, as do the people we love. We give as much pain as we get, too!

Country singer George Strait croons:

It ain't cool to be crazy about you
It ain't suave or debonair
To let you know I care like I do.
It ain't smart to be so reckless with my heart.
I should have known right from the start
I'd end up like a fool.
Believe me, it ain't cool.

The classic bailout option is always there. Do what comes naturally. Run. Pull away. Protect yourself. Remain aloof.

This is the invitation to enter hell. The classic lie to be like God: immutable, transcendent, wholly-other. But we do not relate within ourselves. Nor does the God who *does* only play that one note samba.

We often seek access to that relational God by slavish obedience or legalistic ritual or even journeying inward to a spiritual Disneyland. Such a path is nothing more than a new improved way to stay aloof and secure. It's like the fantasy that so many pastors live: our devotion to doctrine, discipline, and duty osmotically makes our family life exemplary and God-pleasing. What a crock! The single most damning prosecution against pastors at the last may well be in regard to our nurture of our marriages and our children.

The God who is aloof indeed draws near to us in the person and work of David's Lord and ours. Yet Eduard Schweizer warns: "Salvation and judgment are accomplished when one meets Jesus." His utter devotion to God and us appears neither suave nor debonair on the cross. The world deems it foolish and uncool.

Our guts tell us to recoil in shocked horror or desperately to keep punching the keys looking for the right access code. That still keeps us in control. Sterile, passionless legalism. Jesus' love of God and us judges us dead.

Those are not empty words: "We confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves." They express reality.

Right there the one who offered up himself for us, that once-for-all sacrifice, offers us free access to the God who demands the devotion only he can muster.

The walls start tumbling down: "I forgive you." God gets through to us: "Given...poured out for you." We are moved to response: "Lord, thee I love with all my heart" (*LBW* #325). "With thine own love may I be filled" (*LBW* #419).

The reckless-hearted God bids us throw caution to the winds. It ain't cool, God's crazy love. But it makes the trip home bearable and possible. SZ

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost November 13, 1988

1 Kings 17:8-16
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:41-44

A FIRST READING

The final chapters of 1 Kings and the opening chapters of 2 Kings (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 8) record a number of reports about the prophets Elijah, Micaiah, and Elisha. The cycle begins with Elijah thundering during the days of Ahab, "There shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Immediately that prophecy began to come true (v. 7). The prophet was directed to Zarephath (under the control of Sidon and beyond Ahab's jurisdiction). There a poor widow shared with him the last bit of food she had in her larder. Because of her generosity, given when her own situation was desperate, Elijah prophesied that her grain and her oil would never fail, "until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth" (v. 14). And the report ends with the assurance that Elijah's prophecy was fulfilled (v. 16). As we come toward the end of the church year, it is helpful to be reminded of the fulfilling of promises.

In Hebrews, repetition is a sign of belonging to the created world of coming to be and changing and ceasing to exist. Christ has entered by his death and resurrection into the inner sanctum of the heavenly world, into the very presence of God, and has done so "on our behalf" (v. 24).

Here below, mortal priests offer their imperfect sacrifices repeatedly, day after day. Unlike those earthly priests, Christ appeared once for all at the end of the age to cancel sin forever by one immortal sacrifice, the sacrifice of himself. Through Christ as a new and living way, we have the joy of access to God (10:19-22).

Mark 12:41-44, like 1 Kings 17, speaks of a poor widow of astonishing generosity. This brief report is the last piece of Jesus' public teaching in the Gospel of Mark. After this he takes four disciples aside and speaks to them privately of things to come (ch. 13). Then the passion and resurrection narrative follows (ch. 14-16). The widow's act is a comment on the way of the cross. She "out of her poverty has put in everything she had" (v. 44), and the Greek then literally reads, "her whole life" (cf. "whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, whole strength" in v. 30). Jesus' cross is like that. His dying, freely undertaken, is an act of ecstatic and shocking generosity. Both his crucifixion and the widow's offering summon us to meditate on God's daily outpourings of love and on our own manner of life. RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "SACRIFICE"

The slippery character of our old sinful selves is no more evident than in the whole business of stewardship. We know all the right buzzwords so that when it comes to pledging and time/talent sheets we say: "I hate all this legalistic junk." And then in self-fulfilling prophecy we do approach it legalistically.

It is no surprise to find these texts here on a Sunday in November, the traditional pledge month. No doubt the pericope-pickers wanted to keep the pastor from having to search for the right texts to get the job done. They'll preach.

In our parish some of the leadership is so fearful of breaching the secrecy surrounding money pledges. "Pastor, we need to keep as few people as possible from seeing who gives what, and they need to be tight-lipped." We have a running disagreement. While not broadcasting pledges for everyone's discussion, our local parish simply needs to grow beyond this kind of attitude.

Our giving is one of the ways we respond to God's grace with praise and thanksgiving. When we are obsessively secretive about our giving, we probably are equally uneffusive in praise of God, similarly noncommunicative in sharing the hope within us, and generally stand-offish with those we don't know. God knows, that's a part of the typical ethnic Lutheran's personality profile; however, the texts refuse to allow a "that's just the way we are" defense!

If anyone had a good excuse, it was the widow of Zarephath. Elijah, on the run from Jezebel's wrath, comes begging for bread and water. Her response is the bare cupboard story. She fears to help him, because there simply is not enough. The wolf is at the door.

Elijah implicitly understands her fear and promises that if she feeds him, God will provide. And she does. And God does. The power of the Word stills fear and meets her needs.

Another widow, symbol of both the fragility of life and our poverty, gives more sacrificially than those whose gifts were, in comparison, quantitatively astronomical. She casts fear aside and puts in her whole living.

The examples peak in God's giving. As a popular brochure proclaims: "At great cost, he has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, not with silver or gold but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death."

God gives us everything we have and are. "God has given me and still preserves... God also protects me in time of danger... all of which it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true."

Even though we "know" these things, even though we confess these words, the old sinful self in us cautions us not to be frivolous. Our fear rises to the surface.

There is a direct corollary between tight money management in the parish and a weak sense of mission and ministry. Parishes who are alive are constantly in conflict over the need for money, unless the people have matured in their understanding of Christian stewardship.

My first stewardship sermons were weak, because I was embarrassed to talk about it. For years I had lampooned the money-grubbing preachers so much that it was like selling out. On the one hand I had the memory of pious parents who wrote pledge checks first, but on the other hand I didn't want to be compared with the weepy "evangelists."

Something happened. The Word went to work on my own fear. Perhaps it was the familiar offertory prayer that touched me: "Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made...."

God has already sacrificed everything for us. At best, we offer frail sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving with all of the stuff of our existence.

Someday we will arrive home to give an account of what we did with what we had and what we were. Thank God, the divine "well done" will be directed to those in Christ by grace alone.

It *is* a joyous thing to be a part of the rule of God as it comes to people with Good Tidings. On the homeward journey, we experience satisfaction as we give away more than we accumulate.

Not to worry, God provides. Promise! SZ

Christ the King Sunday November 20, 1988

Daniel 7:13-14
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

A FIRST READING

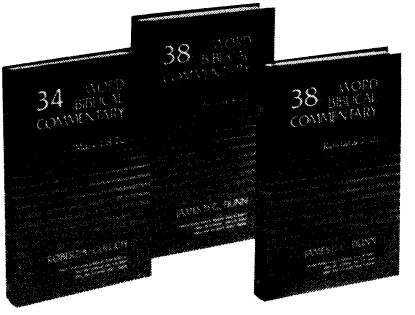
First of all Daniel had a vision of four great beasts, coming up out of the sea, the watery abyss of chaos. They represent a success of beastly kingdoms devouring the flesh of the peoples. While Daniel was pondering those beasts, he saw judgment beginning to be executed on those beasts, and then "there came one like a son of man" (7:13), not a beast but a human figure. And to the great human figure was given not temporary but "everlasting dominion which shall not pass away" (v. 14). Christians see in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the beginning of the reign of the great human one, the Son of Man (cf. Mark 14:62). His rule is yet hidden, acknowledged by the faithful, but we yearn for the time when all beastly institutions, beastly arrangements, and beastly empires will be cast down, their place taken by the genuinely human and fully loving rule of the Christ.

John greets the seven churches (=the whole church) with grace and peace from the Lord God ("who is and who was and who is to come"), from the "seven spirits who are before his throne" (=the full and boundless energy of the one Holy Spirit), and "from Jesus Christ," martyr, resurrected, and "ruler of the kings on earth." His blood (v. 5) does not spell defeat but is the sign of victory, for by it he loved the church to the utmost, liberating his people from sins and constituting them as both a royal household (children of the king) and as a body of priests (servants of God). He is king and he is coming to establish his kingship, casting down all contrary powers.

Pilate seeks a plain answer to a plain question: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus' response alerts readers that the question is not so simple. "My kingship is not of this world," in the sense that it does not have its source in the powers and assumptions of this world. If Jesus' kingship were the standard earthly thing, then he would have followers with weapons in their hands and killing in their hearts. "But my kingship is something completely different," as all those beasts in Daniel's vision are different from the human one. Pilate is a literalist with a very narrow focus: "So you are a king?" Jesus admits to having entered the world to bear witness to the truth, indicating that his kingship will be founded on truth, on the surpassing reality of God, and on nothing else. Pilate does not get it, and so Roman imperial might blundered forward in the vain attempt to silence Jesus' witness to the truth. RHS

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PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "THE BOSS"

The initial session of our parish's first Word and Witness class several years ago began with the question: "What is the Kingdom of God?" To a person all ten learners replied "heaven." The remaining 2-1/2 hours were spent (forgive me) unpacking the phrase "Kingdom of God."

Even after jogging their memories of Luther's insightful thoughts on the second petition in the *Small Catechism*, we did not begin to break new ground until we focused on the phrase "...but we pray God's kingdom would also come to us."

It is unsettling to take seriously the implications of our prayer for God to rule over the minutiae of details in our lives, so much more discomforting to begin to pray urgently, "maranatha."

We rejoice to live in a country that practices participatory democracy and then demand it in the Church even where we have no right to do so. Because we have enshrined the interim ecclesiology of the Reformation-era German Lutherans and have wed it to the suspicions of the Haugians, we caution "one hand only" on the head of the ELCA bishop while telling the foreign primates (with their apostolic succession), "wait until he stands to greet him." Sarcastic jibes emerge when some new synod bishops reportedly wear mitres. ("Thank God, we know we can throw the rascals out in four years!")

All this joy of being socially-conscious rugged individualists aside, the lessons for the day remind us we do have a Boss. Not a Boss who is born to run, but one who is born to come calling us to hear his voice. This goes so contrary to our political instincts. We baby-boomers cut our teeth on the slogan: "Question Authority!" And a certain liar keeps whispering, "You don't want a boss."

Just as Ash Wednesday reminds us that we all end up food for worms, so Christ the King Sunday reaffirms, of all things, the antiquated notion that we have a Boss who is going to drop in for a surprise visit. He will be less interested in how well the local franchise has been pushing the latest company gimmick than in discerning whose voice we have been heeding.

Barnabas Lindars (*John, NCB*) comments that the essential character of kingship means personal allegiance to one person. Our old sinful self balks at such a notion under the guise of the argument that all authority is abusive. Of course, what we fear is the truth about us: we are all, to borrow from Hopkins, grieving for "Margaret." The Boss is eternally Boss, our pretense to the throne is short-lived and futile.

We do well to shift to the Johannine concept of Cross as Victory. Indeed Jesus is in control all the way, a flesh and blood Christ (not a docetic one) lifted up to draw all persons to himself. We are marked indelibly with his cross in baptism, so that the grave, like C. S. Lewis' Narnian stable, becomes but the doorway to our home. We *are* homeward bound!

Each time we gather to hear our Lord's voice, to be fed by him, we—the family of God—offer up our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Our voices are frail. Our hearts long for the peace of home.

We pray "thy kingdom come." And we get but a foretaste of the coming feast. The Boss sends us out to speak and to do the Truth in a world of darkness, a world of lies. Then, God rules in us as we are drawn towards home, laying down our lives all the way. SZ

Thanksgiving Day November 24, 1988

Deuteronomy 8:1-10
Philippians 4:6-20
Luke 17:11-19

A FIRST READING

A key word in Deuteronomy 8 is "remember." Remember the events that shaped your life (Exodus and Wilderness experience, v. 2).

Remember God's humbling and God's feeding, for both are blessing (vv. 3-5). Remember who it is who gives land and water, valleys and hills, grain and vines, olive and honey (vv. 7-9). As you eat your fill, remember to bless the giver (v. 10).

Paul had an especially warm relationship with the Philippians. Letters and gifts went back and forth between them. "I have learned," Paul writes, "the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want" (v. 12). But joy runs all through this letter to his friends because of the love they have expressed for him in the gifts they have sent him. He and they are bound by a common vision of the glorious riches of God in Christ Jesus (v. 19), and they act towards one another on the basis of that vision. Paul and the Philippians live beyond anxiety in the land of peace and thanksgiving (vv. 6-7) and loving partnership (v. 15).

Luke 17:11-19 is the familiar story of the grateful Samaritan, one of the ten cleansed of leprosy. Luke loves to ponder the mystery of the failings of insiders and the instinctive rightness of outsiders. Luke uses such reports to needle Christian insiders to greater openness to outsiders and to nudge us to remember (cf. Deut 8), to give thanks, and to enter into partnership with those who suffer need in a world of plenty (Phil 4). RHS

PASTORAL REFLECTIONS: "EUCHARIST"

Praise and thanksgiving are the alpha and omega of the Christian life. Whether we do it with hands in air, or praying the daily office, or at kitchen table with *Christ in Our Home*, or through tears at hospital bed or beside loved one's coffin, it is all part and parcel of the same grateful response.

So it's a secularly declared religious holiday today. So it's a day given to all manner of abuses in the name of civil religion. This day of Thanksgiving is a happy intrusion of state into church. Notice how it cleverly falls, this year, between Christ the King and Advent 1, when we are ending and beginning again all with the sense of "Next Year in the New Jerusalem."

Isn't it good that weary pilgrims are given a free day of rest? Not just to gorge with Hooverian intensity and waddle to the sofa to watch the Cowboys die again, but a day to offer ourselves and gifts in thanksgiving for the sake of him who offered himself for us!

How hard to undo years of bad teaching—rationalistic, pietistic, individualistic—that keeps the Church from being fed as it so desperately needs to be fed. The Eucharist *is* the central act of worship. All the being and doing of the Church has its foundation here. Our cries for justice, our feeding the hungry, our binding up the weak, our practice of including, our naming the name of Jesus, our living responsibly, all flow from lives that have been given the very life and presence of Jesus in bread and wine.

Luther's word concerning apathy and "unthanks" in the Church: "If you could see how many daggers, spears, and arrows are at every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the sacrament as often as possible. The only reason we go about so securely and heedlessly is that we neither acknowledge nor believe that we are in the flesh, in this wicked world, or under the kingdom of the devil" (*Large Catechism*).

The Eucharist counters the same broken tendency addressed by Deuteronomy. When we are in possession of good things, we tend to thank and praise ourselves: "God bless the child that's got her own." How hard to teach folk like ourselves that the rain really does fall on the just and the unjust, so that we properly pray "...that God will help us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanks." The Eucharist teaches posture as a second use.

Unjust lepers. That's the Church's description of *and* reminder to those gathered for Eucharist today. Lest we simply pray "God save the Queen or state," which, however fitting, is not why we are assembled, we hear from Luke how the gifts received in this journeyperson's life pale in comparison to the Giver. Sometimes, it takes today's Samaritan lepers—Central American refugees and Vietnamese Buddhists—to teach us anew about gratitude.

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, all time and space collapse in that kairotic moment. We are suddenly with angels and archangels and the host arrayed in white praising and thanking the Giver for the greatest Gift of all. "Too soon we rise; the vessels disappear..." (*LBW* #211).

Again we are on the road homeward bound like Cleopas and friend saying, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" And with Paul Simon, songwriter, we might sing: "Home where my thoughts escaping, home where my music's playing, home where my Love lies waiting..."—dear welcoming parent rejoicing—"...for me."

Our crosses are no less crosses. Our church is not triumphant, just a faithless partner. But we have been given an aperitif of what's to come. He keeps us moving towards home.

Thanks be to God! SZ

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