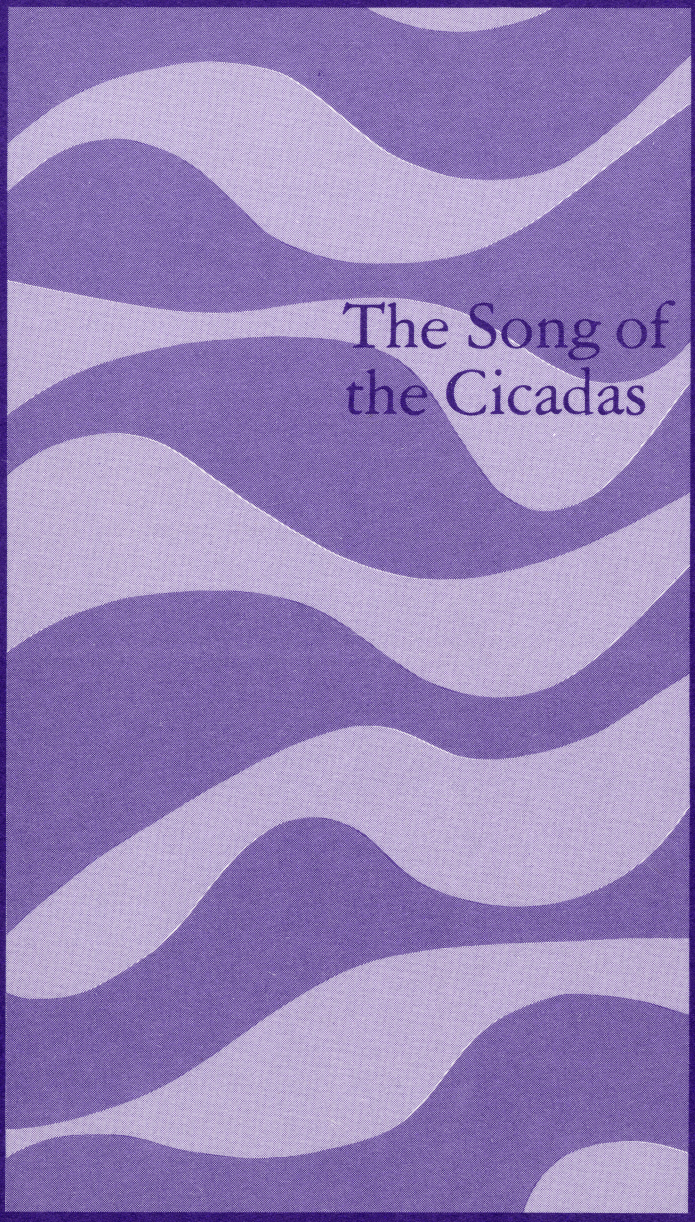
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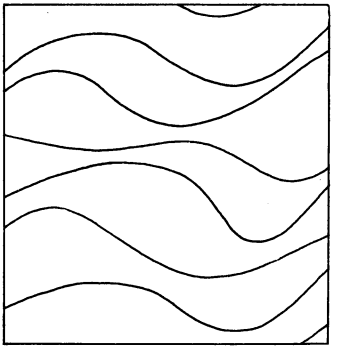
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The Song of the Cicadas

More summers ago than I like to think about, and for no worthwhile reason, I used to gather dozens of seventeen-year locust shells that hung on our tree trunks in central Illinois. During long sultry nights, cicadas who had escaped those shells filled the air with their shrill noise, produced, as I now know, by the vibrating membranes on the underside of their abdomens. The last thing those experiences called forth in me was theology. As I say, that was a long time ago.

When **Duane Mehl** happened upon an Updike novel in a drugstore it was a theologically productive moment. In that book he found reflections on what it means to live in a godless society, dominated by the devil and by persons incapable of distinguishing between good and evil. The men in Updike's novel have no beliefs or moral convictions; the women transform themselves, almost unknowingly, into witches. Mehl feels that Updike has fully and horribly characterized the devil, three of his devoted followers, and their victims. What remains for the novelist to do is to embody in his fiction the death and resurrection of the Christ he avoids, and perhaps, secretly also loves.

Howard S. Olson knows a man who interpreted the song of the cicadas theologically and who concluded that theology at its deepest has to be a song. Olson wants to help his African and North American colleagues know more about the meter, the tunes, the texts, and the rhymes of our hymns. Good hymns stimulate our memory of God's prior actions and restore our hope of what is to come. In short, they help us worship. His practical suggestions on what makes for good, powerful, and beautiful hymns may help us expand the praises of the cicadas.

Edgar Krentz would like us to think about evangelism in a Pauline perspective, as informed by 1 Thessalonians. For Paul in this earliest letter, God is the primary actor, and the resurrection of Jesus demonstrates that God has life

and gives life. Paul's gospel was about salvation from the threat of coming judgment; it produced a certainty that expressed itself as joy in the midst of persecution. The Christian life to which Paul invited people was based on faith, supported by love for other Christians, and directed to the eschatological future. The Spirit meanwhile ratified the proclamation by producing effects or fruits. The Thessalonians, like the readers of *Currents,* were moved to do something because of Christ; they did not just know something or experience something.

According to **Marc Kolden** the purpose of salvation is the restoration and fulfillment of creation. Creation and redemption are interwoven: the redemptive work of God presupposes God's ongoing creative work as well as creation's ongoing sinfulness. Kolden suggests that we use the word ministry to describe our involvement in God's redemptive activity while naming our participation in God's creative activity as our vocation or service. Since it is the same God who both creates and redeems, the tasks and opportunities of daily life—our vocation—are no less service to God than is our ministry. The creative purpose of vocation is to serve God in all the various ways that we help keep the world going; the redemptive purpose of vocation is to draw us away from concern for self.

Everyone knows about the potential nationalistic idolatry of the flag in the chancel, but **Cathy Ammlung** points to its seductive endorsement of self-righteousness even when it stands for the best in our country—for equality under the law, freedom, and fair play. It was only the prodigal outpouring of love for people through Jesus Christ that perfectly expressed what it means to be God. In response to God's gift of rightness, we can now use the gifts of democracy, justice, and equality as tools to serve one another. Or to put it another way: all the values of the flag need to be put under the judgment of the cross.

Is God present with us all the time, like the shapes and colors of a painting, or does God have "intermittent" being, coming alive for us time after time in revelatory moments, as in the notes of a symphony? **Roland Daniel Zimany** raises these metaphysical questions and suggests that his model for conceptualizing God eliminates the supposed discrepancies between God's power and God's love. It also conditions us for pluralism and subjectivity—God will always be the one with whom one has had a personal experience. Regardless of what you think of his model, it reminds us that God truly becomes God when he becomes my God, our God.

Filling out this issue are poems by **Gary Blobaum** and **Gretchen Shartle,** a letter by **Frederick W. Baltz** on inclusive language, and a tribute to Origen, the church's first real theologian, by **Arthur Vööbus**.

We have come a long way in the 1800 years since Origen and even in the decades since my misspent youth. None of us is likely to be the last theologian, but we are all at the cutting end of a 2,000-year tradition for which we are—in family, congregation, and classroom—the prime spokespersons. In the chirping of an insect, a novel from a drugstore, or a flag in a chancel, we may find a stimulus to carry on our ministries of reconciliation and our vocations of service. To hear theology in the song of the cicadas, after all, is no more far–fetched than to call upon winter, cold, snows, ice, and frosts to praise the Lord. That's what the Three Children sang from the fiery furnace, according to the Apocrypha. And now we, snow shovels in hand in Chicago, pick up their strain.

Warm, wintry regards,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Devil, You Say

Duane Mehl
Charlottesville, Virginia

Because so many national reviewers either banned Updike's book, *The Witches of Eastwick,* or talked as if it were nothing more than a charming literary farce dotted with clever metaphors, I chose at first not to buy it. Having found it in paperback one day, however, in my favorite mom and pop bookstore, I decided I should read it.

Upon finishing the book, I realized I admired it as much as any book published since Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood,* or Mary Gordon's *The Company of Women.*

In fact, having written in *Currents in Theology and Mission* that Updike had "nothing more to say,"[1] I will now cheerfully eat my words and insist Updike has lots to say in *Witches of Eastwick.*

Updike has again proven himself to be not only our country's best writer, but also the



[1]Duane Mehl, "Dear John—An Apology and Footnote," *Currents in Theology and Mission* (August 1984), 235.

most honest, least romantic, if not best, theologian creating fiction in the world today—including such writers as Isaac Bashevis Singer, Walker Percy, Graham Greene, and Gordon.

Updike, I believe, has gone to school on Hawthorne's and Flannery O'Connor's stories (his play on names, proper and common, in itself reminds one immediately of O'Connor). He has written an allegory of great complexity and importance, which form, however, because of its theological and moral significances, like O'Connor's allegories, goes largely unrecognized among secular critics.

Thus, some critics felt Updike tried in a witty way to create a trio of New England witches in a 60s setting, and so provide us a little spoof (one reviewer called it a "romp") on the culture of the times. One feminist reviewer thought Updike had tried to characterize the female heart and mind, but had failed miserably. Several critics felt Updike had treated the social upheavals of the 60s in too shallow a fashion. In *The Washington Post* Jonathan Yardley said Updike had been altogether too trivial, if not, to use a phrase once applied in *Commonweal* to Flannery O'Connor's early stories, "gratuitously grotesque,"[2] and vulgar.

Whether Updike captured the state of the female heart and mind (or tried, for that matter), I cannot say. I do know his book, though excruciatingly vulgar, is far from trivial. Updike has managed to embody through workable contemporary characters in a literal story radiating with moral, doctrinal and "anagogical," or mystical dimensions, what happens when individuals and a whole society have no God even to lose, and therefore act without moral values—or even a sixth sense for wrong—and consequently, without guilt.

In *The Witches of Eastwick* three "youngish" divorcees, Alexandra the eldest and most sensitive, Jane the middler, and Sukie the youngest, have left their husbands for no reasons in particular, except to be themselves, get in touch with their feelings, and enter the divorced state which, in their thinking necessarily follows the married state. What they get in touch with, however, is their mutual desire and capacity to be witches, and therefore to form a self-protective and aggressively destructive coven, preying on the village of Eastwick.

Significantly, Alexandra is a sculptress of little mud figurines she calls "bubbies," an allusion, I think, to her breasts, which she no longer uses for mothering purposes. Jane is a pianist, much addicted to, but deeply distressed by Bach; and Sukie is a writer for the local Eastwick newspaper, called improbably, "Word," of which there is a famine in the land: many words, but no Word.

Updike, I believe, would have us understand that Alexandra and Sukie try to substitute "pop art" for religion, and in the process, produce frivolously subjective works—as is true for all art lacking a religious foundation and a functional place within a pious community. Thus, Alexandra's "bubbies" serve no purpose; Sukie reports for the *Word* the maliscious gossip of the neighborhood. Only the cold but driven performer, Jane, struggling to master and interpret Bach, is guaranteed spiritual revelations in the end.

---

[2]William Estey, "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters," *Commonweal* 7 (March 1958), 587.

Like prostitutes, the witches find themselves in need of close male companionship, protection, male hair and smell, rationality, and leadership. In the process of seeking and devouring male lovers, however, they regularly ruin other couples' marriages, and drive one of Sukie's conquests to kill his wife and himself. Significantly, they are routinely and severely critical of other women—most of whom they find physically or socially ludicrous, and very poor competitors in the arts of love-making. Gossip occupies much of their time.

His book, though vulgar, is far from trivial.

The three divorcees also become attached to a presumably wealthy and, in the secular manner, "interesting" man, Darryl Van Horne. Van Horne is an American entrepreneur in caricature, and a scientist-alchemist (who talks a bit like Alan Wolf writes), much devoted to decadent art, and to experiments designed to unravel the secrets of the universe. Somewhat like Thomas Mann's Adrian Leverkuhn in *Doctor Faustus,* Van Horne is also a skilled pianist and knowledgeable music critic, well informed in the classical *oeuvre,* but disposed toward counter-cultural arts: Hindemith, Schoenberg—atonal, amorphous, amoral. Almost predictably, the writer, Sukie, sets out with Van Horne's help to write a novel, "which she and her mentor believed could be preplanned and engineered, a simple verbal machine for the arousal and then the relief of tension."[3]

As the reader might guess, Van Horne is a Promethean or Faustian character, with, however, more than a trace of Mephistopheles mixed in. He pretends to pursue the secret of the universe, but lacks ability and discipline to find it, let alone submerge himself, like Goethe's Faust, in humanitarian pursuits. He is in fact, allegorically, the devil himself (again, not unlike Leverkuhn who in the absence of God and any basis for human morality makes the devil his god), already damned, and pretending to be sympathetically human in Faustian form.

Van Horne is a new American version of Faust, suitable for the late 20th century, presaged by Hawthorne in such characters as Rappacini, Ethan Brand and Roger Chillingworth. Updike may, in fact, have read Erich Heller's penetrating essay, "Faust's Damnation," in the collection called *The Artists' Journey Into the Interior,*[4] before writing *The Witches;* and created Van Horne to be the next figure in the procession of literary Fausts Heller describes in his essay.

Without fully realizing what is happening, the witches fall under Van Horne's spell, use his drugs, recline naked in his hot tub, give each other massages, and bring each other to orgasm to ease boredom and their nagging fear of old age and disease, over which

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[3]This and all subsequent quotations from John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* are taken from the edition published by Ballantine Books, New York, 1984.

[4]Erich Heller, "Faust's Damnation," in *The Artist's Journey into the Interior and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1965), 1–44.

they have no control. Though he prefers the role of voyeur, Van Horne sometimes allows the witches to service him as if they were his succubi. All wish to win his favor. Alexandra wants to marry him, and, for curiously maternal reasons, take care of him. As the reader learns, however, Van Horne can father only lies.

Meanwhile, the witches celebrate not only their independent status and powers, but display them by reducing all their enemies—sometimes to ashes. No one of their actions, however, has for them any more moral weight or value than any other, because none of them (except Alexandra at the climax of the story) feels guilt about anything. They manifest an astonishly ingenuous but thoroughly "modern" psychopathology, mirrored in the blasphemous and gratuitously vulgar language they use, in the random recreational sex they practice for the "release of tension," and the pop art they admire, which seems starkly evil by virtue of its encitement to lust and violence, without any corresponding religious or moral purpose.

The key to the "interpretation" (allegories must be interpreted) of the story lies first in a quotation Updike supplies from Nietzsche at the beginning of a final chapter called "Guilt": "Recall the famous witch trials; the most acute and humane judges were in no doubt as to the guilt of the accused; the 'witches' *themselves did not doubt it*—and yet there was no guilt"; and second in Alexandra's final description of Van Horne: "I really doubt . . . that Darryl was ever organized . . . He had to improvise on situations others created and couldn't look far ahead . . . He couldn't create, he had no powers of his own that way, all he could do was release what was already there in others" (p. 334).

Thus, however powerful on the surface, Van Horne is a pitifully parasitical figure who can create and enjoy nothing on his own. He is a creature of non-being, sucking like the devil (C. S. Lewis would say "devouring") the being of his followers to bring forth from them works of un-selfconscious and decadent evil for his own satisfaction (today we categorize and "explain" such acts as symptoms of a "disease" we name sociopathy).

"What's special?" Van Horne asks the three witches mid-way through the story. "Tiny Tim was special. Liberace is special. Lee Harvey Oswald was special" (p. 251).

Also, early in the story he says to the trio of witches, "God . . . I'd love to be a woman . . . Think what a female body can do—make a baby and then make milk to feed it." To which Jane replies, "Well, think of your own body . . . the way it can turn food into shit" (p. 121).

This hideous exchange graphically describes in moral and "doctrinal" terms the difference between Van Horne and real human beings (and to a lesser degree, the difference between man and woman in an agnostic society) radiating within the literal story line of Updike's novel.

Men lose nerve and women take over.

Van Horne can produce, create or procreate nothing but "shit" from food. He can attract people with borrowed money, erect

large but useless, uncompleted buildings, hatch grandiose schemes for making money, pretend to be on the verge of discovering the secret of the universe, collect banal art works, criticize music; but in the process he always devours others and with an aura of reckless *elan* passing for freedom, prods them toward outright evil or decadent behavior.

By contrast, the real men and women in the story can by nature create works of art, develop crafts and skills, provide necessary services, procreate and care for children, and thereby fulfill a vocation in life. The men, however, are literally and pathetically worn out. Clyde Gabriel, the intellectual editor of the *Word,* lost faith in God, art, and self before attaining his maturity, and kills both his wife and himself. The Unitarian pastor, Ed Paisley, has no faith in God, is too old to join the sociopathic radicals of the 60s he pretends to admire, runs off with a vacuous hippie girl (whom the witches both "see through" and despise), and blows himself to bits making a bomb.

The women have and practice creative powers. All three witches have children, and pursue art "forms." Though they are not so worn out as the men of the village, they do, however, badly need the kind of male who can guide them in a "way of life" (they have only Van Horne), and provide them spiritual and moral stability—that is, protect them, man to man, against the devil.

Van Horne himself describes woman's predicament: "That's what I love about women . . .Their homely similes. There's no such word as "ugly" in your vocabulary. Men, Christ, they're so squeamish about everything—blood, spiders, blow jobs" (p. 123).

The women, in other words, lean naturally—perhaps out of a congenital need to protect themselves and family members—toward sociopathy. The men of Eastwick, however, no matter how morally squeamish they may be at heart, can no longer exercise any moral influence over their women, their families, or their community. They have lost faith in God, and therefore in their own creative abilities and moral judgment.

Toward the end of the tale, after pretending to be interested in the witches, Van Horne marries a young woman named Jennifer, a "cool" and self-serving daughter of one of the witches' victims. He then presumably induces the witches to kill her by voodoo witchcraft, and runs off with her mindless brother, his real lover, leaving nothing but debts behind.

And what are we to make of this? Is Updike suggesting that in a godless society, dominated by the devil and by persons incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, men lose nerve and women take over, thereby transforming themselves, almost unknowingly, into witches? I believe he is saying something very close to that. Van Horne's departure with the boy at the end of the story further suggests that men in decadent societies lean toward homosexuality in order to enjoy maximum promiscuity without responsibilities for marriage or family.

Lest we imagine that Updike has come only recently to this theme, he had the irrascible Hook in his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair,* insist that upon losing religion, humanity will ultimately decline with the following symptoms: "As the Indian once served the elusive deer he hunted, men once served invisible goals, and grew hard in such service and pursuit, and lent their society an indis-

pensable temper. Impotent to provide this tempering salt, men would sink lower than woman, as indeed they have. Women are the heroes of dead lands."[5]

Following up, as it were, on this earlier theme, Updike creates within the people of Eastwick an almost numinous quality of impotence and decay, already hinted at in his earlier novel, *The Couples,* with which *The Witches* has much in common. Whereas in *The Couples* Piet Hanama, however, trailed clouds of Christian belief behind him, and loved his manual labor, the men in Eastwick have no beliefs, moral convictions, sense of fidelity or vocation, even to lose. As they collapse, the women fill their places, often claiming their "rights" to male vocations, but thereby violating their own natural inclinations to have and nurture families, and to manage the necessary material elements—the "daily bread"—sustaining the household and village.

What emerges, therefore, from this remarkable story is what theologians might call a "disordering" of creation and society in the absence of any God, feeling for God, or personal morality grounded in the will of God. The banal moral rhetoric attached to the social causes of the 60s flourishes within the Eastwick community. No one, except Brenda, wife of Rev. Ed Paisley, however, seems capable of recognizing or even feeling the reality of good or evil on a personal level.

Brenda Paisley takes over her husband's Unitarian Church after his death, and in a remarkable sermon, proclaims the evil the witches are hatching in Eastwick. Significantly, Updike makes of Brenda's ascent to pastoral office a mark of a decadent society, but grants her prophetic insight into the nature and realities of the witches' evil.

So also, Flannery O'Connor gave her crowd of unlikely "Bible belt" preachers spiritual insight by virtue only of their calling, reminding us of St. Thomas' claim in *de Veritatis* that God spoke through his prophets irrespective of their virtue, sex, or even their faith. Brenda, the self-appointed Unitarian pastoress, emerges in *The Witches of Eastwick* as the sole source of spiritual insight, and therefore of future belief, for the entire society.

Wildly and wonderfully, the stabilizing male in *The Witches of Eastwick,* balanced off as a source of good over against the devil, Van Horne, is the long dead Johann Sebastian Bach—named in the story that "old Lutheran" by Updike, who began his own life as a Lutheran of the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran *Formula of Concord.* Updike, I think remains a Lutheran, deep down, of the *sola gratia* tradition, no matter what his fascination with the predestinational theology of Calvin or Mohammed—that is, with an omnipotent god divested of a living and sacramentally present Christ, who by his sacrificial suffering alone makes human suffering acceptable, and by his Spirit allows people to choose against the fallen state of being into which they are thrown by birth.

Updike's interest in Bach may, in fact, also signal the beginning of the end of his virtual obsession with the dialectical thinking of Kierkegaard and Barth, who tend to make of Christian revelation an intellectual paradox, a bolt out of the blue, acceptable only as a wry, even ironic absurdity (a "conceit"), rather than a rationally feasible reality.

Bach is brought to life by the narrator giving his biography, and by Jane, the pianist,

[5]John Updike, *The Poorhouse Fair* (New York: Fawcett-Crest, 1958), 111.

who attempts to master his work. Though Bach drives her almost crazy with anger and hatred, his ordered art nonetheless challenges her physically, morally and spiritually, proving Luther's adage that music is, next to theology, the queen's handmaiden among human disciplines. In Bach, Jane senses the male ability to beget art as women beget children. In a wonderful final scene, while she is playing Bach's Second Suite for Unaccompanied Cello, she senses in Bach the male ability to understand and accept death, and to look forward to it for release from this body and this world.

The absence of the resurrection looms as a terrifying presence.

What Updike and Jane fail, however, to reveal in Bach is his magnificent resurrection works which counterbalance and redeem his death works—a bit like lopping Bach down the middle with cleaver and pretending to present the whole man. The absence of the resurrection looms as a terrifying presence in Updike's novel, and more than any other factor has led unwary critics into missing Updike's purposes altogether. Most of the same critics, for instance, found evidences of Christ's resurrection placed by John Cheever into *The Falconer,* no matter how decadent that novel appeared on the surface.

Though Updike knows that resurrection of the body from the dead is a necessity for himself and the world, and has said so in his work ("O Lord, bless these poor paragraphs, that would do in their vile ignorance Your work of resurrection," he writes in "The Blessed Man of Boston, My Grandmother's Thimble, and Fanning Island,")[6] he cannot, I think, yet affirm it for himself. Updike describes and characterizes evil; he cannot yet do the same with good, and thus provide rescue and relief for his characters or his readers.

His predicament becomes particularly poignant in the two sermons he introduces into *The Witches of Eastwick*—inevitably reminiscent of Father Mapple's sermon in Melville's *Moby Dick* and Father Arnall's in Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man.*

Brenda Paisley tries, in a state of dread not unlike Fr. Mapple's, to convince her congregation that witches abound in the village, creating indescribable evil. Because she lacks faith in the power of God, however, she falls victim to the power of the witches in the very act of preaching about the power of evil.

In a sermon from Brenda's pulpit, aping Fr. Arnall who preached with vivid examples upon the horrors of death, judgment, hell, and the bliss of heaven, Van Horne preaches a sermon titled, "THIS IS A TERRIBLE CREATION," upon the horrors of evolutionary determinism, of man, and of nature. Whereas Fr. Arnall, however, concluded his sermon with an affirmation of the eventual coming of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, Van Horne concludes with a description of liver flukes and tarantulas, creations of what he calls the "Big Visage," controlling the universe. "Couldn't

[6]John Updike, in *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories* (New York: Fawcett, Crest, 1962), 157.

you have done better?" he asks the congregation, rhetorically. "I sure as hell could have. So vote for me next time, O.K.? Amen." (p. 328)

Because Updike chooses not to answer Van Horne's questions, nor allow anyone to vote nay to him, his witches wander off stage in the end in much the same way the characters wandered off in The Couples. In homiletical terms, Updike preaches law (or sin) without Gospel (or forgiveness), which, in my profession, is usually considered worse than doing nothing at all—since it merely confirms guilt, suffering, dread, and damnation. In a *Life* interview Updike once said as much: "There is no help from within—without the supernatural, the natural is a pit of horror."[7]

In Updike's personal and professional pilgrimage, however, the characterization of Van Horne, the witches, Brenda, and the other people of Eastwick represents, I believe, a distinct forward movement. Though he has not yet chosen to characterize God, or a committed people of God, as major characters in any of his fictional works, Updike has in this novel fully and horribly characterized the devil, three of his devoted female followers, their victims, and at least one living adversary on the side of good—a considerable theological and literary achievement.

I sense, however, that Updike yearns to do more, yearns to redeem himself, and in his own way, the times, with the Gospel, embodied in a novel. Years ago in *Rabbit Run* he made the old Lutheran pastor, Kruppenbach, thunder at the hero, Harry Angstrom: "Yes, you must suffer, but you must *love* your pain, because it is *Christ's pain.*"[8] Updike knows it, but cannot or will not chose to confess it yet in his fiction.

When a man has come to recognize and feel the reality of evil, however, he has no choice but assent to the good, or go down into the depths of utmost depravity and damnation. Updike, I think, has toyed with the latter possibilities too long, and has misled his readers much too far to avoid his next vocational responsibility: the embodiment in fiction of the death and resurrection of the Christ he avoids, but perhaps secretly loves also.

John Cheever finally did so in *The Falconer.* And as Fr. George Hunt wrote in *John Updike and the Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion, and Art:* "If . . . a writer like Updike betrays a keen religious and specifically Christian sensibility, then the mode of his 'assent' will take on a Biblical and implicitly theological coloration."[9]

All of us who have loved Updike's works, pray for such an "assent." For much is at stake, I think, for Updike, the supremely gifted writer with an obvious Christian calling, for his readers, and, indeed, for our culture and civilization. Much is at stake for me, one of his most ardent readers.

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[7]John Updike in an interview in *Life,* quoted without a footnote by George W. Hunt, S.J., *John Updike and the Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion and Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 17.
[8]John Updike, *Rabbit Run* (New York: Fawcett-Crest, 1960), 143.
[9]George W. Hunt, S.J., 213.

Singing Our Theology

Howard S. Olson
Lutheran Theological College, USA River, Tanzania

Who but Choan-Seng Song would think of interpreting the song of the cicadas theologically? After allowing his fertile imagination to disclose subtle motifs even in the chirping of an insect he concludes, "In actual fact, theology at its deepest has to be a song. That is why there is so much hymn and poetry in our Bible."[1]

Theology needs the wings that music can give to it, and in these few pages I want to try to explain how theology can be done musically. Certainly no one needs a compelling rationale to be convinced that "theology at its deepest has to be a song." From a pragmatic, unpoetic point of view it is obvious that music imprints theology more indelibly on the mind than any amount of ardent effort to memorize theology as cold prose



[1]Choan-Seng Song, "Theology that Tells Peoples' Passion Stories," *Theological Education* 21 (1984):24.

could do. How many of us can sing hymns without a hymnal, yet need to read the printed line when reciting the Scriptures? Apart from the aesthetics involved, it is simply good pedagogy to theologize musically. From my own denominational perspective I can say, "The key to the particularity of Lutheran worship is the Lutheran love of hymns" (LBW, 6).

Although the medium of this article is English, much of the content will be informed by the great linguistic and musical diversity of East Africa. Because sung theology is an organism of speech and music combined, it will be necessary to examine some of the constituents of this organism, namely, 1) meter, 2) tune, 3) text, and 4) rhyme. Meter will be treated first since it is integral to both the tune and the text.

Meter

Church music was basically plainsong until the 12th century. With the introduction of polyphony some kind of rhythmical order was necessitated to synchronize the various parts, and hence the emergence of meters or rhythmic modes. The main meters employed in musical texts of Western music are iambic, trochaic, anapaestic and dactyllic. The normal conventions to indicate a stressed (or strong) and an unstressed (or weak) syllable are – and u respectively. Thus, iambic (also called the rising foot) is u –, an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable; trochaic (also called the falling foot) is – u, a stressed followed by an unstressed syllable; anapaestic is u u –, two unstressed followed by a stressed syllable; and the less common dactyllic is – u u, a stressed followed by two unstressed syllables as in Longfellow's Hiawatha. Examples of these meters in Western hymns are:

Iambic: All PEOple THAT on EARTH do DWELL
Trochaic: HARK, the HERald ANgels SING, GLOry TO the NEWborn KING
Partially
Anapaestic: ImMORtal, inVISible, GOD only WISE
Partially
Dactyllic: o COME all ye FAITHful (as scored in *Nyimbo za Kikristo,* No. 16)

In looking further at just one of these meters, the iambic, one notes that the most common patterns are long meter, common meter and short meter. These are designated as follows: 1) LM—long meter consisting of four lines of eight syllables each, 2) CM—common meter consisting of four lines alternating between eight and six syllables, 3) SM—short meter consisting of four lines of six, six, eight and six syllables respectively. In addition to these, the common and short meters are often doubled and designated as CMD and SMD. Each of these three meters in turn, lends itself well to a specific kind of text. LM is appropriate for long praise texts, CMD works well for telling stories or teaching, and SM is suited to exhortation.[2]

The most common Swahili metrical form is the four-line stanza called *tarbia.* Three-lined stanzas are called *tathlitha,* and five-lined stanzas are called *takhmisa.* Swahili poems with 14 syllables per line, divided into segments of six and eight syllables are well-suited to singing and are pleasing to the ear.

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[2]Austin Lovelace, "Basic Tools of Hymnwriting," *The Hymn* 35 (1984):75.

In most cases of Western hymns in English, the tune and the text scrupulously observe the same meter and correct accent. Because of the monosyllabic nature of many key words in the Christian vocabulary (faith, hope, love, grace, sin, guilt, fear, death, life, joy, peace, work, rest, sing, speak, hear, God, Christ, Lord, etc.) English is extremely flexible in employing various meters.

However, with Bantu languages this is not the case, and the English words in parentheses above are from two to four syllables in Swahili, for example. Moreover, Bantu languages have their own prosodic features which must be observed in the music if the text is to be intelligible.[3]

The late Father A. M. Jones was helpful in drawing attention to correct metrical accent. But he went so far as to make the unwarranted assertion, "The Bantu languages are *all* (italics mine) trochaic in structure, that is, they are built up on the general principle that an accented syllable is followed by an unaccented one."[4] The trochaic pattern is useful in the case of Swahili musical texts because Swahili requires a penultimate stress. Unlike most Bantu languages, Swahili is not a tone language. Tone languages have an additional prosodic feature, namely pitch which may be both semantic and grammatical, and to which the music must conform.[5]

With reference to tone languages Professor Nketia of the University of Ghana writes, "Once you have created new words, you have already created a new tune."[6]

Tune

Providing that one is fully aware of the necessity of agreement in the meter of the text and the music, the tune as a vehicle of theology may be either original or borrowed. Certain of the following guidelines are to be born in mind in either case.

The key to the particularity of Lutheran worship is the love of hymns.

Range

Theology that is to be sung must be suited to the capabilities of the average singer, the common worshiper. First of all that means that the range (tessitura) must be reasonable and comfortable. Peter Cutts recommends that the range of a congregational hymn should normally not exceed an octave, and that "most of the tune be in the middle of the compass."[7] He also warns against introducing "sudden leaps" in a tune, not only because of its difficulty in singing, but also because of the possibility of creating an unintended accent in the text.

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[3]Howard S. Olson, "African Music in Christian Worship" in *African Initiatives in Religion,* ed. David Barrett (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971), 64.

[4]A. M. Jones, "Hymns for the African, Parts I and II," *Books for Africa* 27 (1957):56.

[5]Howard S. Olson, "The Relationship Between Lyrics and Melody in Rimi Vocal Music," *African Music* 6 (1980).

[6]Olson, "African Music in Christian Worship," 63.

[7]Harry Eskew, "Writing Hymn Texts and Tunes: An Interview with Brian Wren and Peter Cutts," *The Hymn* 35 (1984):73.

It is hoped that when the Lutheran Church in Tanzania produces a music edition of its forthcoming Swahili Hymnal, *Mwimbieni Bwana* it will rectify the oversight in its predecessor hymnal in this regard, and set hymns in a singable key. As a general rule, songs for congregational use should not have a melodic line which goes above E flat.

Quality

For a hymn tune to be memorable it must have a balance of repetition and variety. The repetition develops a feeling of familiarity, and the variety obviates anesthetizing monotony. Traditional African music has an infinite capacity for variety and repetition through the devices of antiphony and refrain. The leader introduces variety in the recitative, the response retains the repetition, and the refrain merges the leader and congregation in a satisfying unison.

One of the difficulties for the composer is the fact that the same tune must serve different stanzas adequately. While the same words are not repeated, the same tune is repeated, and as Cutts says, "To bear repetition it must be sufficiently interesting."[8]

Theological Orientation

One's theological position will affect one's musical interpretation at least, if not the composition itself. While many composers will indicate a pianissimo in the score when the text deals with peace, others, like Cutts, who interpret peace more dynamically, would not do so. Johann Sebastian Bach, because of the way he composed his music to interpret Scripture, was called "the fifth evangelist." When in the Christmas Oratorio he deals with the theme of peace he employed a harsh dissonance to show that for him peace was dear, wrought for us by the cruel death of God's son.[9]

Techniques

To add interest to one's composition differing note values should be employed, but here too, the note values should be such as not to cause problems of diction. For example, the note set to a word like "hosts" should be long enough for adequate pronunciation.

Chromaticism may be ideal for the clever progressions in barbershop harmony, but are hardly appropriate for congregational hymns. The use of accidentals, i.e., the temporary raising or lowering of a note within a measure, creates particular problems in African singing. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that most ethnic scales are not chromatic. Jones maintained that for African congregations, "Except in tunes where 'fe' is preceded by 'soh' we must abandon all tunes which have a single accidental in them."[10] Although accidentals are to be avoided, harmony need not be dull and restricted as in the mere three chords used in the hymn "Standing On the Promises."

Lovelace summarizes his advice to would-be hymn tune composers thus:

> 1. Think textually. The tune is designed to clothe the text with beauty. 2. Think melodically. The tune must stand alone. 3. Think vocally. Keep your hands off the piano while writing. 4.

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[8]Eskew, "Writing Hymn Texts," 73.
[9]Howard S. Olson, "Johann Sebastian Bach, God's Musical Ambassador," *African Theological Journal* 14 (1985):31.
[10]Jones, "Hymns for the African," 85.

> Think musically. A hymn tune should be just as good as any other kind of music.[11]

Jones has the following advice to makers of hymn books in Africa:

> 1. Exclude all hymns with false accents or unsingable tunes. 2. Write new hymns to some of your old words. 3. Try all new hymns for a month or two. 4. Let most new hymns have a chorus. 5. When writing words to a tune, be sure of the accent of the music. If it has iambic endings don't attempt it. 6. Do not forget African musical instruments. 7. Urge musical Africans to write hymns and tunes.[12]

Text

Purists would have us believe that one should write poetry only out of an inner compulsion, when an idea's gestation period has reached full term, and has no alternative but to burst into life. Lovelace urges that we "say things because we must, not because we may." K. Amri Abedi says, "Write poetry only when you can't help but write. Don't compose poetry about anything except that which really grabs you. Poetry written with such intensity has the strength to penetrate to the heart with an abiding beauty."[13] I am attracted by the idealism of these words, but they do not square with the demanding realities of a professor's life which I confront daily. I have found that inspiration is about ninety-five percent perspiration. More to the point is the practical view of Fred Pratt Green who writes, "Inspiration? If we wait for it, we may wait forever."[14] Inspiration comes in the doing of the task, just as in the Christian life knowledge comes in the act of obedience.

Content

Carl P. Daw, Jr. uses two technical terms to describe two essentials of worship, namely, *anamnesis* and *prolepsis*[15] These terms mean recollection and anticipation. Good hymns can fulfill these functions of worship in the stimulation of memory and the restoration of hope. To achieve this remains a constant challenge to hymn writers.

The hymn must be able to convey Christian truth understood by all, but which perhaps only this hymn writer can express adequately. For the hymn to be convincing writers should confine themselves to that which is familiar to them and in which they believe implicitly. Gracia Grindal feels that hymns can be spoiled by the writer's obsession with being different. "The major pitfall is our great modern romance with originality."[16]

The Rev. Sila Msangi was the first African teacher on the faculty of the Lutheran Theological College, Makumira. One of his great gifts was in the field of music. He wrote the words and music to well over 200 hymns before he died 30 years ago. In sharp contrast to many modern Tanzanian hymns which stress the final judgment, Msangi's hymns concentrated on the grace of God in Christ. His positive, joyful Christian texts set a high standard for those following in his train. The

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[11]Lovelace, "Basic Tools," 78.
[12]A. M. Jones, "Hymns for the African, Parts III and IV," *Books for Africa* 28 (1958):3.
[13]K. Amri Abedi, *Sheria za Kutunga Mashairi na Diwani ya Amri* (Dar es Salaam: East African Literature Bureau), 23.
[14]Clarkson, Daw, and Green, "Approaches to Hymn Writing," *The Hymn* 35 (1984):82.
[15]Clarkson, Daw, and Green, "Approaches," 80.
[16]Gracia Grindahl, "Pitfalls in Hymn Writing," *The Hymn* 35 (1984):82.

texts of Msangi are objective and express enduring Christian truths which will continue to be relevant in every age.

Language

Fred Pratt Green says the language of a hymn should be "simple enough to be understood, fresh enough not to be boring, and rich enough in meaning not to become stale with repetition." Margaret Clarkson echoes this sentiment with a slightly different formulation, "Good hymns should have loftiness of concept, dignity and reverence, beauty and simplicity of expression."[17]

The contemporary concern for inclusive language is long overdue. S. Paul Schilling tells of a hymnal companion published in 1940 with the avowed goal of inclusiveness in language, but in describing how exclusive language in the areas of culture, race and religion is undesirable said that it continues to divide "men."[18] Sexist language has been one of the most persistent offenders, and one which for long has been the least self-conscious. I would not conflate history and hurl invectives at earlier hymn writers, but it must be stated clearly that today sexist language is no longer tolerable. Male-dominated language in hymns is offensive to both discerning women and men. If, as opponents argue, male terms obviously include women, why then do female terms never include men? The not-so-subtle implication of male-dominated language is that women are inferior to men, and this unrecognized prejudice relegates women to a subordinate role in the church and society as a whole.

Sensitive to the injustice of sexist language the editors of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* have attempted to make necessary changes where possible. Hymn 47 becomes "Let All Together Praise Our God" (instead of "Praise God, the Lord, ye Sons of Men"), Hymn 144 becomes "Good Christian Friends" (instead of "men"), and Hymn 283 becomes "O God send heralds who will never falter" (instead of "men whose purpose will not falter"). There are many adequate substitutes for words such as "man, mankind, men" like "men and women, women and men, humanity, humankind, folk, kin, people, all, all of us, etc."

Not all attempts at altering hymns to remove the non-inclusive language have been uniformly successful. A revision of Harry Emerson Fosdick's "God of Grace and Glory" rephrased his fourth stanza which contains the words, "in the fight to make men free" and "that we fail not man nor thee." The consequent recasting became "in the journey to be free" and "ears to hear and eyes to see." The result was to distort the meter and lose Fosdick's original intention. This is where hymn writers creating new texts have the great advantage. They do not have to rework something requiring alteration, but can make their text egalitarian from the outset.

> Hymnody belongs to the people, not to the poets.

[17]Clarkson, Daw, and Green, "Approaches," 79, 81.
[18]S. Paul Schilling, "Inclusive Language," *The Hymn* 34 (1983):201.

It is not only sexist language which is not inclusive. The hymnwriter will want to choose language and images which reflect the corporate experience of the worshiping community rather than the pious sentiments of one individual. Concern for corporate expression also helps one avoid the sentimentality that comes with many subjective hymns.

While it may seem platitudinous to say that the text must be clear, yet it cannot be overstressed. When one sings a hymn in the fellowship of a service there is no way one can go back over the unclear passage, unless one quits singing the rest of the hymn. As an example of the subtlety that darkens lucidity one may quote the Lenten Preface to the Communion Service in the *Service Book and Hymnal* of the Lutheran Church in America.

> Who on the Tree of the Cross didst give salvation unto mankind; that whence death arose, thence life also might rise again: and that he who by a tree once overcame, might likewise by a Tree be overcome. . . .

A hymn has even less opportunity to be reread than does this prayer. Therefore if the meaning of a hymn text is not clear on the very first reading it should be altered accordingly.

Gracia Grindal shares some uncommon common sense when she writes about the commonplace in hymns. She boldly asserts in the indicative mood, "Hymnody . . . belongs to the people far more than it does to the poets . . . It is simply not possible to sing hymns in church which are too idiosyncratic . . . Sometimes I describe the work of the hymnwriter's craft as being one of trying to suppress the Muse as much as possible."[19] In some instances one has the very uncomfortable feeling that in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* both poets and musicians have treated this volume as a private arena for exhibiting their own peculiar virtuosity.

Sources

Most hymnwriters agree that Scriptures provide one of the most reliable, relevant and satisfying sources of inspiration for hymn texts. Grindal laments, "The biblical witness, to my ears, is growing more and more faint in modern hymnody, as the clash of our own modern platitudes grows disturbingly louder."[20]

The best in devotional literature across the ecumenical and historical spectrum of the Church can provide the stimulus to creative hymnsmithing. Even a cursory survey of such literature reveals the recurring themes which are constant from age to age, but which need to be vested anew in modern dress.

Practical Advice to Beginners

This section will simply collate varied bits of knowledge gleaned from experience over a long period of time, and which may prove helpful to the reader.

Choose the theme of your hymn carefully. Make sure it is developed with clear and logical progression. Avoid stringing stanzas together loosely which are all on different subjects.

After choosing an interesting theme expend much effort on the opening line. It

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[19]Gracia Grindahl, *Lessons in Hymn Writing* (St. Paul, MN: Luther Northwestern Seminary, 1983), 28.
[20]Grindahl, "Pitfalls," 84.

should appeal to both the ear and the eye. If attention is not caught at the outset you are unlikely to capture it midway.

Martin Luther did not think it strange to create and sing 15 stanzas for a hymn such as his "Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her."[21] Archbishop Johann Olaf Wallin of Sweden produced many very long texts for some of his 269 hymns. Modern hymnody will not permit such lengthy hymns. Therefore a hymn today must be short enough to be sung unbroken to the end.

In both English and Swahili, hymn texts which utilize strong nouns and verbs are more effective than those which rely on many adjectives. Texts should be reworked to be pruned of every unnecessary word. English texts are best which avoid polysyllabic words, but this is hardly advice to follow in many Bantu languages.

Before publishing a hymn text, subject it to the criticism of someone who is not a close friend, someone who will not be tempted to flatter you. Critics are to be sought, not feared, for an able critic may improve your text considerably and save you from embarrassing infelicities.

Perhaps a good example of a compelling text is more helpful than reams of advice. It is hard to imagine any finer artistry than that of Jaroslav J. Vajda's translation of Transovsky's text to a 12th century Bohemian carol. Many of the subtleties of rhyme dealt with in the next section are contained in this carol, "Come Rejoicing, Praises Voicing" (LBW, 66).

1. Come rejoicing, praises voicing;
   Christmas Day is breaking.
   The eternal Lord supernal
   Human form is taking.
   He is born in a stall,
   Now he lies, infant small,
   In a manger, heav'nly stranger,
   Lord of all;
   In a manger, heav'nly stranger,
   Lord of all.

2. Whom the sages and the ages
   Anxiously awaited,
   Angels proudly, heralded loudly
   In their songs elated.
   Let us, too, in these days,
   Thankful hearts gladly raise,
   To the tender infant render all our praise;
   To the tender infant render all our praise.

3. Child appealing, light revealing,
   Jesus Christ, our pleasure;
   God, yet very Son of Mary,
   Heav'n's gift and treasure.
   Mighty king, gentle friend,
   As our Lord to us bend,
   And caressing us with blessing, now descend;
   And caressing us with blessing, now descend.

Rhyme

The simplest rhyming allowed in the long, common and short meters is the rhyming of the last word(s) of lines two and four. The more accomplished poets will rhyme lines one and three also. This double rhyming has the technical name, "cross rhyming," and is denoted by the letters ABAB. Of course it is possible to rhyme lines one and two, and three and four as AABB. Austin Lovelace discourages the AABB pattern saying, "The danger is that the mind is inclined to settle down at the end of line two."[22]

The greater the number of lines the greater the possibility for varied patterns.

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[21]Howard S. Olson, "Luther's Legacy of Hymnody in Africa," *African Theological Journal* 12 (1983):23.
[22]Lovelace, "Basic Tools," 76.

Again, Lovelace suggests ABABCC, ABABCCB, and AABCCB.

In addition to the above examples of end rhyming one occasionally encounters in lines of eight syllables an inner rhyming between the fourth and eighth syllable. The third line of each of the stanzas of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is a case in point. These lines are as follows:

1 Above thy *deep* and dreamless *sleep* . . .
2 While mortals *sleep,* the angels *keep* . . .
3 So God im*parts* to human *hearts* . . .
4 Cast out our *sin,* and enter *in* . . .

The rhyming thus far referred to is direct rhyme as in the lines above from O Little Town of Bethlehem. There is another type of rhyme which appears to have stemmed from the visual rather than the aural image. Examples of them are again/pain, love/move, good/food. These are called slant rhyme.[23] Isaac Watts may have been satisfied with slant rhyme, but to most people it is very disturbing. In Robert Grant's "Saviour, when in dust to thee," the word "litany" was slant rhymed to "high," "eye" and "cry." This made some people so uncomfortable that they refused to use this hymn. In the LBW version, no. 91 the word "litany" was changed to cry so that it would rhyme directly with high, eye and sigh.

Advice on rhyming

For rhymes to be attractive they should not be contrived, but be natural. Both Lovelace in English and Abedi in Swahili agree that the thoughts of the poet must give birth to the rhyme. The danger for those unversed in versing is that the constraints of the rhyme may dictate or distort the direction the poet originally intended for his hymn.

Rhyming is never easy. It can be made somewhat easier, however, if one studies the best in poetry. One should not imitate indiscriminately for there is much that passes for poetry which is unworthy of the name.

Fluency in rhyming is dependent in large measure on a good vocabulary and a vivid imagination. In the case of Swahili poetry, rhyming is made easier by a thorough knowledge of the speech of the elderly, and in producing theological poetry one needs to be at home in the language, idioms and metaphors of Scripture.

A hymn must be short enough to be sung unbroken to the end.

Conclusion

Buechner once wrote, "Theology is the study of God and his ways. For all we know, the dung beetles may study man and his ways and call it humanology. If so, we would probably be more touched and amused than irritated. One hopes that God feels likewise."

If we sing our theology aright, using at least a few suggestions from the preceding pages, it could possibly be that we might expand the repertoire of the cicadas.

[23]Batastini, Glover, Revell, Vajda, "What Hymnal Committees Look for: Suggestions for Hymn Writers," *The Hymn* 35 (1984):99.

Evangelism and Spirit: 1 Thessalonians 1

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Introduction

Each day at this conference a New Testament scholar and a systematic theologian address a facet of the theme "Holy Spirit—Human Spirit." Today's topic is the "Spirit and Evangelism."[1] The exegete in such a tandem presentation has a specific function in the work of theology: to state as precisely as possible what biblical terms and texts mean in their particularity, in this case 1 Thessalonians 1 and the terms "gospel," "kerygma," and "Spirit."[2] On the basis of that investigation the exegete asks whether the full biblical message in its concrete particularity is included in the theology of the church: in this particular case whether the evangelistic message and the church's understanding of the role of the Spirit in evangelism preserve the sharp contours of Paul's thought.

Theologians' papers are, inevitably, the result of a process of selection and refraction of biblical materials through the lens of ecclesial tradition and/or a particular confession (e.g. Luther's Small Catechism) or theologian (e.g. Martin Luther, Karl Barth). A systematic formulation is inevitably influenced by a philosophic system, whether a form of Aristotelianism or a modern mode or system of thought. That is not to be faulted. But in relation to that method the exegete is called to serve as the "biblical conscience" of theology—just as the systematic theologian is called to remind the exegete, *inter alia,* that she or he needs to hear the confession and testimony of the church in understanding the text. It is that spirit that the following observations are made.

I. Preliminaries

1. No books in the New Testament are directed to outsiders; all of them aim at strengthening the Christians for whom they are written in the face of particular problems

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[1]This paper was originally presented to the bishops and presidents of the member churches of The Lutheran Council in the United States of America at a meeting in Keystone, Colorado in August, 1985.
[2]I discussed the role of the Spirit in Paul in the chapter "The Spirit in Pauline and Johannine Theology," in *The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church,* ed. Paul D. Opsahl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 47–65. That material will not be repeated here, except incidentally as it impinges on 1 Thessalonians.

which they face. It is not surprising, therefore, that we have almost no records of the evangelistic work of the apostles.[3] The closest we come is Acts' record of sermons preached to non-Christian audiences; but Luke writes twenty or more years after the last sermons he records, and more than fifty years after the events of Pentecost and the earliest life of the church in Palestine. The sermons in Acts are stylized, designed more to instruct the church of the 80s about how it should live than report the details of the life of the earliest church. Luke's Paul differs from the writer of the letters we have at significant points.

2. There is a sense in which the New Testament begins and ends with Paul. "Paul" is the first word to be written in the New Testament (1 Thess 1:1); and Paul's difficult words are the subject of the last paragraph to be composed (2 Pet 3:14–16). Paul's letters are written in the first generation of the church (C.E. 30–60), the age of rapid missionary expansion; yet we have no missionary letter from Paul's own hand. Rather his letters are addressed to communities that have heard and accepted the initial proclamation (not always Paul's). They do not lay foundations, but build on them. Corinthians and Galatians deal with problems caused by misunderstandings of Paul's message or with ideas introduced by teachers who have come in after Paul has left. Philippians is in part a letter of thanks for financial support and in part a letter rejecting (3:2–4:1) a "Judaizing" of Paul's message. Romans, written to a church Paul did not found, sought to unify the Roman church so that it could serve as the base of operations for Paul's western Mediterranean mission, as Antioch had served in the east.[4] Philemon intercedes on behalf of a runaway slave. All the letters relate to specific situations.[5]

II. 1 Thessalonians

3. 1 Thessalonians is the earliest Pauline letter, though not written when Paul was a neophyte Christian. He had probably been proclaiming the gospel for some twenty years when he wrote 1 Thessalonians. It is a striking letter that never once cites the Old Testament; indeed the new Aland 26th edition puts



[3]The standard work on early evangelism is Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983 = 1970). It deserves careful reading. A useful introduction to the literary and historical character of Acts is Gerhard Krodel, *Proclamation Commentaries: Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

[4]One indication of the Roman church's non-Pauline foundation is the interpretation of Jesus' death as covenant sacrifice available only to Jewish Christians, Rom 3:24–26. Paul himself interprets that sacrifice universally in Rom 3:27–30.

[5]Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, and the Pastoral Epistles, are probably written later by Paulinists seeking to apply Paul's message to new situations. See J. Paul Sampley, Joseph Burgess. Gerhard Krodel, and Reginald H. Fuller, *Proclamation Commentaries: Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), for an overview of the reasons for such later dating. This in no way implies a lesser value or lower canonical status for these letters.

not one word of the text in boldface or italic type. No Old Testament figure or person is named. Little use is made of Old Testament cultic or sacrificial language. The themes of the true Israel and the covenant do not appear. There is no major theological opposition to Paul in the church—though eschatology is a problem for its members. It is probable that some members of the church thought Paul, like one of the itinerant philosophers, had forgotten them once he left. Thus the letter gives the impression that Thessalonica is a Hellenistic city and the church a largely gentile community. The language of the letter is strongly hellenistic in character. The great themes of the later Pauline letters are absent or, at best, minimally present. 1 Thessalonians has no developed doctrine of Christ's death (though 5:9–10 mentions it in a framework given by earlier Christian tradition). Paul does not mention his apostolate in the praescript or the later parts of the letter. Indeed, the first person singular is rarely to be found. The great Pauline antitheses, law/promise, faith/works, flesh/spirit, are totally absent, and terms such as "justification," "law," and "grace" do not appear. ("Grace" does appear as part of a formula in the letter opening, 1:1) These terms appear elsewhere in situations of controversy with Jewish Christians. In short, this letter shows us an unusual Paul, his theological emphases not determined by controversy, at ease with his addressees.[6]

4. Its early date and lack of controversy make 1 Thessalonians a precious document for the student of primitive Christianity. It gives us valuable information about the structure, ministry, worship, and ethical teaching of the early church. It is the only Pauline letter that describes the initial preaching of Paul and the manner of its acceptance by the community (1:2–10) in some detail.[7] 1 Thessalonians gives us unique insight into Paul the evangelist, insight that is impressive and important.[8]

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[6]1 Thessalonians should alert scholars not to work with a model of the ideal Pauline message, drawn from Romans or Galatians, against which to measure the theology of a given book. It shows how much the situation addressed influences formulation, a reminder stressed by Johannes Munck, "I Thess. I.9–10 and the Missionary Preaching of Paul," *New Testament Studies* 9 (1962/63) 95–110.

[7]There are two other places in which Paul mentions such initial preaching: Gal 3:1–4, 4:13–15 and 1 Cor 2:1–5. Both stress the crucified Jesus as content of Paul's initial proclamation. Of course, there are passages in other New Testament books that imply evangelistic outreach. Matt 28:18–20 comes immediately to mind. But it gives no content for evangelistic proclamation and does not use a technical term for such proclamation, e.g. *keryssein* ("proclaim as herald") or *euangelizesthai* ("tell good news"); rather it speaks of the catechetical teaching that is to follow baptism, i.e., it is more related to the inner development of the Matthaean community than to its missionary extension. Luke 24:44–49 literarily sets the stage for the book of Acts (cf. Acts 1:8), stressing the fulfillment of prophecy that is reflected in the sermons in Acts.

[8]1 Thessalonians is in many ways the most disregarded of Paul's letters. Much exegetical ink has been used on the eschatology of 4:13–5:10, but little attention has been given to the epistle other than that. Up-to-date commentaries in English include F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians.* Word Biblical Commentary 45 (Waco: Word Books, 1982.); I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians.* New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983). The most original and stimulating recent work is that of Willi Marxsen, *Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher.* Züricher Bibelkommentare (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979). Raymond F. Collins has gathered his important articles in *Studies on the First Letter to the Thessalonians.* Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium LXVI (Leuven: University Press, 1984). His first essay (pp. 3–75) surveys recent scholarship, while pp. 385–401 present an extensive bibliography of commentaries and articles that have appeared since 1956.

III. Paul's Initial Proclamation: Faith in God

5. 1 Thess 1:6–10 is the key section for our concerns. Paul refers to his initial proclamation when he talks of "what sort of entrance to you we had" [1:9] and refers to their "receiving the word" [1:6]. These expressions clearly refer to his initial preaching and the Thessalonian response in a way important for our topic. The passage presents a number of significant items for consideration: a summary of Paul's initial proclamation [1:9–10], a reference to their "imitation" of him that suggests a consideration of Paul's "life-style" as proclaimer [1:6 and chapter 2:1 [12], the powerful acts that accompanied Paul's gospel [1:5], and the effects of Paul's proclamation on the Thessalonians. Each helps to clarify Paul's mode of evangelism.

Paul calls to faith in God more than to faith in Jesus!

6. Paul's initial proclamation is summarized in 1:9–10. It is a "classic description" of the fundamental message of early Christian missionary proclamation to non-Jews. The Thessalonians were known for "their faith directed toward God" (1:8).[9] It is striking that Paul does not call for faith in Jesus in 1 Thessalonians (cf. the use of the verb "believe" in 1:4, 2:4, 10, 13, 4:14 and the noun "faith" in 1:3, 8; 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 10; 5:8). Rather, faith is directed to God. This blunt statement holds good, in general, throughout Paul. Thus only in Gal 2:16 and Phil 1:29 is Jesus the object of the verb; in most cases where *pistis* ("faith") is followed by the genitive *Iesou* ("of Jesus"), it denotes God's fidelity demonstrated publicly through Jesus, as in Gal 3:22 & 26. Paul calls to faith in God more than to faith in Jesus! That is certainly true in 1 Thessalonians.[10]

7. 1 Thess 1:9–10 gives content to that "faith directed to God." It is first and foremost a saying "No!" to the idols (images) of their past and a "turning to God" [1:9]. The verb "turn to" is infrequent in Paul,[11] occurring elsewhere only in 2 Cor 3:16 (but not in the sense of "conversion") and Gal 4:9, where it is used of a return to pagan religios-

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[9]The RSV translation "in God" is imprecise and undertranslates the Greek phrase, which has unusual dignity and sonority.

[10]The only discussion of "faith" and "believe" in 1 Thessalonians known to me is the article by Collins, "The Faith of the Thessalonians," *Louvain Studies* 7 (1978/79) 249–269, reprinted in *Studies*, 209–229. Rudolf Bultmann, *pisteuein*, etc. *TDNT* 6 (1968) 203–228, esp. 217–222, also presents excellent material.

[11]The term is found often in Acts 14:15; 26:18 of turning away from idols; 9:35; 11:21 of turning "to the Lord"; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18 & 20 of turning "to God." Paul regularly uses other terms for conversion, e.g. *gnônai ton theon* ["to come to know God"], *gnôsthênai hypo tou theou* ["to be known by God"] in Gal 4:9; *dechesthai ton logon* ["to receive the word"] (Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 3:5; 15:2 & 11; Gal 2:16); *paralambanein logon akoês* ["to take the word of hearing"] (1 Thess 2:13). Paul also uses the verb "obey" (*hypakouein*) to express conversion (Rom 15:8; cf. 1:5). See the important article by Gerhard Friedrich, "Ein Tauflied hellenistischer Judenchristen," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (1965) 503–505.

ity. Here it denotes turning in faith, i.e. conversion. Their first act was a turning to God, not to Jesus![12]

8. This interpretation of "faith toward God" in 1:8 is explicated by the phrase "to serve a living and authentic God." The phrase reflects the Jewish confession of faith, *heis theos,* "One God!"—shared by Christians and used by Paul (Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:6; Gal 3:20). That acclamation summarizes the Jewish *Shema* (Deut 6:4–9), a creed that joined Jew and Christian and separated both from the polytheism of the Greco-Roman world. God is both "living" and "authentic." The terms are both unusual adjectives for God in Paul. The phrase "living God" occurs in Rom 14:11 in a citation of Isa 49:18 & 45:23, where it is used as an oath formula. Rom 9:26 cites Hos 2:1. (Cf. 2 Cor 6:16) In 2 Cor 3:3 Paul ties the "living God" to the Spirit; *pneuma* is the power of the eschatological covenant that makes alive (1 Cor 15:45), i.e. "spirit" is God in his creative activity. God is living because he is both alive himself and causes life.[13]

9. The designation of God as *alêthinos,* "true," is unique in Paul. The term means "authentic" as opposed to spurious. It has antecedents in the Old Testament (cf. Ex 34:6; 2 Chr 15:3; Ps 85:15).[14] Paul speaks of God as "true" in Rom 3:4, stressing God's speaking the truth as opposed to lying people. Together the two adjectives mark God off from the "idols" that the Thessalonians have left behind.[15]

IV. Initial Proclamation: The Role of Jesus

10. 1:10 adds a christological affirmation to the theological confession of 1:9. A number of linguistic features mark the verse off as pre- [or un-] Pauline in formulation.[16] The Son is defined as the one "whom he (God) raised from [the] dead, Jesus." There is no article in Greek before "dead"; everywhere else Paul uses the phrase he employs

[12]Marxsen argues that Paul found his converts from those non-Jews who had been attracted by the teaching of the synagogue, without converting. That is possible, but not compelling.

[13]Hans-Joachim Kraus calls attention to the significance of the "living God" motif in the Old Testament. The phrase "as God lives" is used as an oath formula (cf. 1 Sam 20:3 & 21) to validate one's words; "living God" is used in hymnic passages of praise (Ps 18:47–49) and in descriptions of God as source of life (Jer 2:13; 17:13; Ps 36:10; 42:3; 84:3). Cf. "Der lebendige Gott: Ein Kapitel biblischer Theologie," *Evangelische Theologie* 27 (1967) 169–200. Reinhard Deichgraeber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 99, has a good short discussion of the concept *theos zôn.*

[14]Deichgraeber, 89, calls attention to the following passages as giving background for understanding the term: Deut 32:4; Ps 31:6, Isa 65:16, 2 Chr 15:3; 1QH 15.25; Jub. 25:15 & 25.

[15]It is striking that Paul does not use a kind of natural theology argument, as Luke has him do in both Acts 14:15–17 and 17:23–31; Paul is consistent here with the position enunciated in Rom 1:18ff. The closest Paul comes to recognition of the Greek or Roman *pantheion* is in 1 Cor 8:6, where he allows that there "are indeed many gods and many lords," but later interprets them as *daimonia,* using a term that meant "gods" to the Greek, but "demonic beings" to Christians (cf. 1 Cor 10:19–21).

[16]The verb *anamenein,* "wait for," occurs only here in Paul. Paul, of course, knows of the parousia of Jesus; but his regular verb for that expectation is *apekdechesthai,* as in Rom 8:19, 23, 25; 1 Cor 1:7; Gal 5:5. Paul does not use the title "his Son" [i.e., "Son of God"] elsewhere in eschatological contexts, but rather the title "Lord" (*kyrios*), as in the "revelation of the Lord" (1 Cor 1:7) or the "parousia of the Lord" (1 Thess 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 1 Cor 15:23) or in "day of the Lord" (1 Cor 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14) or "day of Christ" (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16). *Ek tôn ouranôn,* "from [out of] the heavens" [plural, incorrectly

the article. That difference also suggests the citation of an earlier formulation. The idea is Pauline, found throughout his letters [with slight variation], e.g. in Rom 8:11 God is "He who raised Christ from the dead." Rom 4:24 describes the Roman Christians as "those who believe on the one who raised Jesus from the dead." Cf. Rom 8:11; Gal 1:1; 2 Cor 4:14, etc. The formula stresses the action of God in the resurrection of Jesus.[17]

11. Rom 10:9 shows how Paul understands the significance of the phrase. "If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart 'God raised him from the dead,' you will be saved." By raising Jesus from the dead God at the same time appointed him *Kyrios,* the *kosmokrator* who rules the universe. The title that most goes with the resurrection is "Lord," not "Son."[18] The early confession was *kyrios Iesous,* not *kyrios ho huios.* Cf. Acts 2:36.[19]

12. Paul interprets the eschatological role of Jesus, the Son, with the words "the one who saves us from the wrath that is on the way" (1:10). There is strong particularity in the use of the name Jesus; the coming Deliverer is the one who died and was raised, a real human being. The unusual term for "saves" (*hryomai*) occurs only here in Paul. It is another mark of the pre-Pauline origin of Paul's initial message. Paul proclaimed a person, not an idea. God has appointed him the judge and deliverer from the eschatological judgement (cf. Rom 1:18 for the idea of wrath, Rom 5:9 for salvation from wrath). In Thessalonians Jesus' role as deliverer lies in the future, as it does in Phil 3:20. The resurrection shows that he is God's agent to rescue. The proclamation in 1:9–10 is the presupposition for the comfort of 4:13–18.

V. Implications for Evangelism

13. The kerygmatic summary in 1:9–10 suggests a number of significant points: (1) It stresses the priority of God in action and as object of faith. Jesus is presented as the one whom God raised and appointed. There is not room in Paul for a Jesusology that ignores God. The resurrection of Jesus puts people before the living God in whom they are to have faith. The decisive occurrence of this motif later in Paul is found in Rom 4 at

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translated in RSV], is unique in Paul. He speaks of the Lord coming "from heaven," *ap' ouranou* (in the singular, 1 Thess 4:16; cf. Rom 1:18). The definite article and the plural show that a Semitism lies behind the phrase. Paul uses an "inherited theologoumenon whose language he preserves. It stresses that Jesus has a role as eschatological figure.

Paul uses the title "Son [of God]" or "His Son" in formulae which use the verb "send." Cf. Rom 8:3 and Gal 4:4. The title occurs elsewhere in a citation of a creed in Rom 1:4, in 2 Cor 11:19; Gal 2:20; and 1 Cor 15:28. Cf. Albert Seeberg, *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1966 = 1903), 60, 61.

[17]This creedal statement has been well discussed by Klaus Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1973), 27–48. See also Werner Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God.* SBT 50 (London: SCM, 1966), 20–26.

[18]Martin Hengel, " 'Christos' in Paul," *Between Jesus and Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 66, points out that Paul uses "Christos" 10 times in 1 Thessalonians, "Jesus" 16 times, and "kyrios" 24 times. Vernon Neufeld, *The Earliest Christian Confessions* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 48, argues that Paul uses "Christ" in passages which refer to the death of Jesus, e.g. Rom 5:6, 8; 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11, 2 Cor 5:15; 1 Thess 5:10. Thus the statistics in regard to the occurrence of titles supports the stress on eschatology.

[19]Wengst, 41, 42, and Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribner's, 1965), 165, suggest that "Son" may represent an earlier "Son of Man." Possible, but not, in my opinion, likely: in favor of it is the eschatological framework.

the end. Faith puts us before the God "who makes the dead alive, who calls non-existent things into existence." That is what the case of Abraham makes clear.

Paul's word was ratified by God's powerful action.

14. (2) Verse 10 presents the Christian basis for knowing that God is indeed the "living and authentic God." The resurrection of Jesus is the demonstration that God has life and gives life. Paul makes that a central affirmation of his theology; cf. Rom 4:16–24; 8:11, etc. Thus the proclamation of God is made specifically Christian by the fact that the resurrection of Jesus becomes the hallmark by which God is known. Faith in God is therefore faith in the God "who raises the dead, who calls non-existent things into existence." While 1 Thess 1:9 describes God in terms shared with the Old Testament, v. 10 shows that for Christians God is no longer identified as the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but as the God who is the father of our Lord, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess 1:1).

15. (3) It is not surprising that Paul therefore lays more stress on God than on Jesus in 1 Thessalonians. Paul's message is "the gospel of God" (2:2, 8, 9); only once is it called the "gospel of Christ" (3:2). The term "gospel" in 1:5, 2:4 probably should be understood as the gospel *of God.* The phrase "word of God" (2:13, 2x) suggests that "word" in 1:6 and "word of the Lord" in 1:8 should both be understood as God's word, not Christ's. The Gospel reveals *God's actions* and not merely or only Jesus' life and significance. God is the one who calls people into his kingdom (2:12).[20] Thus God is the primary actor for Paul in Thessalonians, though his action is done first and foremost to [and through] Jesus. To use a later formulation, Jesus and his actions are the door–sill over which we move from the *deus absconditus* to the *deus revelatus.* Therefore it is not surprising that faith is characterized as *pistis pros ton theon,* "faith directed to God" (1:8). In all of this there is no reference to the Spirit in 1 Thessalonians. Luther's language in the *Small Catechism* ("the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel") finds no support in Paul's language—though we add immediately that he is not the entire New Testament. All evangelism that disregards God is less than biblical.

16. (4) Paul neither presupposes or urges uniformity in missionary proclamation. The kerygmatic summary in vv. 9–10 presents Jesus as the eschatological deliverer. It is not less than adequate because it does not mention the death of Jesus that removes sin or the sending action of God. When I was a seminary student more than 30 years ago, students were excited about C. H. Dodd's presumed recovery of *the* kerygma from the sermons of Acts in *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (New

[20]This stress on God is found throughout Paul's letters. (See the following passages: Rom 4:17, 8:30; 9:12, 24; 1 Cor 1:9; 7:15, 17, 22; Gal 1:6, 15; 5:8, 13; [Eph 4:1, 4; Col 3:15 preserve this usage in the deutero-Paulines[; 1 Thess 2:12, 4:7; 5:24 [cf. 23].) The "spirit" is mentioned is none of these passages.

York: Harper, 1951 = 1944). What Dodd recovered was the outline of the sermons in Acts, but not *the* primitive kerygma, since there is no one single primitive proclamation.

17. (5) Martin Hengel[21] describes the understanding of Paul, the preacher, in this context: "As the herald of the Kyrios, the apostle announces to the world his act of reconciliation and lordly rule and in so doing gives the nations a last chance to accede to the revelation of the righteousness of God in the person of the Kyrios through the obedience of faith, and in this way to escape the threat of judgment (1 Thess 1.9f.; Rom 5:9f.; 2 Cor 5:20f.; Rom 1:17ff.)." That illuminates Paul's use of the terms *sôtêria* and *sôtêr* to refer to the future coming Jesus in his letters. Hengel's reference to the righteousness of God does not fit the linguistic character of 1 Thessalonians, but the pattern of action he describes does. One can understand Paul's urgency.

VI. The Thessalonian Experience: Faith and Spirit

18. Paul calls attention to the Thessalonian imitation of him and the Lord (1:6). Just as the character of God is known from his action in Jesus, so Paul's life style was determined by his message: "Just as we were approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, that's the way we speak" (2:4). The practical implications are spelled out for Paul's case in 2:1–12. Although he had suffered just before and had been "manhandled" in Philippi, yet he took courage to speak the gospel (2:1). Paul did not teach for profit or reputation; he shared not only the gospel of God, but also himself as he worked to support himself while preaching the good news (2:5–9). In short the work of the evangelist was determined by the evangel.[22] The Thessalonians imitated that characteristic of Paul in their mode of receiving the Gospel (1:6) in the middle of persecution. Paul's message was commended by his life that conformed to it. It called forth imitation by his auditors.

19. In 1 Thessalonians, God is the one who gives the Spirit (4:8); that correlates with Paul's stress on God in the letter. The acceptance of the Gospel was accompanied by powerful confirmatory actions. Twice Paul refers to the Holy Spirit in chapter one. His gospel did not come "in argument only, but also in power and Holy Spirit and full assurance" (1:5). Paul underscores the fact that "our gospel" (1:5) is not simply subjective; a gospel that came only in *logos* would be that. Rather his word was ratified by God's powerful action that produced a certainty that expressed itself as joy given by the Holy Spirit in the middle of persecution (1:6).[23] This experience made the Thessalonians a model for others, as Paul had been a model

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[21]"The Origins of the Christian Mission," *Between Jesus and Paul,* 51.

[22]In contrast to some wandering philosophers (described well by Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 32.8–11). Abraham Malherbe has illuminated Paul's life-style by careful comparison of the description in 2:1–10 with that of Cynic philosophers: "Gentle as a Nurse: The Cynic Background to 1 Thess ii," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970) 203–217. In many ways 1 Thessalonians is more a document of Roman Hellenism than any other of Paul's letters.

[23]There is an analogous argument in Gal 3:1–5, where the proclamation (of the crucified Christ) had been ratified by the gift of the Spirit. Paul uses an experiential argument to reinforce the gospel among his congregation.

for them. Paul holds that the proclamation of the gospel is given divine ratification.[24]

20. Finally, Paul also states that the gospel produced great effects among the Thessalonians. He speaks in 1:2 of a surprising triad, each noun modified by a genitive of description: "work of faith, labor of love, endurance of hope." Faith, hope, and love are known elsewhere in Paul (1 Cor 13:13; cf. Rom 5:1–5; Gal 5:5–6). The three are here not to be separated from one another. All of the basic nouns stress action: work, labor, endurance. "In its original sense this triad describes the essential mark of Christian life, that is based on faith, is supported by love for other Christians, and is directed to the eschatological future" [M. Dibelius].[25] Elsewhere Paul credits such effects to the Spirit. Joy comes from the Holy Spirit (1:6), and that results in the Thessalonians passing on the Gospel. The Spirit in Paul is the source and norm of the life of the Christian community. When Thessalonians do not observe proper actions in marriage, Paul states that this is an action against God, "who gave the Holy Spirit to you" (4:8). The Spirit in Paul is not present *extra ecclesiam* [outside the church]; in Pauline thought, the gospel produces the Spirit, not vice versa (cf. Gal 3:1–5). The Spirit is not cause of faith, but powerful gift of God to faith.[26] The Spirit is never the subject of the verb *kaleô* ("to call"). The Spirit is the controlling power in the Christian community, but not the initiator of faith in Paul. Evangelization that results only in conceptualization of the Gospel is not gospel proclamation at all. The Thessalonians *did* something; they did not just know or experience something.

Conclusion

21. This cursory examination of Paul's initial preaching to non-Jews produced some surprising conclusions. Paul has no hesitation about fitting his proclamation to the character of his audience. The implications of this attitude for the modern world in which racial, sexist, political and economic injustice are endemic are immense and deserve thoughtful discussion. The stress on faith in God rather than faith in Jesus is a warning against a false Jesusology that contradicts the first article of the creed. The presentation of Jesus concentrates on the theological implications of his resurrection and his eschatological role. There is amazingly little stress on soteriology. It is striking that Paul does not credit the faith of the Thessalonians to the Spirit. The Spirit ratifies the proclamation by producing effects. Much here that is at first unusual in emphasis is caused by Paul's stress on God. In the final analysis Paul's missionary proclamation in 1 Thessalonians 1 raises for us the question of the priority of faith in God in our evangelistic proclamation.

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[24]It comes as something of a shock to read the most recent work by Ramsay MacMullen, Roman historian at Yale University. Examining the accounts of conversions prior to Constantine (but later than the New Testament), he concludes that the primary basis for conversion was miracle, whether healings or other deeds of power, not preaching. Cf. *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale, 1984), 25–42.

[25]I translated the citation from Martin Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I–II, an die Philipper* 3. Aufl. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1937), 3.

[26]The occurrence of the word *pneuma*, "Spirit," in Romans illustrates the Pauline stress well. The term occurs thirty times in the letter.

Creation and Redemption; Ministry and Vocation

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I.

Christianity is not concerned primarily with religion; it is concerned with life. God, who redeems and calls people to faith, continually creates all life. The purpose of salvation proclaimed in Christ's name is the restoration and fulfillment of creation. If Christians forget this basic biblical truth, they become preoccupied with religion and spiritual things at the expense of the created world and its activities and institutions. On the other hand, if Christians are concerned only with this world but not with its God, they will fail to have an adequate understanding of the world's finitude and sinfulness and its need for redemption. Any consideration of the role of Christian people in the communities of church and society needs to begin by both distinguishing and relating God's creative and redemptive work.[1]

When the Bible speaks about God's creative work, it is less interested in the question of how the world began than in how God is related to the world now.[2] Is all life from God? Is God involved in what is going on? The creation passages of the Bible portray God as always creating anew (preserving, upholding, transforming) so that there is no place, time, or activity in which God is not involved. Yet God is not portrayed as acting alone; the Creator works through the creation, and creatures relate to the Creator as they relate to other creatures. Martin Luther stressed this point in his Catechism and in his vivid descriptions of God milking cows through the dairy farmer and creating and raising children through their parents.

God's verdict on the creation is that it is good—it is good to be a creature, dependent upon God, limited and finite, but also endowed with certain kinds of freedom and re-

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[1]See Gustaf Wingren, *Credo* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), and Marc Kolden, *Called by the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983).
[2]Claus Westermann, *Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

sponsibility (Gen 1–2). The institutions and structures of society have a God-given legitimacy and integrity precisely because they could not exist without God's creative work; they exist in order to care for the creation (Romans 13, 1 Peter 2). Our service to God will always involve service in society.

The creation is not only good, for the Bible also speaks of sin, and portrays it as the failure of God's creatures to be what they were meant to be. The root sin is located in unbelief—not believing God's verdict that being a creature is good, and wanting instead to "be like God" without the sorts of limits creatures have; or, conversely, also in unbelief, denying the freedom and responsibility which God has given and settling for a mere sensate existence. The sin of humans infects the whole creation so that it tends to center on itself instead of on the Creator, and creature becomes pitted against creature as each seeks security.[3]

Bad theology has led to the idea that only certain Christians have a ministry.

Nothing created can be identified unambiguously with God or God's will, because sin will permeate even the highest human achievements. Taking into account the biblical teaching on sin will keep God's people from being naive about the depth and extent of evil (also in themselves) and will protect them from seeking simplistic solutions. Yet, no situation is totally apart from God and the hope for new creation.

The redemptive work of God in Christ presupposes God's ongoing creative activity as well as the creation's ongoing sinfulness. Redemption needs to be understood within this framework. Sin is not to be thought of as the primary reason for Christ's coming, for Christ is the one through whom creation takes place (he was predestined from before the foundations of the world, Col 1, John 1). In Christ God is completing the creation. Christ is the one who is in God's image and to whom we are to be conformed; he is not merely an afterthought called forth because of a failure in creation.[4]

Redemption should not be set against creation or conceived of as an escape from the physical, material, or social. Christ came because God so loved the *world*; Jesus was truly *human*; he came that we might have abundant *life*; and in Christ we hope for the resurrection of our *bodies*. It is sin when we seek to flee the earth and our humanness and our neighbors. Redemption gives us faith in God's word that it is good to be creatures and stewards of the creation.

Salvation comes by faith, by trust in the Gospel concerning Jesus Christ—who was born of a woman under the law, who shared in all things human, who faced temptation and death. Trusting that this one is the Word

[3]Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (2 vols., New York: Scribner's, 1941, 1943), 1:150–264, and Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace* (Washington: University Press of America, 1980).

[4]On thinking about Christ as coming not only on account of sin, see Herbert Richardson, *Toward An American Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). However, the implications he goes on to draw are somewhat different from this paper.

of God for us joins us to his way of living and dying—in love, in obedience to all the words of God, and in utter trust in the One who gives us life in the first place. Redemption through Christ restores us to being truly human, as he was, which was being faithful *creatures* of the Creator in the world and for the world. This will not deny our humanity, or even sin, for redemption comes by forgiveness of sin, not its annihilation. Forgiveness creates faith, leading us away from an inappropriate love of self toward love for others and also to an appropriate reverence for our own humanity.

Salvation involves us in a community of other forgiven sinners and in a world of persons who need to hear the message of salvation and receive our love and service. By calling us to respond to their needs, God pulls us outside of ourselves. To put it into doctrinal language, we are justified by faith and not by works *not* because God arbitrarily decided to save those persons who believed the correct teaching about our salvation but because of the substantive reason that God does not need our works but other people do. Thus, we are put right with God through God's grace in Christ so that we might be set free to serve others and live in community with them.

We are called to faith so that we might be part of the church and also part of the church's work for the world. As members of the church, we are also creatures in God's creation. We are now involved in God's creative *and* redemptive working—both as recipients and as participants. When we speak of "the people of God in the communities of church and society," we do not conceive of our lives as being related only to creation or only to redemption but constantly to both.

II.

The church's unique task is to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world. No other people have this task and if the church fails to proclaim the Gospel it will not be done. "Proclaiming" the good news of Jesus Christ does not involve only formal preaching and teaching, though they are central, but it involves all words and actions inspired by Christ (thus bearing witness to him) or aimed at eliciting faith in Christ. The Bible calls this unique task the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18).

Periodically in the history of the church, Christians have rediscovered the biblical teaching that *all* the members of the body have this ministry of reconciliation. 1 Peter 2:9–10 is the most vivid statement of this idea:

> But you [plural] are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Bad theology, bad practice, historical circumstances, and human sin have led to the non-biblical idea that only certain Christians (the ordained, the professionals, the pious) have a ministry, and that the great mass of Christians are only recipients of ministry. Luther opposed such a notion with the idea of "the priesthood of all believers." Taking his cue from 1 Peter and Hebrews, Luther said that when Christ bears our burdens for us and intercedes for us he does the work of a priest. And likewise, when we do this for oth-

ers it is our priestly activity. We are all called in baptism to be priests in this sense for our neighbors.

In the face of the hierarchical priesthood of the 16th century, the idea the "priesthood of all believers" often became part of a rebellion against the church and its clergy. The idea got twisted to mean such person's right to stand before God in a direct relationship without the need of any human or sacramental mediator. For Luther, in contrast, the priesthood of believers does not express religious individualism but its exact opposite, the church as community.[5]

The idea of the priesthood of believers seems inevitably individualistic, given human sinfulness; we hear that we are priests and we think of status and privilege rather than service. Also, there has often been included in this notion an implicit rejection of the ordained ministry. The problem may be that the image itself, the *priesthood* of believers, is still dominated by priestly power. What is needed instead is a new image of the church not based on any sort of clergy-laity dichotomy but rather on the church as the people of God whose purpose is mission.[6]

The "ministry of the laity" has been suggested as a better organizing center for thinking about the church. This idea depends on the recovery of the biblical idea of the laity as the whole people of God (*laos*), and not merely the amateurs or passive objects of ministry in the church. Laity often have been defined in terms of what they are not—not ordained, not competent, not educated. However, the *laos* means all God's people, including any who hold special offices. The ordained ministry is not *the* ministry; *the* ministry is the one ministry of the church, the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18) for which all share responsibility (cf. 1 Cor 12:4ff., Eph 4:11–12).[7]

We must speak not only about the gathered congregation but also about the *dispersed* church—believers in all their various settings in life. It is when we think of the church's gathered expression that the place of the clergy becomes magnified. Stressing the ministry of all the people makes it clear that the church is always a means toward God's redemptive ends.

The slogan of this way of thinking is that "Everyone is a minister" or "Everyone has a ministry." But recently it has become popular to suggest that "Every*thing* is ministry"—working, playing, voting, paying taxes, raising a family, protesting, mowing the lawn. Some have even suggested that non-believers do ministry. Here, it seems,

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[5]Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 313–314.

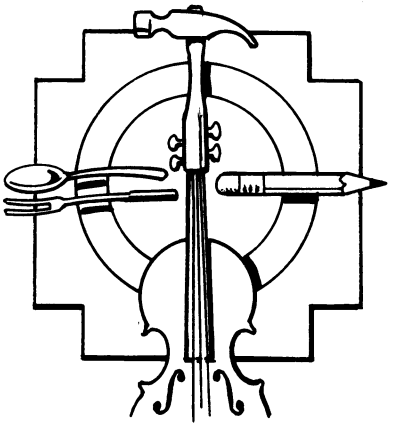
[6]See Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 61–69, 94–96. Kraemer's very influential study draws on Thomas Torrance, *Royal Priesthood* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1955).

[7]See Francis O. Ayres, *The Ministry of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962); Alden Kelley, *The People of God: A Study in the Doctrine of the Laity* (Greenwich, CT: Seabury, 1962); and Oscar E. Feucht, *Everyone a Minister* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974). These popular treatments all draw on Kraemer. For a more extensive treatment, see Cyril Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1960).

[8]See Nelvin Vos, *Monday's Ministries* (Philadelphia: Parish Life Press, 1979), and William Diehl, *God's Agents for Change* (Philadelphia: Parish Life Press, 1983). Vos and Diehl have done much to advance the cause of the ministry of the laity, but by using "ministry" to include nearly everything that Christians do, they have inflated the word so much that another word will have to be found to speak of specifically redemptive ministry.

"ministry" has become so vague as to be meaningless.[8]

The problem here is a failure to distinguish between God's creative and redemptive work and to see that ministry, as in "the ministry of reconciliation" which God gives to all Christians, is concerned with God's *redemptive work.* It would be helpful if the word "ministry" in our day were reserved for our involvement in God's redemptive activity and if we used another word (vocation? service?) for our participation in God's creative activity.



In no way would this limit ministry to the ordained, for all Christians are to be involved in the ministry of redemption: "as Christ came to minister, so must all Christians become ministers of his saving purpose according to the gift of the Spirit which each has received, as messengers of the hope revealed in Christ. . . ."[9] What this would do is allow for a way of speaking of the Christian's *unique* ministry, as distinguished from the service to God in which all people (believers and non-believers) are involved. It would distinguish between our witness and our work—so that we would do both, not thinking either that our work was our witness or that our witness was our work.

If ministry has to do with the saving work of Christ and the communication of that so that people may believe, only Christians will be able to do it. But they will not do it only in or through the institutional church. It may well be that the most important communication of the Gospel takes place between people in the many contexts of daily life—at home, at work, at school, over lunch, in arenas far removed from the institutional church. The point of saying that every Christian is a minister and that ministry has to do with redemption is to insure that the unique word which the church alone has will be heard.

To refuse to call all aspects of our life in the world "ministry" is not in any way to degrade life. Rather, it is to say that it is not necessary to add "ministry" to our activity in creation to make it significant. God is already at work in the world, and in ways quite other than the Gospel of salvation. God works there through law, reason, power, movements, and institutions—if we take seriously the doctrine of creation. It is not that the Gospel has nothing to do with life in the world but that it alone is not sufficient there. Through the Gospel the Holy Spirit gives us faith and with the "eyes of faith" we see the world as God's world; but it is through the law that God governs this world and it is by keeping the law (especially as summarized in the

[9]W. A. Visser't Hooft, ed. *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954* (New York: Harper, 1955), The Report on the Laity, 161.

Commandments) that we serve God there. The Gospel frees us for this.

The best way of speaking of this is in terms of our callings, our *vocations.* In the language of the Reformers, after the Holy Spirit calls us to faith by the gospel, we come to understand that our "stations" in life (as family members, citizens, workers, students, friends, and the like) are in reality the places where God calls us to serve. Starting from 1 Cor 7:20—"Everyone should remain in the state in which he or she was called"—Luther argued against the prevailing view that granted the status of a vocation only to religious callings such as the priesthood. He stressed that God calls us to serve in ordinary daily work and in such previously denigrated relationships as marriage. Clearly this is service in God's creative work—keeping the world going, seeing that one's neighbor is fed and sheltered. While all persons—believers and unbelievers—have such stations in life in relation to persons and institutions of society, only the person who has heard that Gospel knows these contexts and demands of daily life as a calling, a vocation. Faith frees and motivates a person to seek the good of the neighbor, but faith does not grant greater ability to serve in creation, for all people are blessed by God and all are also sinners. In fact, non-believers may keep the law in an earthly sense as well as or even better than believers.

Yet vocation is not unrelated to redemption. Our vocation also serves God's redemptive purpose—in this case, for our sanctification. Luther taught us to understand sanctification as the putting-to-death of the old sinful self, so that only the self which is righteous in Christ remains. The law is God's agent in the death of the old self. And the place where we live under the law is our vocation; it will be in our vocation that our sanctification takes place. The *creative* purpose of vocation is to serve God in all the various ways that we help keep the world going; but the ***redemptive*** purpose of vocation is to discipline us by drawing us away from concern for self—all the way to our eventual death. Creation and redemption are intimately related. The same acts of love that the new self, born of faith, does spontaneously in response to the Gospel are those acts (of love!) which the law demands—and our old self needs the law. Our sanctification is hidden in the "ordinary" tasks of life in society.[10]

Not everything Christians do is ministry.

The traditional dangers of this way of thinking are (1) that the created world is looked at in static terms so that Christian vocation seems to be inherently conservative—preserving the *status quo* even when it is unjust; (2) that one's private life of faith is separated from one's public life so that in the latter only the laws of the land seem to apply; and (3) that works are dictated by one's sta-

[10]See Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," *Word and World* 3 (Fall 1983), 382–390, for further discussion of vocation and references to the literature. It should be noted that two important books on vocation have just been reprinted: Gustaf Wingren's *Luther on Vocation* by Concordia Publishing House and Donald Heiges' *The Christian's Calling* by Fortress Press.

tion and not related to faith. But these are misunderstandings. It is not as if God once created the world and now it is static and unchanging. God creates in every moment anew; God seems to favor new things. Thus the ways in which humans have ordered society should never be absolutized, and the law of God should be seen as a dynamic expression of the divine will and not as an eternal, unchanging set of rules. Protest, change, and criticism, as well as obedience to laws and respect for institutions, can be seen as being in accord with God's will.

The second problem—of separating one's private and public lives—also follows from an inadequate doctrine of creation. God who redeems and calls the private person to faith is at the same time the one who creates and rules in the public sphere. No situation is unrelated to one's relationship to God. Since faith is not mere belief but is the presence of God in the believer, faith is the norm of law, of vocation, and of the duties of one's station. Faith active in love not only does what vocation calls for (the good of the neighbor) but it sees in one's station what is "old" and what must be given away for the sake of the neighbor. The new life of faith gives freedom to love and keeps vocation lively and flexible.

Creation is basic to the people of God and their relationship to the communities of church and society. Christianity, church, and faith all exist for God's world. If we see this it will change our attitude toward the world and our participation in it; and it will challenge and reform the church in the direction of participating in God's mission of reconciling the world to himself. While all Christians are ministers in the church's ministry of reconciliation, not everything Christians do is or should be called "ministry." The term "ministry" should be reserved for our service in the specifically redemptive work of God. But we are also called to the many tasks and opportunities of life in society, and these are no less service to God and his ongoing creative work. Calling these latter sorts of responsibilities "vocation" helps to highlight their importance and insure an adequate fullness to our approach to the communities of church and society.

Flag and Faith: A Meditation on Philippians 2

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Over the years, I have worshiped in churches that have had national flags in the sanctuary. There are many congregations which celebrate Independence Day with patriotic hymns and the Pledge of Allegiance during the worship service.

This year, patriotic sentiment may be at an all-time high in America, and doubtless more churches will display flags, and the ones that already do will feel even better about displaying them. Am I merely a grouch therefore, or worse, an anti-American, for feeling uneasy about the practice?

The flag is the most visible and potent symbol of the nation, its values, and the whole complex of things making up American civil religion. I do not mean that Americans worship the state above, or in place of, God. But there is a danger that the civil religion (which derives many of its values from Christianity) will be construed by many Christians as an essential part of Christian faith. I think that signifies the start of the loss of the "mind that is ours in Christ," the mind he had toward us. Maybe that is why flags in the church bother me—as a sign of a deeper danger.

It was Paul who first explicitly stated that the real business of a church (and of all its individual members) was to have among itself and to display to all people, the mind that it had in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:2). He first recalls, in the incomparable language of the hymn in Phil 2:6–11, the sort of mind and action Jesus himself displayed, and their overall consequences for humanity. Then he examined how all that affected and transformed the concrete life of churches and Christians in Philippi. Or Corinth. Or . . . America?

Let us start by mapping out some of the basics Paul presented in his letter to Philippi. Claiming Jesus as Lord means believing that he has brought us out of the system of cause-and-effect, reward-and-punishment. That is the system which tries to balance personal

good with the interests of the neighbor—a system which depends on "one good turn demanding another" for that balance to be maintained. However possible that might be on a human-to-human level (and the sorry state of humanity throughout history indicates it has not been all that possible), it is totally impossible on a human-to-divine level. God wants nothing short of perfection, and we cannot produce it. It is literally a dead end.

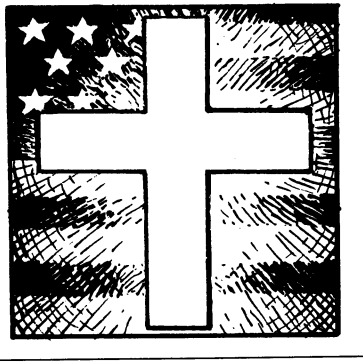
Jesus brought us out of that into an entirely new system based not on cause-and-effect/reward-and-punishment, but on totally self-emptying love that threatens one's personal survival! He promised that in this new system his own life, mind, righteousness, and eternal relationship to the Father would be made ours simply for believing that he made it so. We could risk all then, because he promised all.

The problem is that such a promise has to be taken on faith, but people crave the security of guarantees. They want their reward to be a sure thing—otherwise why risk everything for anybody? In short, there is something in people that wants the assurance of being *right.* Pretty soon, the *security* of rightness becomes the reason for doing or believing certain things, rather than the incidental payoff after it's all over. Instead the lines goes, "I am doing this because I know it to be *right.* You are doing something else. That means you are wrong, because to believe fully in Jesus means to hold this value. God approves of this value; therefore it is guaranteed that we are justified in adhering to it."

This argument sounds logical, and indeed there is more than a grain of truth in it. God's word, we believe, *is* sure and will endure. We are enjoined by Christ, by the prophets and apostles and martyrs, to live in accordance with that word. Thus when we take God's word seriously—whether to feed the hungry, to hallow God's name, or to honor those in authority over us—we *are* sure that he approves of that word and that we are justified in adhering to it.

Certainly Luther seems to support this. In the Large Catechism, for example, his discussion of the Fourth Commandment runs thus: "It is our duty to honor and magnify [civil authorities] as the most precious treasure and jewel on earth. He who is obedient, willing, ready to serve, and cheerfully gives honor where it is due, *knows* that he pleases God and receives joy and happiness for his reward. . . . We respect [them] very highly and next to God we give them the very highest place." (Tappert, Theodore, ed., *The Book of Concord.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959. Large Catechism: Fourth Commandment, Par. 151, 107.)

But there are two ways of looking at guarantees, assurance, and justification. One is to say that *because* such-and-such beliefs and actions are commanded and approved by God (and are therefore right), *therefore* if we believe and/or obey them (even imper-



fectly) we are doing right and therefore *are* right. This language and logic is indicative of a desire to return to law-based reward-and-punishment, cause-and-effect systems again. It shows a desire to trust our subscription and obedience even to divine ideals as the basis for being *right,* for being justified in some absolute sense.

The other way of looking at guarantees and justification is much harder. It is to say that *because* God has declared us righteous (and has guaranteed that in Jesus Christ), *therefore* our fumbling attempts to believe and obey are pleasing to God and have his approval. "God is pleased when we keep [the law]—not because we live up to it but because we are in Christ." (Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Art. IV: Justification, Par. 140.) In this way of thinking, it is the relationship to God promised us in Christ which validates our actions, not vice versa. But this leaves so much out of our control! It does not seem very reassuring at all. Too often, we really lose our nerve, lose our faith in Jesus' promise. Then we are in danger of losing the promise and everything else. For Paul would say that the only way the law can work *for* us is to abide in Christ and to have his mind, the mind which trumps the law by risking all. And we have decided that was not worth the risk.

Now what, you say, does this gloomy meditation have to do with civil religion? Let us see what can happen.

Think, for a moment, what the highest values of America might be. Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness? Justice and equality? Most people would say those represent the best of America, and that the flag symbolizes those best values. People with whom I have spoken or whose works I have read have said something like the following:

"The values for which America stands are divinely ordained. They are based on the Ten Commandments, for heaven's sake! We know these values are right. That is why the flag belongs in the church—because the nation and the church are working for the same thing. It's hard to believe how one could be a Christian and not believe in these values."

There is at the heart of this sort of statement the feeling (not often expressed aloud) that if it were really possible to live up to the values of freedom, democracy, justice, and the rest, we honestly would merit divine approval. God's blessings rests on America because it is a country where such values are upheld. The nation stands under divine judgment, it is true, but only insofar as it fails to live up to the divinely-ordained ideals it upholds. Holding those ideals in the first place is beyond question or censure.

This feeling does two things. First, it gives us the sense that we have a guarantee. If we follow and believe these things, we know we're *right.* We know we have divine approval. It gives us the assurance that there is one thing we will never have to risk losing. For many earnest Christians, holding to the values of America confirms the validity of their faith.

Second, and as a result of that, such beliefs can become something of a litmus test. If you truly have the mind of Christ, you have these values. If in your dealings with me, you do not express those values, I am forced to conclude that you do not have the mind of Christ either.

This is widely held in my own congregation. It was demonstrated when we had a guest lecturer talk to our adult Sunday school about Christianity in Nicaragua and

Cuba. At one point he commented that some churches felt that the revolutionary governments were less antithetical to the Gospel than was the democratic capitalist form of government. One of the criteria they used was the fact (as they saw it) that capitalism was inherently imperialist and that the U.S. was the prime example of this in the world. "How could church people even think that?" was a common reaction. Afterwards, one class participant said he was glad the patriotic Americans present took the lecturer to task on that point.

We find it difficult to believe that the mind of Christ might express itself in values.

When the same lecturer talked about how churches were functioning in Cuba, he said that most American Christians with whom he spoke were incredulous that the Christian faith was viable there, and that Christians worked with the government of Cuba rather than against it.

I mention these things not to debate the merits of socialist regimes but to raise a point. The attitude many American Christians display is that because our values have divine approval, they have the best (perhaps the only) "fit" with Christianity. This has the effect of putting us into the "us versus them" mind about which Paul chided the Philippians. We find it difficult to believe that the mind of Christ might express itself in values different from our own. We are tempted to divide the mind of Christ along political, economic, and moral value lines, and to claim the larger portion of his mind for ourselves. We question the validity of beliefs of Christians elsewhere in the world (note how many commentators and theologians insist that all liberation theologies are anti-Christian heresies!) and thus divide Christian against Christian. We are indeed a sorry witness in the world.

Beyond that, we betray that basic insecurity that wants to have guarantees and security of belief. The promise that we are right because Jesus has made us right seems a little, well, vague. We want something concrete to show that we have been *made* right and that we *are* right.

These are legitimate needs and desires. God indeed wants us to have a solid faith, not mumbling indecisiveness. It is equally true that one of the strengths of Christianity is that it is grounded in the concrete and visible; it is not some esoteric or abstract list of thoughts and dreams unconnected with reality.

Too often though, we mix up *whose* concrete words and actions assure *what* for *whom*. Too often, we assume that our right beliefs, words, and deeds essentially exist to assure us of our *own* rightness. This goes back to the old Protestant work ethic, which (simplistically stated) held that if one led a clean, moral, hard-working life, it was a pretty good indication that one was among the elect. Thus good deeds, good beliefs, and so forth were (at the root of it) to assure the individual or group of rightness before God. However pastoral and reassuring this doc-

trine was meant to be, ultimately it turns one's mind back onto oneself.

Before we turn to the "un-mixed-up" version of concreteness and assurance, let us see where this mixed-up version eventually leads.

Jesus, you might say, wanted more than divine approval.

If a true proof and demonstration of our faith consists in our adherence to the "traditional moral values" and ideals of America, then the one thing that dare not happen is for those ideals to be called into question by God. Placing the flag in a church can be an unconscious expression of this certitude. The attitude of the "patriotic Americans" in my congregation who took the lecturer to task were expressing that attitude. Our values as Americans are based on God's eternal law! How can anyone think those values will be found wanting by God?

Leaving aside the possibility that some of our national ideals and values may *not* be based on a correct understanding of God's law (which is another whole debate!) and hence may be legitimately subject to judgment, we are left with what seems to be an unsinkable argument.

But the fact is that justice, equality under the law, freedom, fair play and all the rest are exactly that: expressions of law. They may be the highest and noblest expressions of that law, but they are still law. For any person to pin their proof of rightness to any expression of law is risky. To think (even way down deep) that for an individual or nation to revere a divinely-approved value is a guarantee for divine approval, actually is to court divine disapproval and final loss of all—including the value held so dear. For when obedience to law is held up as the means to rightness, or as the ultimate rightness itself, rather than as a freely-chosen response to God's freely-given gift of rightness, then law becomes not merely criterion but also deadly critique.

The Apology to the Augsburg Confession poses the problem more graphically than I can:

> The law *requires* our own works and our own perfection . . . [but] it is impossible to keep the law without Christ; it is impossible to keep the law without the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit is received by faith. . . . Although it is somewhat possible to do civil works, that is, the outward works of the law, without Christ and the Holy Spirit, still the impulses of the heart toward God, belonging to the essence of the divine law, are impossible without the Holy Spirit. . . . All the Scriptures and the Church proclaim that the law cannot be satisfied. . . . The incipient keeping of the law does not please God for its own sake, but for the sake of faith in Christ. Without this, the law *always* accuses us . . . and thus shows us an angry God. (Apology to the Augsburg Confession: Art. IV: Justification, Par. 44; 126–130; 166–167; 295).

However wonderful the law is, it is ultimately the deadest of dead ends because it demands more than it gives us the power to

fulfil. It is no source of final rightness, no guarantee at all, for human or nation. Then how in heaven's name *do* we become truly right and convert the great laws and values from death-dealers to life-expressers? Let us see how the master converter did it, acccording to Paul.

Jesus, you might say, wanted more than divine approval. He wanted equality with God, fair and square. You might even say that he wanted that guaranteed, although that might be going a bit far. He has all the right connections. He has the papers to prove that he is in the form of God. If anyone has the proof and justification that he is *right,* that his mind is filled with divinely-approved values, it would have to be Jesus, says Paul to the Philippians. If Jesus had been the average anxious person, he would have hung onto that ultimate rightness as his proof and assurance of God's approval.

Jesus did something totally different. He emptied himself of all those good things. First he stripped himself of the assurance of deity. Then he divested himself of the assurance of being a "good" man, approved by society. Then he allowed himself to be crucified as a criminal and slave. He stripped himself of every assurance and guarantee he had—even of the presence, it would seem, of God himself. For though Christ did not sin, yet he "became as sin" for our sakes and suffered all the penalties of sin. Only thus could we, in the deepest possible despair of our worst sin, be assured that Christ's suffering and resurrection triumphed over even our situation. "If somebody doubts that his sins are forgiven, he insults Christ because he thinks that his sin is greater and stronger than the death and promise of Christ." (Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Art. IV: Justification, Par. 149.) He has tasted all the stings of sin, for only thus could he be all in all, for all.

But why did Jesus risk all this for us? Because that prodigal outpouring of love for people was the most perfect expression of deity. He risked everything—including divine abandonment and his own "rightness"—so that we might be made right. And surprise of surprises, he got everything back: life, dignity, deity, and all of creation as his possession, and the name above all names. God the Father was willing (indeed eager!) to not grasp his name, honor, and creation to himself but to bestow it most lavishly on his Son. Ultimate glory, rightness, and assurance came to Jesus through the giving up of all claims to such things.

Since Jesus got all creation as his own, he got us as well. He did not hang on to his exalted status now any more than he did at the beginning. He gave us the chance to share in all his benefits—to "have a piece of his mind" which was this lavish giveaway deity. Resting in this generously loving Christ, we are free to let go of our need for guarantees of rightness as we live with our neighbor. We are free to use the good gifts of laws and values, not to assure us of our own rightness, but generously to serve one another. Christ has won for us all the rightness we will ever need, now or at the last day. When we have his mind, we begin to know that rightness is ours to spend, to run up as big a tab as we can in loving service to our brothers and sisters, because we trust that there will always be more than enough to go around. We do not have to wish for any other.

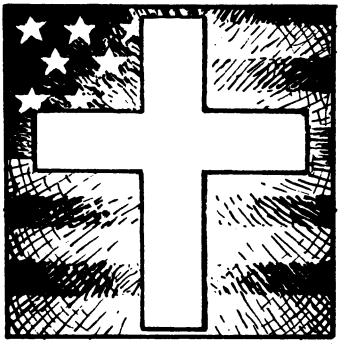
This is the "un-mixed-up" understanding of rightness, justification, and law. Now we see that it is *Jesus'* concrete actions—his

life, death, resurrection, and ascension; his presence in Word and Sacrament—which are the guarantees of *our* rightness. In "losing his mind" for our sake, in obedience to his Father's mind, Jesus won everything for himself and for us. Now we are free to "lose *our* minds" in him, because we have his promise that he has given us his own mind. People with this new sort of mind no longer respect and obey laws for their own sake and assurance. Instead, these new-minded people begins to turn beliefs and deeds outward. "*After* we have been justified and regenerated by faith . . . we begin to fear and love God. . . . We also begin to love our neighbors because our hearts have spiritual and holy impulses. What these impulses are, the prophet shows when he says (Jer 31:33) 'I will put my law upon their hearts.' " (Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Art. IV: Justification, Par. 125.) That is, *our* concrete actions begin to be for the sake of worshiping God and serving our neighbor.

What does this "un-mixed-up" understanding of rightness and law mean for Christians in America? Perhaps we can look at the gifts of democracy and justice and equality and all the rest of what we cherish about America as tools, not justifications, of our rightness.

What do I mean, tools? All these things are simply the means we have at hand to help us concretely serve other people. We can acknowledge that other Christians in other places have different tools at hand, and their Christianity is not called into question solely on the grounds that they use those different tools. Instead, we can rejoice with them that they, too, are pouring themselves out in their own way, in loving response to the way they have been loved. We thus can acknowledge that having the same mind in Christ does not mean thinking all the same thoughts or doing the same things. It means living in the same attitude of joyous trust in the One who makes all thoughts and actions opportunities for worship, for they are all ways in which we confess Jesus as Lord.

When we live with the mind of Christ we lose, it is true, all our other claims and guarantees of rightness. We lose the security of expecting divine approval for national ideals and our adherence to them. But an unexpected effect of this is that we are also relieved of the burden of having always to prove and defend our rightness—at least at the expense of (let alone the condemnation of) our neighbors in the world. How many times in history has our insistence on America's rightness in a cause been the source of much grief—even to the point that we "prove" the exact opposite about ourselves! If we are emptied of the compulsive need to prove and justify ourselves, perhaps we can risk humility, backing off, looking a little weak and foolish in the eyes of the world, for the sake of not turning our tools for service into bludgeoning-clubs of coercion.



And it might just happen that taking that risk will sometimes pay off! Perhaps those

great virtues we Americans hold so dear might be more clearly seen when we are not defending them so vehemently. Perhaps speaking softly and carrying no stick—or carrying the Cross—is the way American Christians should walk in the world. In that way, our ideals are being well served, and so are the people for whom Christ died.

One last thing. Emptying ourselves in love means that there will be opportunities to trump the legal virtues we hold, with a surprising and Christlike self-disregard. We can, when necessary, forego for ourselves the rights and justice and privileges we are owed as citizens, for the sake of our gospel ministry to others. The effect of this on the national ethos is unpredictable, but one thing is sure. It will be infecting America with little bits of the Kingdom of God, claiming more and more of it not just as the arena of God's eternal law at work but of his Gospel as well. And we can rejoice that this is happening in Cuba, and Nicaragua, and South Africa, and Russia, wherever Christians act in Christ's mind. We will not bring in the fullness of God's kingdom, but through our actions, God will!

Rootings

Gretchen Shartle
Austin, Texas

Gretchen Startle recently published a book of poems, *On Earth and in Heaven* (St. Helena, CA: Illuminations Press, 1986).

That is where my truth lies,
down in my pelvis,
my loving center
where it all begins,
the place of my pain,
emptiness and fullness.

It's a grace to love from here,
to reach down deep inside
like peasants' arms
reaching into wheat bins
bringing up the "daily bread"
for him and me.

I reach for the grain
and sow it alone.
It is blessed
when he receives.

God with Intermittent Being

Roland Daniel Zimany
Blackburn College, Carlinville, Illinois

A Comparison Between a Picture and Music

I begin by making two related comparisons. I shall compare a painting with a symphony; and I shall compare the process of looking at a painting with the process of listening to music. On the basis of those comparisons, I propose what seems to be nothing less than a basic paradigm change in the way that we conceive of God.

To highlight the significant contrasts, a picture is static and permanent, while music is dynamic and constantly changing. Time is not important to a picture, whereas it is all-important to music. You cannot have music without the passage of time, whereas once a picture is created, time has no essential effect on it. All parts of a picture are simultaneously present, while music comes to us over time, one note—or one group of notes—at a time. For a symphony to be simultaneously present would be for people to hear just one instant of cacophonous sound.

Another important contrast has to do with the control we have over the process of looking at a painting, compared with listening to music. In looking at a painting, we are essentially active. We take the initiative to focus our attention on different features of the painting. We can move up close to it to observe a detail, or we can stand back and bring a different perspective to the painting, viewing it as a whole. When we listen to music, however, we are essentially passive. We are forced to wait for the notes to come to us. We cannot make them come any more quickly than they do, and we cannot require that they linger until we have examined them sufficiently.

Finally, in dealing with a painting—a mural on an entire wall would be a good example—the future is basically knowable. When I am at one end of a mural, I can at least glance toward the other end and get an idea of what I will be coming to, as I move through time and space to examine the mural in its completeness. When one listens to music, on the other hand, one cannot know what the future will be like. One may be able to predict how a certain progression of notes will resolve itself, if one is familiar with certain patters in Western music. But when one listens to improvised jazz or to unfamiliar music from the Far East, even that sort of prediction is ruled out.[1]

These two artistic modes represent very different forms of reality; yet each is genuinely real.

We seem to favor the picture-model, however. We see most things, including our concept of God, in the categories associated with a painting, especially the categories of being always present and of our being able to exercise epistemological control.

Even process theology, which certainly appreciates the element of time, seems to be allied more closely with a painting than with music. While the God of process theology is not static but is constantly changing (at least in its consequent nature), every moment of that God is part of a continuous presence, at least in Alfred North Whitehead's version. Its God might be compared with a roulette wheel: moving, but also completely present. And the metaphysical detail with which process theology describes its God certainly affirms the control which it has over its knowledge of God. On the matter of metaphysical detail, the theology of Thomas Aquinas is, in principle, no different.

God would exist only when God is having an impact on the world.

God as Music Note

What if our concept of God were to follow an oral, musical-model, rather than a visual, picture-model? In that case, God would exist only in an individual's—or a community's—encounter with God. As a musical note (rather than a continuously existing painting), God would exist only when God is having an impact on the world. Otherwise, God would not exist—there would be no God—just as a musical note does not exist unless it is being played.

Surely it is the case that if we experience God at all, that experience is not continuous. Yet we assume that the cause of that experience must be a continuously existing reality. Why? The answer lies partly in the fact that we come from a religious tradition that projected human characteristics onto the extraordinary, including the characteristic of continuous existence over time. Another part of the answer lies in our not sufficiently heeding Immanuel Kant's warning that the cause and effect categories that our minds use to make sense of phenomenal reality may not apply to the noumenal. The fact that we can identify agents that cause most physical events does not mean that there has to be a spiritual agent causing spontaneous remission of cancer or causing a heart to become "strangely warmed."

We claim, of course, that God is very much unlike us. But to illustrate our belief, we take the picture-model for granted. We say that *our* existence is limited in time, but God's existence is eternal. Perhaps God is

[1]Space prohibits additional justification of the preceding sets of generalizations. Surely a person can "take in" an entire painting passively, at a glance, or listen to music actively for the bass notes or for the trumpet; but I would argue that those experiences stand as contrapuntal, minor themes, when compared with the cumulative result of the variety of perspectives used in the preceding three paragraphs. If the comments presented here are not convincing, however, then let my contrasts be treated simply as my own, subjective approaches to paintings and music, described to make clear my theological proposal.

very much unlike us not by having a more permanent existence but by having many split-second, discontinuous lives, following the model of music. Perhaps that is the type of reality that is appropriately termed "divine."

Such a conception of divinity would leave us without an entity named "God," just as there is no entity named "music." But just as we say that music exists, in some abstract sense, even when no notes are playing (even though we know that there is real music only when the notes are sounding), so, perhaps, it may be a pure abstraction to say that God exists continuously.

By similar reasoning, the model fits very well the claim that God is Love. Love exists only when it is concretely expressed or felt. Otherwise it, too, is just an abstraction.

The model also endorses the suggestion that God be conceived as a verb, rather than as a noun.

Those views certainly would not prevent us from believing that God exists from time to time. For example, they would not prevent us from believing that the world behaves in such a way that the unpredictable and extraordinarily good does occur, or that there are occasions in which life and love do win out, surprisingly, over forces of death.

An analogy from subatomic physics may be appropriate, here. Physicists are finding subatomic particles that appear literally out of nowhere or nothingness, thrive for a split second on energy borrowed from neighboring particles, and then vanish. It may be that God, likewise, is to be understood as emerging briefly at unpredictable moments in the dynamics of human living, when the ideal is actualized, or even when "merely" the best under the circumstances is actualized.

I am proposing that the musical paradigm be applied to the Judeo-Christian God, because the paradigm is rooted in the Bible. Specifically, it is rooted in the Bible's view of God as Word, as One Who speaks and something occurs. Thereafter, there is nothing of God available to study. There are the results of God's impact, of course, but they are not God. And there is no evidence that God continues to exist, until God speaks again. All that can be done is to respond to God's address to us and to watch for the next time that God will speak, for the next time that the note will sound. What I am proposing is a radical version of existentialist and Barthian "Word of God" theology and of the New Hermeneutic.

The music-model may also be found in the answer that God gave to Moses at the burning bush, when Moses asked what God's name or essence was. The traditional answer is, "I am who I am." But since Hebrew does not make a distinction between present and future tense, that answer could just as easily be translated, "I will be what I will be." Even more radically, the name is based on the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which normally means "to be present" or "to take place." Perhaps God's real answer was, "I will occur when I will occur."

The music-model depicts God as self-revealing but otherwise unknowable. According to this model, apart from human encounter with God, we do not know anything about God and cannot say anything about God, unless we would want to risk some generalizations, based on characteristics and patterns evident in past encounters.

In the emerging dialogue between Eastern and Western theology, the model forces the Western side to take its biblical charac-

teristics with utmost seriousness, by presenting Ultimacy as active, rather than as passive.

Christological Implications

Let me apply the music-model, just briefly, to Christology. When the Word became flesh in a Greek understanding of the word "word," the picture-model was in operation. One "crystal" from the logos-structure of the universe emerged in human form and remained present throughout the lifetime of Jesus. As divine reason incarnate, Jesus was the Word of God while he was going to the bathroom, while he was sleeping, while he was scratching himself, etc.

In contrast to the Greek understanding, the Hebrew understanding of "word" is totally different. According to Thorleif Boman's study of this matter in his book *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek,* a word exists, in the Hebrew view, only at the moment when it is being spoken, in the same way that a note exists in music. When that understanding of "word" is applied to Jesus, Jesus would have been the Word of God only at those times when he was doing those things that people found attractive (or convicted by), when his behavior and teachings were hitting them between the eyes, shaking up their existence, and even transforming their lives. Otherwise, he was just another person. Isn't that still the case today?

In addition to being called "Word of God," Jesus is also called "Son of God." Jesus as *Word* of God is the *music* model's preferred way of characterizing him. "Son of God," on the other hand, is an artifact of the picture-model. It is a designation that we can define and study, argue about, apply and misapply, and hold heresy trials about. A musical note doesn't generate that sort of treatment, because it doesn't encourage us to think that it is within our grasp.

Limitations of the Model

To adopt the music-model, you must be willing to forego a complete, metaphysical portrayal of God. The model does not permit our specific experiences of God (for example, of God's power) to be extrapolated into generalizations about God. Maurice Friedman at San Diego State College may be thinking along the same lines when he says that

> What I am proposing is a radical version of "Word of God" theology.

God must be re-cognized again and again in concrete uniqueness. It may be true that *when* God is experienced, God is experienced as being powerful. But, given the limits of inductive reasoning, even several such experiences should not require the conclusion that God is *all* powerful. It may be time for greater humility in theology, and for even greater willingness to acknowledge the mystery surrounding ultimacy. This may be what the liberation theologies are giving us, with their emphasis on witness to the insights that they are uncovering, rather than on systematic development of apologetics. They have heard some notes that need to be heard, and they are spreading the good news! The prob-

lem comes when they—and others—think that their notes are the only ones available to be heard.

This brings me to what some will see as another limitation of the music-model. The model works against the claim that there are universal Christian truths and in favor of the claim that Christian doctrine is true *when* it has particular meaning for a person in a particular situation. The claim that "Christ died for your sins" or even simply that "God forgives sin" might be greeted by the average person with nothing more than a yawn. Those claims could evoke a very different response, however, from someone who genuinely feels burdened with guilt. The doctrine would be true when a person appropriates it as true.

The model does work against any notion of a "public theology," i.e., a theology based on facts available to everyone, that can be studied objectively and that can yield irrefutable conclusions.

But the music-model does not provide the content of a theology. It says simply that what is ultimately true is what God makes true, when God is present; or, more simply, what is ultimately true is what is true when the Ultimate is present. Accordingly, the model does set limits to our knowledge of the divine. And it does limit where we may look for theological content, namely, where the music is being played, i.e., where God's revelation occurs and has occurred.

This approach would limit our knowledge to personal and communal experience, tested over time and perhaps refined through comparison with the experiences of other communities. But isn't that the locus of living religion, in any case? The model could be seen as favoring theological content based on praxis, rather than on philosophical deliberations—although it would not rule out inspiration by the Holy Spirit, even in an academic setting!

Besides, what is the value of a continuous, cosmic God for an earth that is being slowly drawn into the Sun and one day will burn up, if we don't destroy ourselves in a nuclear holocaust before then? In order to find hope for concrete situations, we do not necessarily need a continuous presence (of God) as much as we need the possibility of a powerfully extraordinary event.

What is ultimately true is what is true when the ultimate is present.

A final objection to the model is that, with God not existing continuously, it is more difficult to say that God is "in charge." But if God is not in charge, one also does not have to explain why God permits evil.

Positive Implications of the Model

With God existing only when God acts, there is no discrepancy between God's love and God's power, as it relates to God's will and the human reality of sin. At the specific point *where* God is present and acting (which is always the same thing in the music-model), there is no sin and God's will is done. That is what makes us say that God is

present. Where there is sin, God is not necessarily present to be thwarted by it.

Another positive value of the music-model is that it provides for pluralism. You can't justify forcing people into the same mold, based on notes that were heard, if all of the people did not hear the same notes. And neither the Bible nor Church doctrine or tradition provides those notes. They are more like sheet music, in this analogy. Karl Barth's view is applicable here. The Bible is the Word of God only when it becomes the Word of God for you, i.e., only when it serves as a vehicle or catalyst through which God "speaks" to you directly. People may unite on the basis of a common experience of God speaking, but the model would require them to acknowledge that they have no objective basis for a claim to superior knowledge.

The model's focus on subjectivity is one of its strengths. It provides for first-order verification of God. Whatever one's God is, it is verified by how one experiences it, including how one thinks about it and relates to it. One's understanding of God may change with additional experiences, but the God involved will always be the God to whom one is personally committed.

Whether that be the true God is another question. Using the musical analogy, the question would be whether the notes have been heard clearly and whether the sound is properly identified as divine. On this question, the music-model does about as well as any other. Generally, we determine the truth when a consensus is reached by those who share the same basic assumptions. The music-model does the same thing. It does not have to be content with isolated experiences. It can find meaning in the relationship between experiences, because a note takes on additional meaning as part of a pattern of melody. So one divine revelatory act must be understood in relation to others, even others that one has not experienced personally. It will be appropriate, therefore, for one's own understanding of truth to be modified by inputs from a larger community. But one's understanding must be only tentative, because the inputs may keep changing as notes keep being heard. The dynamism of the music-model requires one always to be open to the future, because the verification of the truth lies only in the notes themselves, as they are played.[2]

The model also avoids a divine subject-object split, in its conception of God. Similarly, it avoids separating God's essence from God's existence. It isn't that there is a subject which then produces an objective note. It isn't that there is an essence which, from time to time, comes into existence. Rather, according to the music-model, God is the note, the event of being present (or the event designated "God is present"). There is no separate essence of God, just as there is no separate essence of music, as a hypostasis. This model accepts Barth's claim that "God's Being is in act," but it also insists on the reverse, namely, that there is no God when God is not interacting concretely with the world.

Further Development of the Model

I conclude by developing these thoughts under three headings. The first has to do with

[2]These views seem to be a logical extension of—or at least compatible with—those of Paul Ricoeur and other hermeneuticists, with their emphasis on present, contextual meaning, in addition to those of existentialists and liberationists, along with Barth, Gerhard Eberling, and Eberhard Jüngel.

how often the divine note sounds. If God be idealized perfection or absolute love, then God is not heard very often, to understate the case. But can we be sure that such a God is not simply a conceptual abstraction in the first place? On the opposite end of the spectrum is the approach that would say that God is (or the divine note sounds) in every instance in which prevenient grace has an effect. Every time one has faith rather than despair, every time one takes a risk on behalf of the good, perhaps every time the best under the circumstances occurs, there is an instance of God: not simply an abstraction, but also not an instance limited to a concrete manifestation only of perfection—rather, something more like Jesus on the Cross, dying for what he believed (embodying the best under the circumstances) and providing a symbol of God present in weakness and in the suffering of the faithful.

The second heading is the doctrine of the Trinity, which lends itself very nicely to the music-model and vice versa. If the Father is a symbol for the ideal or even just for potential good, and the Son is a symbol for the concrete occurrence of that good, and the Holy Spirit represents the power that enables the potential to become actual, then the full Trinity is needed for the divine note to sound. There is a note only when the ideal is made actual through the power that enables that to happen. Conversely, God as a concrete note does not exist apart from an actual occurrence. And God as concrete note is the ideal actualized, or perhaps merely the *best*-under-the circumstances actualized—in any case, the occurrence of some degree of salvation in a particular setting. This might be viewed as a description only of the *economic* Trinity; but with Karl Rahner, the music-model, too, does not make a distinction between God *in se* and God for us.

Finally, it will be pointed out that music is played or generated by something that does have continuous existence (i.e., people and/or instruments). Analogously, the enduring underpinnings of God may be said to be the universe. Such an assertion runs counter to tradition, but we have no basis for demonstrating that God is outside the universe or prior to it. Traditional theology separates God from the universe, primarily as a way of asserting that divine reality cannot be derived from the day-to-day world as we normally experience it. The music-model does the same thing, since it claims that, although God comes in the context of the universe, God is not everything but is only the extraordinarily good occurrences in the world (measured sometimes from a long-term perspective). Consequently, the model is not pantheistic. And while the model does not provide for a Supreme Being who engages in creating things, it does provide for identifying instances of creativity with instances of God. Indeed, it can even endorse the original moment of the creation of the universe as an event of God, while being content to leave other related metaphysical questions shrouded in a mystery appropriate to finite human minds.

Vigils

Gary Blobaum
Hollsopple, Pennsylvania

I

I think of you and Christ, both
light sleepers.
He didn't sleep at all, of course,
before his incarnation
and even then,
to judge from accounts of early morning prayer,
not much.
In a storm, true—
    when black clouds curdled the sky,
    the skiff bucked in a cauldron sea,
    and eyes of fishermen opened big as caves—
he slept.

It took the likes of Gethsemane—
    knee bent on a frail crag of shore,
    curl-fingered waves clawing the last rocks,
    and deadly prayer giving way to the sucking undertow—
to make his wakeful blood
drip on stones
near those on which the heads of his
disciples dozed.

II

I was like Malchus and Peter both:
nearly dozing on your porch that day,
I did not want to hear
when you spoke of your Gethsemane.
I sliced off
my hearing of you
and of your wakeful
darkness
    and went to gather flashlights,
    boots, jackets, children, for a climb
    down Hipple's Cave.
    Leaving you,
    in the cool and mud and blackness
    we descended.
    Our flashlights bobbed
    like the lanterns and torches
    of a band of soldiers
    until someone giggled:
    "Let's flick them off!"
    Instinctively then,
    as a father would,
    I dropped to one knee
    sensing in mud-sucking darkness
    the wave of fear
    about to shiver my child—
    and held him.

III

Darkness awakened me to another.

Celebrating the 1800th Birthday of the First Christian Scholar

Arthur Vööbus
Professor of New Testament and Church History Emeritus, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

In the history of Christianity the figure of Origen stands very tall. He was the first true Christian scholar, whose extraordinary talents secured for him a unique place in history.

Origen was born in 185 in Alexandria, Egypt. At a very young age he was appointed head of the catechetical school in Alexandria, and under his guidance it reached the zenith of its fame. Forced to leave Egypt because of the envious intrigues of ecclesiastical dignitaries, he founded a similar school in Caesarea, Palestine.

The works of the Greek philosophers were part of his daily menu. Guided by Plato and the Bible, he forged a philosophical theology of a peculiar stamp, always enhanced by his vivid oriental imagination. He was the first to investigate the history and development of the text of the Bible. He was the first to produce an edition of the critical text of the Old Testament. His famous Hexapla contained the entire old Testament in six columns. The first contained the Hebrew consonantal text, the second the Hebrew text in Greek letters, the third the Greek translation of Aquila, the fourth the Greek translation of Symmachus, the fifth the Septuagint, or old Greek, the sixth the Greek translation of Theodotion. This project was of inestimable value, and its loss is incalculable. He was the first exegete to use a philological method, guided always by tact and critical judgment. He was the first really to cultivate apologetics; indeed, he was the first to realize what this discipline involved.

His creative energy seems to have been inexhaustible. Seven stenographers were constantly at his disposal, in addition to an equal number of transcribers and calligraphers—and they were kept busy by his prodigious productivity. With such help he was enabled to produce works on an assembly-line basis: commentaries, biblical studies, theological, ethical, apologetic and practical works. The church historian Eusebius composed a list of Origen's works numbering 2,000, but, alas, this list is lost. All his

works display his deep personality, spiritual greatness, his unquenchable thirst for the profundities of the spirit, and, above all, a burning longing after God.

Origen eventually fell victim to violence. During the persecutions of the Christians under Decius, he was thrown into prison where he was horribly tortured because he remained firm in his faith. As a result of these ordeals he died in 253 C. E. His grave at Tyre became an object of pilgrimage for a very long time.

Many institutions celebrated the 1800th anniversary of Origen's birth in 1985 through conferences and special lectures. But only LSTC could celebrate his milestone in a way no other academic institution could—by publishing sections of Origen's lost works. This is the result of the manuscripts that have been collected in the school's Institute of Syriac Manuscript Studies.

On one of my forty journeys to the Syrian Orient in search of ancient manuscripts, I could not believe my eyes when I held in my hands a codex no modern scholar had ever seen. It contained a lectionary which had embedded in it more than 80 texts from the Hexapla in an ancient Syriac version. This now has appeared in a facsimile edition under the title, *The Lectionary of the Monastery of Azizael in Tur Abdin, Mesopotamia* (University of Louvain, 1985).

Some scholars believe Origen was born in 186 instead of 185. Thus celebrations of Origen's birth continued well into 1986. Just to make sure LSTC would honor both potential birthdates, we published another lectionary in 1986, which also contained precious texts from the lost Hexapla (*The Lectionary of the Church of Forty Martyrs in Mardin, Tur Abdin, Mesopotamia* [University of Louvain, 1986]).

It gives me deep satisfaction to think that the Institute of Syriac Studies in our school has made it possible for our community to celebrate the jubilee of the first Christian scholar in such an appropriate way.

More About the Inclusive Language Lectionary

Frederick W. Baltz
Galena, Illinois

In the October, 1986, issue of Currents, *members of the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary's faculty published four articles on* The Inclusive Language Lectionary *(ILL). Shortly after* Currents *appeared we received the following letter.*—Editor

Let me offer some comments as a parish pastor about inclusive language.

Inclusive language is a current in theology and mission which does not belong to the main stream of the congregation. My experience as a pastor tells me that the majority of the laity, who do desire fairness and equal opportunities for women, will nevertheless resent the inclusive language of the ILL.

Many people in parishes will perceive those who have prepared or introduced the ILL as arrogant for taking liberties with the biblical text. Further, they will regard the ILL as an insult to their good will and to their intelligence. Most people will resent inclusive language being forced upon them as though their ordinary words have been determined by someone else to be hazardous to spiritual health. We want to do our own thinking.

Lyle Schaller, who probably knows more about congregations than anyone else, points out that congregations usually are conservative and tend to reject new ideas, because most new ideas are not good ideas. Judging from the reaction of presiding bishops already, the ILL is certain to be opposed by congregations, and its intended purpose will be lost. The results will be counter-productive.

The ILL provides other grounds for criticism as well. Gary Pence writes of censorship, and we do in fact exercise a kind of censorship in the texts that we choose to exclude *from worship.* But we do not pretend to have thus censored *the canon.* It is also important that we not simply equate censorship with re-writing or editing, definitely done in the ILL at many places, This is a far different thing from selecting new words better to reflect the author's intent (e.g. replacing "no man" with "no one").

Pence looks to Martin Luther for support in his arguments. I think it is worth noting that in his preface to the Small Catechism, Luther addressed the need to be consistent with familiar texts: "They easily become confused when the teacher at one time employs a certain form of words and expressions, and, at another, apparently with a view to make improvements, adopts a different form. The result of such a course will be that all the time and labor which we have expended will

be lost."

We cannot simply say that during the worship hour the Bible will not be used for any purposes of instruction, but only for our self-expression in worship. The fact is that removing all traces of a patriarchal system from the texts used in worship will also remove from the hearers the past as it actually was. There is great value in being able to learn from the undesirable past. For example, the fact that Jacob is not an ethical individual by our standards serves to make clear that God deals with us by grace. Further, those very texts in the New Testament which call for a new respect for women lose their force as their patriarchal world setting is systematically expunged. The ILL is a re-writing of our history resulting from the re-writing of the text, and that is not legitimate. And if we accept such rewriting in the name of translating, shall we apply this discipline selectively? How much of the Old Testament—or even the New Testament—would we re-write if we were to remove all traces of offense?

When the Living Bible was introduced, many responsible churchleaders objected to it. I imagine many supporters of the ILL were in that group. The Living Bible sought to incorporate a particular theology into the text, then to be considered a translation. Is it wrong to do that when the presuppositions behind the finished produce are fundamentalist or "evangelical," but correct when the presuppositions are feminist?

It is simply a fact that persons have gender. We tend to think of persons in terms of gender, as well as name, intellect, strength, appearance, interests, concerns, and emotions. True, God has no gender. True, God does not really hold us in his hand, nor did he really smell the pleasing aroma from the altar, because he has no nose. But Gary Pence says "In worship Christians seek the immediacy of the divine presence . . . They want somehow to hear God and to be heard by God." I question whether the sustained, conscious realization of how different God really is from us mortals makes God seem any nearer. Yet it is on one aspect of that difference that the ILL intends to focus, the fact that God has no gender. By definition the transcendent God is not near. There is still some of the anthropomorphist in each of us, and for good reason. I also believe that detracting from the manhood of Jesus in the name of inclusiveness actually exacts a price in our appreciation of the incarnation, just the opposite of what it is meant to do. The word "child" simply does not say as much as the words "son" or "daughter." It is at once less personal and more vague.

We would be far better off to seek a natural sensitivity to one another that comes out in natural words, rather than to require members of churches to learn a new, unnatural dialect of the English language and wedge it into their Scriptures. In sermons the preacher can deal with equality among men and women, as well as other issues, without having to re-write the Biblical texts first. Hans-Georg Gadamer writes that "nothing is so purely the trace of mind as writing, but also nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind . . . The man who is able to read what has been handed down in writing testifies to and achieves the sheer presence of the past." (*Truth and Method,* p. 145). We need that past, as it was. Our task is not to impose a selective amnesia on this "trace of mind," but to apply our understanding to it in ways appropriate for our day.

Book Reviews

CELEBRATING OUR FAITH. By Robert E. Webber. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986. 118 pages. Cloth. $11.95.

The avowed purpose of the book is stated on p. viii: "In this book I wish to introduce liturgical evangelism to the Protestant Church." The book carries out the purpose succinctly and well.

Webber begins with a chapter defining liturgical evangelism, which "calls a person into Christ and the church through a conversion regulated and ordered by worship. These services order the inner experience of repentance from sin, faith in Christ, conversion of life, and entrance into the Christian community."

The book fits well into the current period of evangelism and mission; on one hand it relates to the whole realm of faith development with which many pastors now concern themselves; on the other hand it relates to the gathering awareness that the next wave of Christians will likely be adult converts to the faith.

Webber had read most of the relevant literature and has written a popular book on the topic. Each chapter gives the biblical roots to a part of the process of liturgical evangelism, the experience of the early church, and application of the principles for our time.

I strongly urge the use of this book as a study tool for parish pastors, worship committees, and evangelism committees.

Jay C. Rochelle
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

PRAYING SHAPES BELIEVING: A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY ON THE *BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER.* By Leonel L. Mitchell. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985. xi and 358 pages. Cloth. $24.50.

One of the major concerns of contemporary liturgical scholarship is how to do liturgical theology. There seems to be general agreement that liturgical theology is not systematic theology which examines Christian doctrine in light of the contemporary context. Rather, it is reflection upon and discussion of the words and actions of specific rites. Mitchell certainly operates with this assumption. Thus, his focus is upon the rites of the Episcopal Church and his concern is to not only to deepen the worshipers' understanding of what they say, hear, and do but also to enhance their involvement in the liturgical manifestations of faith and life.

Mitchell begins with a consideration of "The Service of the Church": context, liturgical roles, and liturgical continuity. He follows with an unfolding of the contents of the *Book of Common Prayer:* Calendar, The Daily Office, The Great Vigil of Easter, Christian Initiation, The Holy Eucharist, The Pastoral Offices, and Ordination Rites. Mitchell concludes with a chapter entitled, "The Theology of the Prayer Book," in which he uses the Catechism, especially its systematic headings, as a way to summarize the theology found in the rites of the Episcopal Church. His cardinal principle throughout the book is "to let the liturgy speak for itself," unencumbered by the *a priori* considerations and categories of systematic/doctrinal theology.

I have often wondered how this is possible. Certainly there is a difference between talking *with* God in Christian worship and talking *about* God in Christian theology. But how can I as a member of a community of faith talk *with* God or with anyone else for that matter unless we have some kind of framework within which such "liturgical conversation" can occur and

within which such talk can be interpreted? Do we not need an idiom of interpretive scheme in order to make sense of what we say, hear, and do in the church's worship just as we do when we communicate with one another?

The primary problem which *Praying Shapes Believing* and other current liturgical theologies raise is precisely the one which they purport to resolve: namely, how can contemporary Christian worship be meaningful to those who participate? There is also the problem of whether anything, Christian worship included, can really speak for itself. Does not the active work of inference play a part in making sense in a given situation of communication, including the worship of the church?

We who are engaged in the task of doing liturgical theology can no longer uncritically assume that Christian worship speaks for itself. If we have learned anything from the past two decades of liturgical reform, it is certainly that! Too, we should realize that the meanings in Christian worship are not simply the matter of extracting something from the verbal and nonverbal "containers" of a given rite. "Meanings" are never that cut and dried. Rather, they emerge as we interact with an environment and with other people for the purpose of achieving some kind of coherence in our lives. The worship of the church indeed claims as well as promises that such coherence is possible. The question with which contemporary liturgical theology needs to dead is "How so?"

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THE MOTHER'S SONGS. By Meinrad Craighead. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986. 79 pages. Paper. $9.95.

This extraordinary collection of paintings is a chronicle of one woman's experience with God as Mother; it is at once highly personal, since each of the pictures tells a story which has to do with the artist's past life or present experience, and at the same time the imagery strives toward universal depiction of women's experience as holy and sacred.

Stylistically Craighead has been influenced by the colors and textures of the Southwest where she now resides. There are paintings whose surrealism reminds one of Georgia O'Keeffe, although Craighead's palette does not contain the subtle pastels O'Keeffe mastered. Craighead's images can be voluptuous; the sculpted cherubs of the baroque period came to mind in considering a few of the paintings. Overall there is more coolness in the paintings through the generous use of dark greens and blues: here the Celtic mythology seems to govern the choice of color. As one might expect, many pictures in the book center on womb-imagery: Womb as vessel, womb as coil; womb as pomegranate; womb as earth. Perhaps the most stimulating image is found on page 52, where a wall with a gate in it is the vagina leading to a womb with child wrapped in red and orange floral petals, surround by a feminine image, each of whose hands reach to the side to draw eggs from baskets; the whole is surrounded with red and the outline of uterus and fallopian tubes and ovaries interchanges with the playful imagery of the painting. Inside the walled garden are trees and women and children resting; above it all fly hundreds of blue and green and purple birds.

On page 25 is another stunning image; two women in stylized form, both fitted with wings, fly slightly above the ground. They are superimposed upon another image, cloudy and grey-blue and brown, which holds the top of a porch swing in the left hand and rings the bell which tolls in death in the right. Both of the women are depicted with a stream of blood running from womb to earth. The text tells us the origin; the artist's grandmother, whose death coincided with her menarche, told her that when she bled, she would fly.

This is a book to ponder. It is probably a book to give away; one ought browse it for a while, then browse it again, and then give it to a friend. The imagery is wholly feminine in the book. Some men might find that upsetting; I did not. I found it comforting, warming and inviting. The images are filled with symbols but they are accessible; there is nothing esoteric here. There are birds and women and children and trees and earth and womb and vagina, and—on page 18—there is a remarkable depiction of Mother as abysmal space, the hollow which is hallowed and which heals in which the holy dead are seeded. A woman sits within the earth, surrounded by earth in the form of wombheart; her legs, which we see, are crossed beneath her; her hands part her long blond hair and within—Emptiness!

Jay C. Rochelle

EZEKIEL 1–19. By William H. Brownlee. Word Biblical Commentary 28. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986. xlii and 321 pages. Cloth. $22.95.

ISAIAH 1–33. By John D. W. Watts. Word Biblical Commentary 24. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985. lvii and 449 pages. Cloth. $24.95.

2 KINGS. By T. R. Hobbs. Word Biblical Commentary 13, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985. xlviii and 388 pages. Cloth. $22.95.

The Word Biblical Commentary continues to appear in rapid succession, and its clear format, well-informed comments, and serious attention to the Bible's use in the church promise to win it many fans.

Brownlee died before this first volume on Ezekiel was completed (the Introduction merely reprints a long Bible dictionary article he published some years ago), and the second volume will be written by Leslie C. Allen, who also wrote the commentary for this series on Psalms 101–150. Despite numerous publications on this prophet over a long career, Brownlee was somewhat of a maverick, especially as to the prophet's location. The Bible places him exclusively in Babylon during his ministry, but Brownlee has him spend a good deal of time in Gilgal, near Jericho, before going off to Egypt in 587. Later he returned to Gilgal and then headed off for Transjordan, Phoenicia, and Egypt, from where he led a new Exodus back to Israel. Caveat emptor!

Hobbes believes the entire Deuteronomistic History, including 2 Kings, was penned by one man in Babylon in 560 B.C.E. This puts him at odds with major scholars both here and abroad who find multiple redactions, and he carries on a running argument with these other viewpoints throughout the commentary. As far as the textual history of the book goes, he dismisses the widely-touted hypothesis of F. M. Cross but fails to note in the Introduction that the entire LXX text of 2 Kings belongs to the *kaige* recension, a late revision much like our present Hebrew Bible, and he seems unaware of the extent and importance of the proto-Lucianic recension. His decision to focus on the final literary form of the text, while seemingly in tune with other studies today, often leads him, in my judgment, to sweep a lot of problems under the rug (see his discussion of Sennacherib's 701 campaign).

Watts is the Old Testament editor of the Word Biblical Commentary and here delivers the first of two welcome volumes on Isaiah. He moves beyond the old First, Second, and Third Isaiah approaches by proposing that the book was pulled together around 435 B.C.E. (63:1–6 seems to be the latest material; Isaiah himself lived in the 8th century) and that it is to be read from this 5th century perspective.

The whole is understood as The Vision of Isaiah (1:1), composed in ten acts, plus Prologue and Epilogue, covering ten generations of Israel's history. The author spoke for a minority which felt that the old order had come to

an end with the conquests of Assyria and Babylon and that a new order emerged with the rise of Persia. Neither tribal confederation or monarchy was the ideal, but rather Zion, pilgrim city and city of God. The author called for a quietistic acceptance of Persian sovereignty and condemned sacrificial worship, the demand for God's intervention (it will be interesting to see how 51:9–10 and 59:15–16, 20 will be interpreted in the second volume!), and pagan cults.

Coming to terms with this reading (little here about source, form, and tradition criticism) may take a while. The commentary assumes that the authors/editors/composers had full creative freedom to pick and choose from the traditional material at their disposal, and that they were fully responsible for its arrangement and the total artistic and theological effect. No attempt is made to distinguish traditional literary material from the original literary work of the editors.

In short, we are back—in some sense—to one Isaiah! But this "Isaiah" wrote three centuries after his historical namesake.

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TEXT AND REALITY. By Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster. Philadelphia: Fortress Press and Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985. 123 pages. Paper. $9.95.

This volume in the Semeia Studies series includes four essays, two by each author, which explore the aspect of "reference" in the present dicussion of biblical hermeneutics. What is the relationship of the "world of the text" to the "world existing outside the text"? In what way does the text refer to reality?

In the first essay, Lategan takes up the methodological issues of the relationship of the "historical" and "structural" aspects of a text, the role of the reader in "determining the meaning of the text," and what is involved in understanding the "reference" of the text. Vorster's first essay (chapter 2) discusses "meaning" and "reference" in relation to the parables of Jesus in Mark 4. He demonstrates that these parables are "retold" stories which need to be understood, first of all, as to *how* they function in 4:1–34 and *how* 4:1–34 functions within the larger Markan narrative. He argues that the "reference" of parables embedded within a literary piece must be seen initially in terms of their created "narrative world," and not, as has often been the case, as directly witnessing to the teaching of the historical Jesus.

Concluding that Vorster had unwisely restricted the notion of "reference" to the narrative world, Lategan in his second essay (chapter 3) argues that the real author of a narrative constructs both the "implied reader" and "implied author" (narrator) to lead the real readers to perceive *extratextual reality* in new ways. This narrative "redescription" (Ricoeur's term) can only operate when the author and the readers have in view reality outside the text to which the text is referring as well as the "textual world" itself.

In his secondary essay (final chapter), Vorster supports his thesis that "the referential status" of a story "is directly related to its semantic function" (p. 96) by considering the story of Nathan and David in 2 Samuel 12, a text used by Lategan in the previous essay to make his case. In the process of debating the applicability of Ricoeur's theory of "redescription" as reference, Vorster argues that the Nathan story can only be understood as its narrative context is taken into account.

These four essays raise important questions about the relationship of "text" and "reality" and provide stimulating, though not easy, reading for those already initiated into the current debate in biblical interpretation about the function of language and the meaning of texts.

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CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKING AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT. By Duane K. Friesen. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986. 303 pages. Paper. $19.95.

This book is subtitled "A Realist Pacifist Perspective." If "realist" means careful, critical, and lucid consideration of a problem from multiple perspectives, then the book delivers what it promises. It is a wealth of information (including bibliography) of both theological and social scientific explorations of peacemaking that should prove especially useful to individuals and groups interested in a thorough introduction to peace studies.

Friesen himself defines a "realist" pacifism as one that "takes seriously the nature of human sinfulness as it expresses itself in the egoistic self-interest and exploitation of political and economic systems" and "is political, that seeks to apply its ethic to resolution of practical, economic, and political issues within human institutions" (p. 19). This definition leads him to develop a perspective that is informed by both social scientific and theological insight.

Without wavering from his conviction that nonviolence is central to Christian life, he recognizes the importance of a careful consideration of what both violence and nonviolence mean, both structurally and individually, if Christian life is to include the public discourse central to being human. Friesen does not paint a utopian picture; he is not interested in withdrawal. He is interested in exploring the significance of Christian pacifism for the "real" world of human interaction, communication, and conflict.

Friesen insists that Christian pacifism understand "peace" as *shalom.* This means that a negative definition is not sufficient. As Martin Luther King, Jr. insisted, peace is more than the absence of war; it is the presence of *justice.*

Theologically, the discussion revolves around consideration of creation and sin, on the one hand, and redemption and hope on the other. A "realistic" perspective is cognizant of God's act of creation and redemption as well as the human dimension of sin. It is precisely God's acts that provide the basis for eschatological hope and for *shalom.* A one-sided emphasis on sin, without attention to the hope grounded in God's active intervention in history, produces only despair. That, Friesen would insist, is not realistic.

Nonviolence is "the normative principle of social change." For Friesen, the normative principle of nonviolence is central to Christian faith; because it is a principle of social change, it is political and is a proper subject for social scientific analysis. Friesen insists that "ends" and "means" are inseparable. An unjust means cannot be expected to achieve a just goal. Because "violence" is essentially violation of persons, while "justice" involves their affirmation, violent means cannot be expected to further the cause of justice.

In his Foreward to the book, Stanley Hauerwas expresses his hope that "Friesen has written the book that will finally begin the discussion that we have long needed between the so-called 'peace churches' and the mainstream of Christianity." Perhaps it is a bit much to expect Friesen to *begin* a discussion that, in one form or another, has been going on for some time. (The series of which this book is a part, the "Christian Peace Shelf," has been an important part of the recent history of that discussion.) But this book is evidence that a discussion that has too often been superficial and has too easily degenerated into caricature can in fact move to the level of real dialogue, which always includes the potential for mutual transformation. It is an important contribution both to a theology of nonviolence *and* to a politics of nonviolent action.

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GODS AND THE ONE GOD. By Robert M. Grant. Library of Early Christianity 1. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986. 211 pages. Cloth. $18.95.

EARLY BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION. By James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer. Library of Early Christianity 3. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986. $18.95.

Wayne A. Meeks of Yale University is the General Editor of a new series entitled the *Library of Early Christianity,* handsomely published by The Westminster Press. These volumes are not editions or translations, as the title might suggest, but introductory studies, non-technical yet substantial and stimulating. "This series of books is an exercise in taking down fences," writes Meeks in the first foreward, such as those between the New Testament and church history, between Judaism and Christianity and ancient Rome, between history and literature.

Robert Grant's book, *Gods and the One God,* is a smooth study of the dialogue and discord between early Christians and other religious people of their age. Part One presents the New Testament references to the Gods and surveys the various religions of Rome. Part Two considers the Christian case against polytheism (anchored in 1 Cor 8: 4–6) and the polytheists' own claims for the functions and deeds of their Gods and heroes.

All of this is really to introduce Part Three, over one-half of the book, which documents the interaction of patristic theology and "pagan" philosophy. Grant nicely summarizes the well-known echoes of Middle Platonism in Philo, certain Gnostics, Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. Early patristic Christology, especially at Antioch, was in constant dialogue with that which deserves to be called more than "background." As for trinitarian formulations, the book ends as the plot thickens; Numenius and subsequent (Neo-) Platonists formulated elaborate theories of divine triads just when Christian theologians worked through the doctrine of the Trinity. The later love-hate tale of Neoplatonists and Christians awaits another author, preferably one with the life-long learning and graceful style of Robert Grant.

Early Biblical Interpretation by James L. Kugel and Rowan A. Greer is actually two separate studies: "Early Interpretation: The Common Background of Late Forms of Biblical Exegesis," Kugel's essay on Israel's interpretation of its own sacred texts; and "The Christian Bible and Its Interpretation," Greer's presentation of patristic exegesis, especially in Irenaeus. The two essays, each about one hundred pages in length, make no cross-reference to each other and seem at first to have little in common. Except for Greer's three pages of epilogue, they could have been written in complete isolation and then bound in tandem by an editor and a title. Nevertheless, in addition to their individual virtues, the two works have a striking complementarity in subject matter and in conclusions.

For James Kugel, the primary context for Israel's interpretation of its sacred texts was the changing fortunes in its political history, from the Babylonian captivity onward. True, this interpretation was required by the evolution of the Hebrew language, by the change of the vernacular from Hebrew to Aramaic, and by the difficulties in the texts. But the primary motive was political or national, such as the urgent desire of returning exiles to re-claim and thus interpret their pre-exilic past. Schools of rabbis collected, classified and exegeted the ancient texts, all for the sake of Israel's current national existence. "Early interpretation was an activity with great political consequence" (p. 65). The huge written collections of Mishnah, Gemara, and Talmud came later, unfortunately outside the borders of this book. While the geopolitical context for the earliest Jewish exegesis is well documented, the yoking of this essay with Greer's would have been stronger if Kugel had continued his investigation past the fall of

Jerusalem. Kugel ends long before Greer beings.

Nevertheless, Kugel's claim that Israel first interpreted its own texts for political motives finds a clear echo in Rowan Greer's sustained argument that the Christian church first interpreted these same texts and its own scriptures for theological motives. In both cases there is no presumption of a post-Enlightenment objectivity and neutral investigation of the texts for their "true" historical meaning. "The early Christians asked what the Bible meant theologically rather than historically" (p. 112). Greer goes behind the usual presentation of Alexandrian allegory and Antiochene typology to find both tendencies in Irenaeus, the first theologian to develop a Rule of Faith.

The Christian canon was itself shaped by the theological Rule of Faith which rejected Marcion, appropriated the "Old" Testament, and made Christ "the key to the meaning of the Scripture" (p. 133). From Origen to Theodore of Mopsuestia, theological positions shaped exegetical principles, which Greer effectively defends from the modern charge of "eisegesis." He leaves undeveloped, however, the converse insight that the best path into a theological system is often an investigation of that author's hermeneutical principles. Protestant readers especially should also note the narrow distinction between a Christological Rule of Faith that Christ is the key to the Scriptures and the broader view that ecclesiastical traditions should openly dominate biblical interpretation.

Overall, the tandem essays of Kugel and Greer provide a clear introduction to early biblical interpretation, covering the general topic and advancing a particular perspective. Indispensable, however, are the primary sources themselves, as now conveniently available in *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church,* translated and edited by Karlfried Froehlich (Fortress, 1984).

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ROMANS. By Paul J. Achtemeier. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985. xii and 244 pages. Cloth. $17.95.

PHILIPPIANS. By Fred B. Craddock. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985. xii and 84 pages. Cloth. $12.95.

These are two volumes in the new series INTERPRETATION. A BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING, with James Mays as the Series Editor. The Series Preface states that "it is designed to meet the need of students, teachers, ministers, and priests for a contemporary expository commentary. These volumes will not replace the historical critical commentary or homiletical aids to preaching. The purpose of this series is rather to provide a third kind of resource, a commentary which presents the integrated result of historical and theological work with the biblical text." One may ask whether there is a need for such a commentary series. Should a preacher or teacher not read the historical critical commentary and some homiletical aids? Why such a new series which is neither fish nor fowl? Well, I suppose the idea is that technical commentaries are sometimes a little frightening for the non-scholarly use and yet their insights ought to be communicated. Thus perhaps such a series can be defended.

There are relatively few references to other scholars or commentaries although a minimal bibliography is appended. The commentaries are based on the Revised Standard Version, but the text itself is not printed in order to save space. Comments are made on paragraphs rather than on individual verses. If this format appeals to you, then the two commentaries under discussion are for you and are good representatives of this series.

Neither one of these two commentaries contains any great surprises, but both exhibit a welcome freshness and liveliness in their description of the content of the epistles. Achtemeier's long occupation with Pauline theology

and Romans is evident in his masterful analysis of the epistle. There are many good features. I liked the diagrams on pp. 7–12, setting forth the various views of the two aeons, his occasional translation of "justified by faith" by "rectified by trust" (it brings out the restoring of the relationship between God and the human being), his interpretive stance on 7:7–25 (the non-Christian life under the law seen from a Christian perspective), and his distinction between predestination and predeterminism. According to Achtemeier, it is the latter which is discussed in Romans 9–11, so that Paul is concerned with the final outcome, the salvation of all, and "speaks of the asymmetry of God's grace, not the symmetry of grace and wrath."

But some negative comments also must be made: I would take issue with his division between Part One (1:1–4:22) and Part Two (4:23–8:39) because 4:23–25 is clearly the conclusion of the explanation of Gen 15:6 which was begun in 4:3.—A number of times, Achtemeier prefers the NEB translation but without actually quoting it.—No attention is paid to the possibility of earlier traditions incorporated by Paul.—Instead of justification by faith as the major theme of Romans, Achtemeier thinks that "the logic of history" is the logic of the structure of Romans. That works rather well for Parts One through Three (God's Lordship and the Problem of the Past, Present, Future), although even here irregularities are to be observed, but it leaves Part Four as a sort of appendix (Achtemeier calls it "God's Lordship and the Problems of Daily Living"). It seems better to me, despite Achtemeier's arguments, to take 1:16–17 as the theme.—A few assertions are repeated unnecessarily.

Achtemeier frequently refers to the lessons of the church year and makes valuable comments on teaching and preaching on specific texts.

Craddock succeeds well in showing the personal relationship and the frequent contacts of Paul with the Philippians. I also like his statement that Paul employs rhetorical devices which would aid a listener (rather than a reader) although I missed his pointing this out during the commentary. Other criticisms:—He discusses the possibility of Philippians as a composition of several letters without stating clearly his own preference.—Although the hymn in 2:5–11 is put very well in its context, I would have liked some more comments on the doctrinal significance of this piece.—He also refers to the church year, but without the specific comments on teaching and preaching which Achtemeier makes.—It would seem that the audience addressed in these commentaries would not need such a detailed description of what a letter is, but might very well be better instructed about Gnosticism than is done by Craddock.

To the publishers and editors I would suggest that the superscriptions for each page should refer to the exact passage discussed and not to the large sections of the outline. Although the method used perhaps makes it necessary for the user to study the context of a pericope better, it would be easier to use the commentaries if the exact passage were indicated.

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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

Edited by
George W. Hoyer

Hospitality—Cure For Tired Preaching

At these seasons of the church year, preachers may be more tempted than ever to ask themselves, "Just what is preaching the gospel anyway?" A simple answer is that it is our effort to explicate or make meaningful for our contemporaries the events encompassing the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Preaching conveys what God has effected, what God has enacted, what God has enabled through those events and that person. And biblical preaching relies on the biblical images (metaphors, if you will) by which the Spirit helps us to understand the divine deed—justification, redemption, reconciliation, among others.

But sometimes those traditional images, tried and true, become tired in our preaching. Perhaps this season's preaching might be refreshed by using a different but, happily, still biblical metaphor—hospitality. Recommended to assist preachers to project this image is John Koenig's *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission,* Overtures to Biblical Theology 17 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

Koenig's book has five chapters. The first sketches how and why the notion of hospitality helps to elucidate the gospel, and the last draws implications for contemporary applications. They are thought-provoking chapters, rich homiletical resources. But more provocative and richer still are the three exegetical studies of the intervening chapters.

Chapter 2, "Sharing the Feast of the Kingdom," traces the prominence of hospitality in the ministry of Jesus, as reflected in the substrata of the synoptic tradition. Koenig is more confident than some critical scholars that we really can (and do!) touch base with the historical Jesus when examining texts like Matt 11:16–19 (Luke 7:31–34), where Jesus is called "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" Koenig's close examination of this passage yields keen insights into Jesus' self-understanding, his sense of mission, and his proclamation of the kingdom's advent.

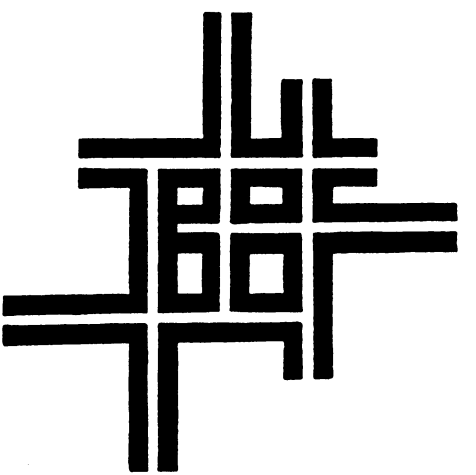
Chapter 3, "Welcoming One Another to New Humanity," is an overview of Paul's theology and missionary practice as seen through the lens of hospitality. Toward the end of the chapter Koenig offers a fresh and engaging view of Paul's partnership with the Philippians, of his reasons for taking the collection, and of his relationship with Philemon. Most significant in the

chapter, however, is his commentary on 1 Cor 11 under the heading "The Supper of Discernment." Koenig explains the Corinthian situation and Paul's frustration with it more clearly than anything I've read previously. The key, of course, is that the Corinthians were creating barriers to hospitality . . . to the gospel.

Chapter 4, "Guests and Hosts, Together in Mission," is as fine a redactional study of Luke-Acts as one can find in print. Koenig says, "The very structure of Luke's work witnesses to a conviction on his part that some deep link exists between the verbal content of God's good news and its historical embodiment in boundary situations involving guests and hosts" (p. 86). The evidence Koenig adduces is overwhelmingly persuasive. He "proves" Paul Minear's assertion that for Luke "table fellowship as interpreted by table talk constituted the gospel." Especially noteworthy in this chapter is Koenig's analysis of the Lukan account of the Last Supper (pp. 114–119).

Over time, metaphors may become faded or jaded, and lose their capacity to illumine truth. That can happen in our preaching, too, alas. To gain a fresh perspective on the gospel and its radical implications and imperatives for the church's new humanity, preachers should look into *New Testament Hospitality.* I had the privilege of experiencing it while the guest of a very genial host, George W. Hoyer, an editor of this journal. And that made the metaphor all the more lively and real.

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First Sunday in Lent March 8, 1987

Psalm 130
Genesis 2:7–9, 15–17, 3:1–7
Romans 5:12 (13–16) 17–19
Matthew 4:1–11

Each of the assigned texts is loaded with insight to launch an exciting series of sermons for the six Sunday season. With such a wealth of material, it is important to proceed with care.

The texts clearly relate to each other; indeed, each informs the other. Yet only one should be chosen on which to ground the sermon. Look ahead at your series in Lent to determine which text and emphasis you wish to use on this initial Sunday in Lent. In any case, make sure the sermon–series has a meaningful flow toward Holy Week and especially the celebration of the Resurrection.

The Old Testament lesson focuses on the narrative of humankind's rebellion against God in refusing to trust his Word and Promise. It is dramatic narrative which needs to be retold with oneself taking the position of Adam or Eve, the disbelieving one, the disobeying one.

In the lesson from Romans, Paul in effect develops the theological significance of our human condition (fallen) in light of Christ's work of redemption. In contrast to the Genesis picture-language, Paul communicates with penetrating analysis and logic, both providing depth and insight to the Word. Indeed, Paul's account moves beyond the Genesis story. In the latter we are confronted with our condition, the "lost estate." Paul insists that we realize God does not leave us in that condition. Instead, there is the "second estate," the difference that Christ makes.

Pervasive in these texts are opportunities for discussing insights into a Christian understanding of sin. Certainly they compel a profound awareness of sin and the persistent reign and power of evil. In Genesis, sin is certainly not doing "bad" and displeasing God. Sin is primarily and ultimately distrusting God, failing to trust him at his Word and, in distrust, disobeying.

In Romans, Paul deepens our insight of the deadly nature of our sin by contrasting sin with grace. Our sinful nature causes us to be clever in manipulating our sins. But when sin is seen as death, then only can you recognize the necessity of Christ, who restores the "faithful" person to life, by his life and his grace. Sin can only be properly understood in the context of Christ's grace. To make this clear, as Paul does, is forever important in our preaching.

The Gospel lesson, it is generally assumed, will be the basis of the sermon for this Sunday. With that in mind, the first two lessons should be primary helps for preaching the Gospel for the day.

For yourself and your listeners, work yourself into the drama of the scenes of Christ's temptation. A casual reading gives a false impression. We often fail to recognize in the account the horrendous and profound conflict we should observe. There are three scenes of the evil one tempting Jesus. In each, Jesus responds with a commanding proclamation that appears to demolish the evil one. Indeed, he hurls three commanding blows, driving the devil from power. But each temptation must be seen as a bitter struggle between God and evil. One can envision Jesus sweating drops of blood as he did in Gethsemane. Indeed, the last verse indicates the exhaustion of Christ due to the bitter encounter: "When the devil left him, . . . angels came and ministered to him."

One could easily over-lay the cry of the psalm for the day, Psalm 130, "Out of the depths I cry to thee, oh Lord."

While some exegetes caution against suggestion that we should attempt to experience ourselves being tempted as Jesus was in this lesson, the writer to the Hebrews (4:15) insists that Jesus was "one who in every respect has

been tempted as we." The accent is on "in every respect," and, as the text continues, "yet without sinning." A good spiritual sweat may be our need—to be shaken by the several devious ways we have been tempted and have fallen!

How about building at least on the first of the three scenes? Our very life-style, what some call a "rat race," others a career, needs critical cal review. Certainly we do not see or hear the devil confronting us so directly: "Make stone into bread!" But there are drives, often piously disguised to make (create) or to buy (possess) in our daily work, with a hidden hope to achieve ultimate security (eternal life). Remember Tennessee William's line in *Cat On a Hot Tin Roof,* "We buy, buy and buy with the hope we can eventually buy eternal life." Turned about by God, we know that beyond our creating/building and buying is the presence and purpose of God. We need the spiritual struggle to be sure we are not living by bread alone.

Rather, we live by the Word of God. This interchange seems a natural tie into the Old Testament and the Romans text. Both accent the Word from God which we need to hear and trust. It is the Word in Christ that gives faith in vocation, giving purpose and meaning, freeing us from entanglement with things.

Each of Christ's encounters with the Tempter is unique, sharp and clear. Because he was the Holy One of God—and this is important—he endured the encounter with evil by not falling, and thus in that way, he is unlike us. Foreshadowing his crucifixion, he endured the suffering to the end, faithful without failing. And therefore, his redemption does overcome our fallen condition. His grace, the grace of God, does overcome our sin. The Word both declares and gives this to us through faith.

In our struggles, Christ is the angel of God who comes and ministers to us, forgiving and strengthening. He reshapes our families, our careers, our work.

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Second Sunday in Lent March 15, 1987

Psalm 105:4–11
Genesis 12:1–8
Romans 4:1–5, 13–17
John 4:5–26 (27–30, 39–42)

"Sir, I perceive you are a prophet," she said—about this stranger at the well, about this higher caste fellow who did in fact speak first to her, about this fellow who wastes no time getting to the heart of things. But who needs a prophet unless he can answer the questions we've always wanted answered, preferably with the answers we already now we want to hear? If he gets too close to the truth, fend him off—even with religious dodges. If he asks for something, inquire whether he knows the rules for proper social distance (John 4:9). If he offers something, ask if he is properly equipped to give it (4:11). If he tries to get beyond surface talk, humor him a little (4:15). If he does get beyond surface talk and a little too close for comfort, flatter him—tell him you think he's a *prophet* (4:19).

Through all the dodges, Jesus' persistence has its result: little by little the woman comes to believe. Some of the themes of John's gospel are apparent in this story of a journey from inadequate faith to true faith: 1) the desire to see how one can benefit tangibly from Jesus (4:15; cf. 6:34); 2) the need to replace sterile forms of religiosity with the true worship (4:20–24; cf. 2:19); 3) the seeking for and the finding of the Messiah in Jesus (4:25–26; cf. 9:36–37); 4) the recognition of revelation which takes place at the confrontation with Jesus (4:29; cf. 8:31–32); 5) the proclamation about Jesus which becomes a vehicle for bringing others to faith (4:42; cf. 17:20). The context itself provides its own contrast: while in chapter 3 the learned and orthodox teacher Nicodemus has

difficulty comprehending Jesus' proclamation, in chapter 4 the despised and heretical Samaritans readily embrace Jesus, confessing him as the "Savior of the world" (4:39–42).

The often-overlooked exchange in 4:10–11 presents another of John's literary techniques, namely that of having Jesus' listener misunderstand Jesus. It is an important exchange. Jesus tells the woman that she does not understand the "gift of God," and that therefore she is unable to ask from Jesus and receive from him. Her journey toward adequate believing then begins when she is able to ask Jesus to give her the living water of which he speaks (4:15). It is this action of giving and receiving that constitutes faith and its beginnings: Christian believers know themselves to be recipients of God's giving:

To know oneself as a recipient—that is the theme of Romans, and chapter 4 presents Abraham as the model of recipiency. Abraham is not an achiever before God, but a recipient: "to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due" (4:4). Believers distinguish themselves from unbelievers in that believers know themselves to be recipients, for only recipients are able to glorify and thank God (Romans 1:21). Because Abraham knows himself to be a recipient rather than an achiever, he is able to have faith in the one who justifies the ungodly (4:5), and he is therefore able to glorify God (4:20), which is something unbelievers cannot do. Therefore it is important to note the missing word in the RSV text of Romans 4:1 (see the footnote), which literally should read: "What therefore shall we declare Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, *to have found*?" For Paul knows the story in Genesis 18, in which Abraham saw the three strangers before his tent door and asked, "My lord, if I have *found favor* (Heb: *chen;* LXX: *charis;* both meaning "grace") in your sight do not pass by your servant" (18:54). Paul knows that Abraham found *grace,* i.e. he is a recipient of God's giving, and knowing that is believing, and such believing is the ground of God's acceptance of the ungodly (Gen 15:6, Romans 4:3).

In Genesis 12 Abraham had already distinguished himself as a believer. He is the recipient of God's call and promise, and breaks with his past toward a new future. He went out, as Hebrews 11:8 puts it, "not knowing where he was to go." As Abraham is the recipient of God's blessing (12:2), he is also now named as the mediator of God's blessing to "all the families of the earth" (12:3). This is the accent Paul develops in Romans 4. Abraham the recipient, not Abraham the righteous achiever, is under God's blessing. Therefore Abraham is the father of all those whose acceptance before God is not the result of their righteous achievement but of God's giving and forgiving (4:5–8, 16–17). Abraham is therefore not simply Israel's progenitor, but "the father of us all" (4:16).

That includes Samaritan women, and German reformers, and American executives, and Namibian workers, minority governments and majority populaces. All are recipients before God. But Christian believers acknowledge their recipiency, and therefore are able to do something unbelievers cannot do: to glorify and thank God. They will look at what they have differently then—from family to friends to church to vocation to skills and talents to country and community to strengths for overcoming hardships to the planet on which we live—not as theirs by right or achievement, but as the result of God's giving. They will look at these things differently than unbelievers do: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new world" (2 Cor 5:17). As ones who trust, they know they are entrusted. And they have a mission: to enable others to experience recipiency, so that such others are enabled to believe (John 4:39–42), i.e. to give glory and thanks to God, which is something unbelievers cannot do.

As one German reformer put it as he tried to explain the first article of the Apostle's Creed, all of God's creating, giving, sustaining, providing and protecting is done without any merit or worthiness on our part. "For all of this I am

bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him." That is what only believers can do.

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Third Sunday in Lent March 22, 1987

Psalm 142
Isaiah 42:14–21
Ephesians 5:8–14
John 9:1–41
or John 9:13–17, 34–39

The Latin name for today "Oculi," (mine eyes) from the Introit is helpful. All three lessons deal with images of blind/seeing, darkness/light, and a movement from one to the other. Lent is a journey through darkness to the Light of Easter.

The preacher must decide whether to use the long or short form of the gospel. The long form offers a variety of approaches all under the theme of "Jesus, the Light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5). The Light both illumines and leads and exposes and blinds.

The story beings with a question about "Why suffering?", a sign of the disciples' faulty vision about God's way of dealing with sin. Jesus meets that issue by not discussing the matter (other than pointing out that their line of reasoning is wrong). Rather, Jesus takes action in the middle of suffering. The causes and origins of sin, evil, and suffering are not explained in Scripture, but the trio are met with action that God might demonstrate his works. As we shall see, that kind of questioning in our story ends with a confession of faith—not by the spectators, but by the victim of such suffering—after an encounter with Jesus. The preacher has opportunity to address the question of suffering and its relation/non-direct relation to sin. The questioning ends with a confession of faith.

Since Lent is a time when our baptismal life is to be renewed, it is appropriate to accent the sacramental significance and symbolism in today's gospel. It beings with a beggar, one blind from birth, hopeless, helpless, and in need of others to guide him. Jesus takes the initiative and goes to him. Just as God took earth, formed it, and breathed into it to create a human being in his own image, Jesus continues the work of the One who sent him as he uses clay, saliva, and water combined with his word to make a new creature. The new creature is hardly recognizable to the neighbors (vv. 8,9).

The man is healed, not by the water, but by the water with the word. Even while physically blind, he has the faith to trust the one who seems to make his condition worse (with mud), in the hope of being helped. He believes he is not just having dirt thrown in his face, that this whole thing is not just some cruel joke—an experience he'd no doubt had before. It is a reminder that one must forget one's own view of how God should act, and trust the voice of his Son. The blind man, like Abraham, trusts that he is not being sent on some wild goose chase.

The man's ignorance is stressed throughout the story (vv. 12, 25, 36). The one thing he knows is that he can see—thanks to Jesus. Such ignorance–with–faith is contrasted with the blind confidence of the Pharisees (vv. 16, 24, 29). They, like the disciples in the beginning, believe they know how God operates. Their problem is that they have their eyeballs screwed in backwards, with the result that they only see a god who operates according to their thoughts and imagination. It is then ultimately "self" confidence. They see clearly, but have focussed on the wrong object. By putting the

man on trial, they judge Jesus and thereby determine their own judgment. Their case begins to fall apart as the witnesses come forward. Even the divided opinion (v.16) gives bad PR for these experts. The examination focuses on the actions of Jesus and is based on whether those acts meet their expectations.

Their problem is stated in verse 16—their dilemma is that Jesus broke the Sabbath by kneading the mud, and that they cannot reconcile themselves with his doing such a mighty work from God. The conclusions which they refused to see was that the Law itself is superseded in Jesus. The Law condemns itself when it condemns Jesus. Jesus becomes the lawbreaker/sinner in order to be the Son of Man for the blind from birth. As the man goes through his stages of faith and clarity, he is being prepared to see Jesus rejected as lawbreaker at another trial. Then he will hear *him* ask the why question about suffering (addressing the One whom he trusts), and watch *him,* too, go down a road that looks worse before it gets better.

The final examination of the formerly blind man (vv. 24–34) shows up the blindness of the questioners. They would prefer to have him contradict himself and settle for a lie than see the truth. They prove themselves to be children of the father of lies as Jesus said (8:44). They prefer to hang on to a comfortable lie instead of allowing themselves to be exposed. Since they regard their own lights as sufficient, when the true Light comes, they refuse to see it. Their deliberate blindness thereby becomes incurable.

The preacher can deal with the faulty viewpoint that there is a direct cause/effect relationship with sin. The popularity of Rabbi Kushner's book, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People,* along with the common notion that a person must have done something to deserve all this, says the issue needs addressing. The question can be refocused from the blind "Why?", to the faithful "To what end would God use this experience?", to "What is it that gives meaning when nothing else makes any sense?"

The baptismal theme is clear. The day affords the opportunity to talk about original sin (blind from birth), what it is that is meant by "spiritual blindness"—closed eyes, focusing on the wrong objects of faith, ignorance, unfaith. Does one know if he/she is spiritually blind or is that the depth of the problem?

The "ignorance of faith" is to know only one thing. That gets modelled in today's gospel. It means, that though we are unable to see, we go ahead and trust the promise of the One who does, confident that this is more than a wild goose ahead. Ultimately, even those who are able to see, and thereby confess Jesus, continue to see through a glass dimly. It means that we must continue to walk this Lenten Life Journey by faith rather than by sight. Blind faith is not all that risky when we walk and are led by the Light of the world.

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Oak Lake Lutheran Church
Kerrick, Minnesota

Fourth Sunday in Lent March 29, 1987

Psalm 43
Hosea 5:15–6:2
Romans 8:1–10
Matthew 20:17–28

Initial Diagnosis: Investors

Investments are a key aspect of life, even in Lent. But what have we bought into? The people of Israel bought into the prospect of finding refuge and healing in kings and nations (cf. Hosea 5:13). Paul speaks of our having bought into flesh-mindedness (Romans 8:5–7). The disci-

ples of Jesus bought into the prospect of one upsmanship within the chosen community (Matt 20:21, 24–25).

Advanced Diagnosis: Disappointed and Disillusioned

Our investments have a way of letting us down. After all, before Israel bought into bribery with Assyria, they bought into power politics against Assyria in alliance with their (now destroyed) neighbors. Flesh-mindedness is forever needing to find another fading idol. James and John, willing to risk whatever it takes to get the best seats, learn that Jesus doesn't have the right to give them out; and besides, the decision has already been made to whom they will go.

More Advanced Diagnosis: Enslaved

But isn't this shifting from one investment to another the very bondage of our lives? In order to make our lives meaningful, valuable, secure, do we really need to invest somewhere, in something? And even if we know how shaky the foundation of such an investment is, we continue to cling to it as if it is the only thing we have.

Final Diagnosis: Condemned

But, alas, we "cannot please God." Punishment (Hosea 5:15) and death (Romans 8:6a) are what awaits, and even James and John receive the ominous assurance that they will drink the cup of judgment (Matt 20:23).

Initial Prognosis: Ransomed

But now comes one Suffering Servant, Son of Man, Jesus, to invest his life and death in order to "pay the price of freedom" (ransom) for those enslaved and condemned. A bad investment? Not to this ransoming Lord, who would have it no other way! (Matt 20:28).

Advanced Prognosis: Revived

That ransoming is what breathes life into our lives. Torn, we are healed, and stricken, we are bound up (Hosea 6:1). In the Spirit there is life and peace (Romans 8:6b).

More Advanced Prognosis: "Enslaved" in Christ

Being a slave *en Christo* is not really slavery, but it is serving in order to liberate all who are captors and captives. Christ is the model *par excellence* for the community of the ransoming Promise.

Final Prognosis: Certifably Righteous

Even in the midst of witness, and in the time of trial (from which, good Lord, deliver us!), even when the only word to be heard is the legal condemnation from the authorities, political and ecclesiastical (cf. Matt 20:18, 22–23), "your spirits are alive because of righteousness" (Romans 8:10b). "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). If you are in a "time for confessing" when you must drink the cup of suffering, forget not the eucharistic cup of blessing and the promise of your baptism, and assert the promise in prayer, "God of all *mercy,* by your power to heal and to forgive, graciously cleanse us from all sin and make us strong." *Laetare!* Rejoice!

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Fifth Sunday in Lent April 5, 1987

Psalm 116:1–8
Ezekiel 37:1–3 (4–10) 11–14
Romans 8:11–19
John 11:1–53 (or 47–53)

We Christians normally read the four gospels as though the great news of the Resurrection is quite naturally the surprise "punch line." But, if that's so, why would that fine dramatist, St. John, ruin the surprise ending by giving away, scarcely half-way into his narrative, the news that the dead can really be raised? That's hint #1 that something else is going on in today's Gospel.

There are other hints:

—Why does Jesus stay away two more days as evidence that he really does love Martha and her sister and Lazarus?

—Why does Jesus weep, if he knows full well that the Father is giving him authority to raise Lazarus?

—Why does Jesus act almost like a "faith-healer" by asking Martha to confess her faith in him prior to raising Lazarus from the dead?

—Why do the Pharisees prompt the Council to put Jesus to death, given that Jesus has just conclusively proven the Pharisees case that there is a resurrection from the dead?

—Why does the Council, having seen the Teacher's mastery over death, think it can use death (rather than exile or defamation or imprisonment) as a means to eliminate him?

We can perhaps come up with somewhat-satisfying explanations to some of those individual questions, e.g. that Jesus wept because he was bringing Lazarus back to a sin-sick world, or that the Council thought the resurrection of Lazarus to be a trick. On the other hand, there are so many anomalies in these verses that one unified explanation might be more satisfying (if not more accurate) than a string of partially-helpful explanations.

Let me try one, namely, that Jesus did not want to resurrect Lazarus, because doing so would distract from larger issues of faith, would seem to take sides in a dispute between two philosophical/political factions, and would call attention to him in ways that he did not really want.

All of us who have ministered in funeral settings know that some shopworn bromides get dragged out in the funeral parlor, bromides which provide the speaker with something to say far more than they actually provide any comfort—"You know she's in a better place now" or "He's on the great golf course in the sky" or whatever. Somehow, Christians try to cut through the blather to ground a concrete hope in the reality of Jesus the Word of God.

Could it be that Martha's declaration to Jesus about "the resurrection in the last day" is the semi-philosophical, quasi-comforting blather of the day?—and that Jesus is likewise trying to cut through it? If today's lesson from Ezekiel is woodenly being used as a "proof-text" for a generalized belief in an eventual resurrection, even in Jesus's day, can we picture Jesus using it to point to the more critical elements, the need for the entry of the Spirit, the coming of a more securely grounded hope, and the truth that resurrection is not an end in itself but merely a means of knowing that the Lord himself has spoken?

Hence, Jesus asks Martha about her faith prior to raising Lazarus, not because her faith is a pre-condition, but because he wants her in the joy over her brother's restoration not to misinterpret what he has done.

Hence, Jesus weeps before raising Lazarus, because his grief is genuine, because he does not really want to "use" his friends even to point to his own mission from the Father, and maybe because he did not want his friends to think that the normal death-and-grieving process will regularly be reversed by him.

Hence, the Pharisees seek to put Jesus to death, not because they don't understand, but because they understand that Jesus is effectively dispensing with all of the issues and beliefs that they want to be important.

Similarly, the Council seeks to put him to death, because thy now need to debunk the notion that Jesus "is" the resurrection, so that the debate can return to more manageable ground. Heretofore, "the resurrection was the resurrection." Now, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life."

How then do we preach this?

By suggesting that the seemingly-momentous issue of resurrection, far from being the "punch line" of this gospel or of The gospel, has been rendered secondary. Rather, the focus is that the God who is "I am" is the God of resurrection and life, and that whoever lives and believes in him (not in those bromides) shall never die. Our life in him becomes a life in which death has been rendered the equivalent of restful sleep. And, in our willingness to face death (but to remain with Christ), as did Thomas, we in fact find life. Do you believe this?

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Sunday of the Passion April 12, 1987

Psalm 31:1–5, 9–16
Isaiah 50:4–9
Philippians 2:5–11
Matthew 26:1–27:66 or Matthew 27:11–54

If the longer version of Matthew's passion story is chosen, it might be a good idea to divide the reading among several voices. Women's and men's voices could be balanced, even though the gospel record provides no speaking roles for the former. (Yet it is the women, rather than the eleven, who watch with Jesus in the final hour of death and stand by to witness his burial). Full participation by the congregation in this earliest Christian story is devoutly to be wished. Would it be possible to include children, too, among the readers? Another suggestion is to vary the roles so that no one individual becomes a stereotypical good or bad character throughout the whole reading. Even Jesus' part could be played by two or three people. The theological grounding for such a format is the simple truth that we all approach the passion as *simul justus et peccator,* and as those who are crucified with Christ.

The gospel reading is of course climactic and will tend to overshadow the other lessons, except perhaps for the Christ hymn in Philippians which occurs every year on this Sunday of the Passion. The hymn stresses Jesus' conscious and deliberate choice in laying aside divine rights to become one of the least of us and suffer the most degrading form of execution. Unlike the reading from Matthew, however, it makes Jesus' triumph explicit ("Therefore God has highly exalted him . . ."). The actual experience of his humiliation is subordinated to his noble act of sacrifice and its reward.

If this picture becomes the interpretive key for your congregation in its hearing of the passion, many could feel, with some vague sense of dissatisfaction, that Jesus is just going through the motions of suffering. After all, didn't he predict his own resurrection? The appointed psalm and the lesson from Isaiah might reinforce this impression, for they portray Jesus as one who trusts confidently in God for refuge to the very end, commits his spirit to the Lord, and sets his face "like a flint," almost stoically, in the firm conviction that he will soon be vindicated. One vital point here is that we need to exercise great care in using the Hebrew scriptures to understand Jesus' inner life. But when this Sunday's readings are heard as a unity, certain conclusions prove almost inescapable. The preacher may choose to address some of these difficulties, especially the view, embedded in our tradition through the Fourth Gospel, that Jesus remains firmly in control of his destiny throughout his suffering and death.

Much of Matthew's 26th chapter also leads us in this direction. Jesus knows with precision the timetable for his passion (vv. 2, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31–34, 45, 54–55) and boldly asserts that

if he wanted to he could appeal to his Father for defense by "more than twelve legions of angels" (v. 53, which is unique to Matthew). On the other hand, Matthew's narration of the threefold prayer in the garden counteracts this picture of the all-knowing and all-powerful Jesus. One wonders if this was not part of the very earliest stratum of the gospel record. Certainly it is an opportunity for the preacher to explore just how human Jesus really was in all of this and just what it was that he gave up when he submitted himself to God's will. Did that act of sacrifice comprehend more than Jesus thought it would? To what extent did it include foreknowledge and control? The early tradition contained in Heb 5:7–9 may offer some guidance here.

If the shorter version of Matthew's passion is chosen, a remarkably consistent portrait of the suffering Jesus emerges. In the whole section from 27:11–54 he speaks only twice ("You have said so" to Pilate; "Eli, Eli . . ." to God) and then cries out with a loud voice at this death. Things are done to him. Not even a pretense of self-defense is offered; it looks as if he is altogether "delivered up" (26:2) to cosmic powers of evil. How shall we describe what he is thinking and feeling *now*? There are some hints of an answer in our story. More than any other evangelist Matthew accents the shame and scorn Jesus endured in his passion. Barabbas the "notorious prisoner" is chosen over him. The high priests' crowd (though not the Jewish people as a whole) demeans him with a bloody oath. Roman soldiers mock him. Those who pass by the cross deride him, and both of the robbers executed with him revile him (contrast Luke). Especially cutting is the taunt, transmitted only in Matt 27:43, "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him."

More than a few have characterized our culture as one ruled over by shame. In a fine book called *Praising and Knowing God,* by Daniel Hardy and David Ford (Westminster, 1985) shame is defined as something "more comprehensive than guilt," as a condition which "negates what one lives from" and so becomes an experience of "ultimate rejection and horror, with the joy and hope of life drained away, and the energies of living turned against themselves" (pp. 89–90). Into this, it seems, the Jesus of Matthew's passion has entered. This is what he experienced fully and suffered through for us. I find tremendous fuel for the imagination of the preacher here and suggest this perspective as a basis for taking another look at the lessons from Psalms, Isaiah, and Philippians. I think that the specter of shame lurks at the heart of them and to a great extent predetermines the form our gospel proclamation must take.

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Maundy Thursday April 16, 1987

Psalm 116:10–17
Exodus 12:1–14
1 Corinthians 11:17–32 (or 23–26)
John 13:1–17, 34

The word for Maundy Thursday is, "Remembrance!" This do in remembrance of me! "Would they remember?" Jesus asked himself that evening. And he took bread and cup and said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Familiar words, but their very familiarity leads to forgetfulness. It becomes important to say, "Do this in remembrance of me."

There is a temptation to omit "the sermon" on Maundy Thursday. But the day cries out not

only for a celebration of the Eucharist but also for a sermon. The four lessons above provide both encouragement and material to do just that.

Taken together, the four lessons suggest this theme, among various other possibilities: The Call to Remembrance.

1. Remember the Celebration, Ps 116.
2. Remember the Liberation, Exod 12.
3. Remember the Proclamation, 1 Cor 11.
4. Remember the Vocation, John 13.

Psalm 116, already in verse one, reminds us that life itself is a daily gift from God that calls for thanksgiving, praise and worship. Verse 13 gets specific and active, "I will lift up the cup of salvation . . ." That is a holy, symbolic action, that gives emphasis to mere words. On this night (or whenever the Eucharist is celebrated), a joyous raising of the cup can in itself give emphasis to our celebrative mood.

There is also a thoughtful word about death in this psalm With our Lord's death to be remembered tomorrow (Good Friday), the word deserves attention: "Precious is the death of his saints," verse 15. "Precious" can be misunderstood. Better is the translation in TANAKH, the 1985 translation of the Holy Scriptures by the Jewish Publication Society, "The death of his faithful ones is grievous in the sight of the Lord." (TEV—Good News—and the German Menge also translate it in this sense). "Grievous" says something about the pain and cost of death. Consider the hymn line (LBW 94), "Who am I, that for my sake my Lord should take frail flesh and die?" Yet the grievous death of our Lord is something to be celebrated. Verse 8 of the Psalm, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death," is reason enough to bring us into the courts of the Lord to join in the celebration.

Maundy Thursday also asks us to remember the liberation of God's people. Exodus 12 takes us back to the first Passover, the prelude to liberation from oppression and injustice. (Congregations that celebrate the Passover-Seder will have a special interest in this passage).

Israel is to remember this night above all others from generation to generation. God is the God "of the mighty hand" that liberates people. He does it in his own unusual way. There is to be "blood upon the houses," v. 13. Blood is an integral part of the Liberation/Salvation story. We have been singing about it throughout Lent (e.g. LBW 95, 98, 109, 112, 113, 120, 127 etc.). Tonight, and whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, we say, "This is my blood." John has something to say about all this in 1 John 1:7, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin." And so does Luther as he ties Passover and Maundy Thursday together in the hymn lines, (LBW 134), "See, his blood doth mark our door. Faith points to it, Death passes o'er. And Satan cannot harm us."

The Second Lesson, 1 Cor. 11:17–32, speaks to parish life as it appeals for unity, urges examination, and calls for proclamation. The Eucharist is not a devotional exercise for pious self-satisfaction. The sacrament calls for self-examination. This is not meant to be a self-torturing analysis; nor is it to be a critical check on correctness of understanding. It asks: we are fully aware of the reality of Christ's presence and are we aware of the fact that this congregation is the body of Christ and that we are members one of another? When we understand that, then every celebration of the Eucharist is a proclamation of Christ's death for the world. The proclamation is essential. No one doubts the power of nature at this time of the year. But we and the world need to know that here is another power—the power of God's active presence in our world.

But believers do not only proclaim, they also serve. Their vocation is service. Maundy Thursday's Gospel, John 13, asks us to remember our place and our vocation. The foot-washing story is a commentary on the serving love of Christ. That love shaped his life, it is also to shape ours. "Blessed are you, if you do . . ." v. 17. Serving love is Jesus' answer to the fool-

ish quarrels of rank and recognition. But interpretation can go beyond the "humility and service" theme. John seems also to have the washing of baptism in mind. Eph 5:26 and Heb 10:22 are helpful toward this larger understanding. It completes the picture: Remember the Word, the Service and the Sacraments. That makes Maundy Thursday a day to *Remember.*

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Good Friday
April 7, 1987

Psalm 22:1–23
Isaiah 52:13–53: 12 or Hosea 6:1–6
Hebrews 4:14–16; 5:7–9
John 18:1–19:42 or John 19:17–30
Sermon study based on Philippians 2:5–11

To many people this seems an ordinary day, a day bearing no particular significance beyond being just one more day in an already all too routine lifetime. But, for those who believe, this day holds something more . . . something much more.

The "something more" in the first place is not *beyond* the ordinary, but rather is in and about the very ordinary itself. On Good Friday, and during the Lenten season just past God has declared to us in no uncertain terms that he loves the ordinary, and that it is in our time and our place that he has chosen to live, reign, and make his home.

We know and can worship and praise this God, because he has entered into our ordinary days and our ordinary deeds so that this world and all who live in it might be transformed and created a new. Jesus Christ our Lord, the Lord of the ordinary, "Did he not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

It is in and through this Christ that we can see God's continuing involvement in this ordinary world as he denies the lofty in order to undergird the lowly. It is in and through this Christ that we are accepted, forgiven, and loved into new beginnings. In this Christ, we are made a new creation and our ordinary lives are filled with nothing less than God's own life and breath. Truly, God has come to make his home in the ordinary.

Still, we have all too often gotten into trouble because we choose to belittle the ordinary. More often than not, we don't like the ordinary, and we don't like being ordinary. It's been this way for a long time.

Think back, back to the beginning of our journey. Remember when our names were Adam and Eve. After making us in his own image, God surrounded us with every good gift, with food to eat and a beautiful place in which to live. Not stopping there, God gave us the gift of relationship, the gift of each other. He asked us to love one another, to care for one another, and to bear one another's burdens. He promised that as we loved one another we would truly be loving him . . . and that in such love we would know peace, wholeness, and joy. And, as if all of that were not enough, he gave us the gift of himself, asking us to come to him when our hearts were heavy, to talk with him, to love him, and to trust in him for our every need.

All of these gifts, the gift of creation, the gift of relationship, and the gift of himself, God gave simply because he loves us. But, prone to grumbling, we responded with complaint: "This is it?. . . . This is all there is in life? Why, it's all so ordinary!" We really prefer something more extraordinary.

Or, remember when we were Peter and the Lord turned to us saying that we would deny

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that we knew him. But we thought ourselves far too extraordinary to commit such a sin. For we were the boldest of the disciples, hardly given to embarrassment and cowering. We were ready to go to prison or even unto death, but we would never fade in faithfulness to the Christ. Others in their weakness might fall in the dark of night, but not us, for we were Peter, the extraordinary disciple.

Or, remember when we were James and John and we argued about who among us was the greatest. After all, we thought, we were extraordinary. Well, maybe we weren't perfect but we surely were better than all those others. Jesus was really pretty lucky to have such great disciples as we. Why, we deserved nothing less than to sit next to the Lord in the kingdom of heaven. Oh, how we thought we had risen above all that was ordinary . . . Do you remember?

All the while we were trying to be extraordinary, God was trying to show us that he is a God of the ordinary. God used the ordinary throughout the Old Testament, used simple people like Abraham and Sarah to do his work, used a powerless nation to be a light to the world, used frightened prophets to proclaim the word of salvation.

God is here in this world, in his world, the world he made. The ordinary creation that surrounds us in God's idea and it proclaims his glory. The ordinary people who embrace us are God's idea and they proclaim his love. The ordinary words that we faithfully speak are God's idea, and they proclaim new life to all who believe.

But there is another "something more" about this day—and it is the most extraordinary thing that ever happened. God the Son has emptied himself. The Son of God has become the Incarnate One. God, the God of all that is, has taken on human form in Jesus Christ and he has been obedient unto death, even death on a cross. God in Christ Jesus has entered the ordinary, so that our journey into death might be exchanged for his journey into life. It is from this cross that the Word made flesh proclaims to all the world that every mountain has been bought low and that every valley has been lifted up. From the cross, Jesus Christ proclaims that there is no "better-than-ness" required in his kingdom, nor any need for us to be extraordinary. There is one extraordinary, and that is God. But we have become by God's grace a quite different ordinary . . . nothing less than God's forgiven ordinary. And at such glorious news, our ordinary knees bow, and our ordinary tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

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Epiphany: an Invitation to Creativity

William E. Lesher
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The church fills up the dark winter months between Christmas and Lent with the most challenging season of the year. Epiphany illuminates how all the powers of the cosmos and all the creative imagination of the human intellect have been enlisted to announce and relate the claims of Christmas and Easter to every creature on earth.

The texts of the season are expansive and bold. God interrupted the cosmic order and sent a star on a unique mission to summon the Wise Men, representatives of the global community, to worship at Jesus' birth. John the Baptizer, who abandoned an ordinary life style for the sake of the message and who attracted crowds with his radical call to repentance, dramatically fulfills his mission by announcing, on sight, that Jesus is the Lamb of God and sends his disciples off to follow him. Jesus begins preaching to those in darkness and in the shadow of death; he sketches a vision of what blessedness—not happiness, but blessedness—is in the Kingdom now and to come. And then he teaches with vivid symbols like salt and light, neighbors and enemies, how conventional wisdom is turned upside down and re-ordered by the measure of love that is the new criterion of judgment in the Kingdom of God.

In the year ahead, the confessions of Peter and the conversion of Paul intersect the Sunday celebrations of Epiphany, but both carry on the bold, creative, action-filled theme and spirit of the season. In more recent years, the church has stretched out the Octave of Christian Unity, a week of prayer for the reunion of the church between the celebrations of this confession and this conversion, as an appropriate contemporary witness to the Epiphany of Christ in the world today.

Epiphany comes again but, in a way, with new urgency to a world that is showing increasing signs of deep spiritual hunger. The false gods of a new and promising materialistic age, that seemed to be having such success in our own society and around the world, are showing themselves to be deficient in their ability to satisfy basic human needs for meaning, purpose, and hope. College chaplains in our own country are reporting an unexpected increase in the num-

bers of students seeking spiritual nurture in worship and in courses in religion. A seminary president in Hong Kong claims that one of the biggest concerns of his church is ministering to the large number of young people who are reaching out for the message and for meaning in their lives.

Epiphany comes again. The season is the church's creation, clustering for us in several short weeks a small selection of texts that tell how virtually no holds have been barred by God or Christ or followers of The Way to relate the message and its meaning to every living creature. The supernatural and the very natural, the dramatic and the ordinary, action and articulation, analogy and straight-forward plain talk, dreams and visions, and down to earth demonstrations are all methods that pack the Epiphany texts. They invite our boldest imagination. How can our congregations, our seminaries, our ELCA most effectively relate the message and meaning of Christ to a spiritually hungry age? If we thought boldly, if we assessed all our creative resources (the musicians, the poets, the artists, the actors, the filmmakers, the computer and telecommunications experts, etc., etc., among us), and if we enlisted the full powers of our imaginations, what new ways might we find to show faith in Christ in our reluctant but resourceful generation?

Epiphany provokes these questions; and these questions drive out the darkness and the dullness of the time between Christmas and Lent and make Epiphany the most challenging and, potentially, the most exciting season of the church year.

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