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CURRENTS in theology and mission

Getting Our Act Together

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Getting Our Act Together

A Lutheran service book in the late 60s suggested the following exchange in the preparation rite for the Eucharist:

All: We are here because we are men ....

Minister: Giver of life, heal us and free us to be men.

It is a measure of our considerable progress that all of us would be immediately shocked and offended by such exclusive language today. That includes above all the four representatives of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, who debate for us and with us the merits of the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* (ILL) in this issue of *Currents.* Their debate is not over the aptness of individual renovations in ILL—Sovereign for Lord, Human One for Son of man—but rather over the pros and cons of the underlying theological questions. All who want to speak without offense in today's church will profit by their open exchange.

Gary Pence concedes that ILL's proposals are a kind of censorship, but that Christians have always "censored" the Bible by the way they selected texts for public reading or for preaching. The ILL is recasting the Bible so that it can be heard by today's listeners as Good News, disentangled from sexist or patriarchal perceptions and values. By using passages selectively and by re-telling the ones we select we attempt to deliver God's people from oppression instead of lending divine authority to oppression. An unrevised Bible, displaying the limitations and biases of the original authors, is quite appropriate for the classroom, where we seek to know the socio-economic character of Israel and/or the early church.

Carl Graesser, on the other hand, sees three functions of the Bible in worship, each of them requiring a distinct kind of translation. When the Bible is used for our words of worship and praise—such as in the Psalms or the Sanctus—an elevated or even archaic language may be appropriate. When the Bible is used *qua Bible* from the lectern, modern interpretations should be used as little as possible, with no attempts to "correct" the text. (Even here a term like "brothers" needs to be rendered "brothers and sisters" since the

original text surely aimed to be inclusive.) In preparing a text for preaching a pastor may want to paraphrase and make other elaborations which help apply the ancient word to the modern situation. What the ILL proposes, therefore, may be most useful for the preacher's use of the text, less so for the Bible's role at the lectern or in the liturgical appropriations of texts into our words of praise. **Gary Pence** appends a reply in which he argues that Graesser obscures the implications of modernity and the distinction between the setting in worship and classroom. He believes it impossible to correct in a sermon the patriarchalisms read from and reinforced by the lectern.

Ted Peters suggests that we should teach that the Father of Jesus is an accessible and caring God, like the abba of Jesus, and that we should not impose a title like mother on the godhead. The ILL, however, applies its own ethical standards to God language and errs in imagining that Christian men (so) become oppressive because the God of the Bible is presented as oppressive. We need to interpret the ancient symbols for today's world—not create new ones; we need to listen to God's word, not tell it what to say. Our ethical mandate: to pursue social transformation with a vision of human justice and loving community based upon our most conscientious insights regarding God's will for the future of creation.

Martha Ellen Stortz finds parallels between the modern battle for inclusive translations and the ancient debate about translation between Jerome and Augustine. While she generally applauds the work of ILL, she finds it too centered on nouns and pronouns, with insufficient attention to verbs that proclaim God's activity, motion, passion, and creation. How God is present with us and the kinds of relationships God seeks to establish thereby are the final goal of all Bible reading.

Joseph Jensen reviews for us what "they" are saying these days about Armageddon. He shows that very little of the futurizing of Hal Lindsey and others actually rests on Scripture. Even worse, ques-

tionable exegesis is then used by apologists for Armageddon to support right wing ideology, the need for more and better missiles, and the alleged futility of arms control. Most dispensationalists ignore a second eschatological picture in the Bible, that of Isaiah 2, with its promise of peace, unity, and harmony. While current ecumenical peace efforts may not be the ultimate fulfilment of Isaiah 2, they may be the closest approximation we can make to that picture, and they may move a merciful Lord to bring us the rest of the way into that future.

Also in this issue: a poem on the joys and frustrations of parish ministry by **Frederick Schmidt** (a nom de plume); a response to a recent call to dialogue on questions of homosexuality by **Ralph W. Klein**; and an essay on preaching by **Travis DuPriest**, who reminds us that both the Word we preach and the way we preach it shape who God is in the mind's eye.

Our authors this month expose and express our disagreements, hold them up to evangelical light, and strive—before God and the community—to achieve a new consensus. Our disagreements, therefore, evidence our unity within diversity, not our disunity. Only because we have been joined so tightly together in Jesus Christ are we free to disagree so openly.

Now that we have our act so thoroughly together, how about you?

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

The Inclusive Language Lectionary and the Church's Holy "Censorship" of the Bible

Gary Pence

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The *Inclusive Language Lectionary,* described by its editors as a "provisional, experimental, and responsible attempt to proclaim the biblical message in an inclusive manner," has nonetheless been broadly denounced as an inept if not intentional distortion of the divine Word. The presiding bishops of both the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church have published their personal critiques, together with encouragement to member congregations of the two churches not to use the new lectionary in public worship.

As A.L.C. bishop Dr. David W. Preus has defined "the chief difficulty" with the new lectionary, "Inclusiveness sits in judgment on the biblical texts, and the result is an unfaithful translation." Like L.C.A. bishop Dr. James Crumley, Preus refers to some of the changes in the biblical texts not only as "paraphrases" but even as "mistranslations."

The charge that the editors of the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* have tampered with the biblical texts, distorting them to make them fit standards of inclusiveness derived from an authority other than Scripture itself, needs to be heard seriously and calls for a thoughtful response.

Appointed by the Division of Education and Ministry, National Council of Churches of Christ and chaired by PLTS professor of Old Testament, Victor R. Gold, the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* was prepared by an ecumenical committee of six women and six men representing such scholarly fields as theology, education, English, linguistics, and worship in addition to Old and New Testament. The Committee has described its task as one of "recasting" the patriarchal language of the biblical texts:

> In this lectionary the wording of the RSV has been recast to minimize the male bias and other exclusive imagery reflected in its language about human beings and the male bias reflected in its language about Christ and God. Except for these changes the text of the RSV has been retained.

Few critics of the new lectionary will argue with textual changes due to the translator's discretion, particularly changes in language about human beings. "No man" can be replaced with "no one," "he who" with "the one who," and "men" with "persons," "people," or "humankind," without violating universally accepted principals of translation. Even the substitution of the name "Jesus" for the pronoun "he" in order to deemphasize Jesus' maleness might be accepted without protest. Often the substitution makes a text clearer and reduces excessive pronoun repetition.

The problem for the critics comes from the suggestion by the Lectionary Committee that traditional references to Jesus as "Son of Man" or as God's "son" be replaced with such "formal equivalents" as "the Human One" and God's "Child." Most boldly, references

Christians have always "censored" the Bible.

to God as "the Father" or "my Father" are replaced either with the simple "God" or the more creative "God my Father (and Mother)," and "Lord" is replaced either with the generic "Sovereign" or with "God." It is primarily proposals such as these that have been denounced as illegitimate paraphrases or mistranslations. These proposals for languaging God in non-gender-specific or even in female as well as male terms have been attacked as dangerous attempts "to change one's doctrine of God." Ted Peters levels such an attack on the lectionary elsewhere in this issue. My article focuses on a narrower question—whether these proposals constitute human censorship of God's Word and, if so, what the church's response ought to be.

I would like to suggest that Christians have always "censored" the Bible and that it has always been subjected to the human wills of the Christians who have read and taught it. The New Testament itself provides evidence of how the earliest Christians selectively quoted and imaginatively recast Old Testament scripture to confirm and support their experience of Jesus as the promised messiah. Christians through all successive ages have used both Old and New Testaments in the same way both to suppress what each generation found unseemly or irrelevant and to emphasize what each generation held most dear.

In part this biblical censorship has occurred through the selection of texts for public reading and interpretation. In a lectionary some texts are included and others excluded according to a formula devised by the compiler. The formula for selection of lectionary texts will attend to such matters as the compiler's perception of how well particular texts will correlate with the church year and its major themes, how comprehensible the texts will be when read orally to an audience, and how usefully they can be appropriated by the worshipers. On the basis of such a formula the compiler decides which sections of the Bible will be heard and which will *never* be heard by Christians gathered for public worship.

Preachers also exercise the power of censorship when they choose texts for their Sunday sermons. Not only are they free to select one of the lectionary texts and ignore the others; if none of the lectionary texts prescribed for the day agrees with the preachers' interests or ideology, they may preach on some other text with the expectation that the lectionary texts read quickly from the lectern will as quickly be forgotten. Once having chosen a text for preaching, *all* preachers choose from the text those elements they wish to emphasize; they repeat those parts of the text during their sermon; they draw attention to those parts; they interpret those parts; they reinforce those parts with imagery and story and memorable quotes. So far as the sermon is concerned, the rest of the text might as well never have been written. It has been



expurgated from consciousness. All preachers necessarily engage in such implicit censorship during the course of every sermon.

One could decry such biblical censorship and insist that responsible use of the Bible demands attention to the whole Bible in all its parts and provision of an English translation that transmits as precisely as possible the literal content of the Greek or Hebrew original. I believe that critique and that demand are valid when the biblical texts are being used by scholars, teachers, and students as historical evidence for the life, thought, and development of the ancient biblical faith community. If we wish to know and understand pre-Exilic Israel or first-century Christianity, we have to acknowledge and account for the whole body of its literary remains without prejudice, just as we would study the literary remains of Periclean Athens or Augustan Rome. For the purpose of historical investigation it would be no more proper or valid to ignore or alter biblical texts that are offensive to modern values than it would be to expurgate or amend other historical document such as a text of Thucydides, Sophocles, Virgil, or Tacitus. If we wish to know the truth about a society, its perceptions and values, we must preserve the historical remains—literary and non-literary—of that society intact and permit those remains to speak to us *their* message uncontaminated, so far as possible, by our perceptions and our values. That ethic of historical inquiry is as valid for study of ancient Israel or first-century Christianity as it is for study of any society of any other age or place. It is at the heart of the historical-critical interpretation of the Bible, which has produced such a harvest of benefits for the twentieth century church.

In public worship, however, the Bible is not being used as historical evidence for an ancient society. When we read the Bible in public worship we are using it primarily as the vehicle for God's Good News. As Good News it works on us to create a clearer perception and deeper understanding of ourselves, our world, our God, new perceptions and understandings that build hope in us and the other hearers. Hearing the biblical texts as God's Word, as God's Good News, we feel safe in the world. Our life takes on meaning and purpose that sustains us through suffering, doubt, oppression, and death. Here the Bible is no longer being used merely to study and understand another faith community; it is being used to create and form our own faith community.

The contrast between these two uses of the Bible carries far-reaching implications. When we use the Bible as historical evidence for ancient Israel and the primitive church, our ethic of scholarly inquiry demands that the Bible be preserved and studied as it was at the time it was written. Otherwise we have lost touch with that ancient world and the ancient community we want to

We use the Bible as God's Word for us and our church today.

know. In public worship, however, when we use the Bible as God's Word for us and our church today, our commitment to the living God and our Spirit-inspired experience of life in Christ's name demand that the Bible be read and heard as Good News for today. Otherwise the Bible is out of touch with the modern world and the modern community it is to create and form. Hence, using as their criterion of selection the Good News which has served as a "canon within the canon" for the church, compilers of lectionaries and preachers of the Word choose out of the vast biblical literature those texts believed capable of speaking Good News to Christians today. Preachers in Europe and the United States critically (and often enough uncritically!) correlate and freely harmonize the chosen texts with those democratic, scientific, post-Enlightenment values common to modern Euro-American culture which they understand to be consistent with the biblical message, just as preachers in other parts of the world necessarily perform the same hermeneutical task with reference to the common values of their various societies.

In my understanding, the Inclusive Language Lectionary Committee is trying to do what compilers of lectionaries and preachers of sermons have always done throughout the history of the church. They are recasting the biblical texts assigned for public worship into language that can be heard by modern worshipers as Good News. The difference from earlier lectionary committees is the determination of this committee to disentangle the Good News of the Bible from the sexist and patriarchal perceptions and values within which it was formed and languaged. That is a more than ordinarily formidable task.

Luther could focus his and his hearers' attention on the letters of St. Paul and condemn "that right strawy epistle" of St. James to a homiletical limbo because it failed, in Luther's estimate, to preach the Gospel. The editors of the *Lutheran Book of Worship* could omit such imprecatory psalms as 137 from the psalter intended for recitation at public worship. It is admittedly offensive and embarrassing for Christian worshipers in the twentieth century to chant solemnly, "Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" Lutheran preachers can systematically banish from their sermons all biblical texts that appear to teach "works righteousness," support slavery, or prescribe eternal torment for the luckless "heathen."

It is one thing, of course, to exclude St. Paul's comments on slavery from the lectionary, but what is one to do with the sexist language that pervades the whole of Scripture? The Inclusive Language Lectionary Committee has dealt with textual problems that appear on every page and in virtually every pericope. Obviously one cannot excise the whole text and have any Bible left for public reading. The only recourse is to make the



necessary modifications in the text itself as preachers have done in their interpretive rereadings of texts during sermons through the ages.

Justification for such textual modifications may be found in the attitude toward the text taken by the biblical community itself, which understood the oral re-telling of a text, not its silent reading or the scrupulous repetition of its printed words, to be the moment when the divine word was pronounced. The revision in the books of Chronicles of passages from the books of Samuel and Kings apparently records such a contemporized re-telling of the word by a later generation. This view of Scripture is further evidenced in the use of Old Testament scripture by New Testament authors. (See, for example, Micah 5:2 and its audacious modification offered as a quotation in Matthew 2:6). This understanding of Scripture was taken up and endorsed by Luther in his understanding of the "living" Word, the preached Word, as the locus of divine revelation.

In public worship we are not, like historians or critics, using the text as historical evidence for another historical period. In worship it is to be above all a vehicle for Good News now, for the revelation of the good and gracious God who comes today to deliver from all oppression—economic, political, racial, or sexual. To permit the Bible to serve us as such a "living" Word of divine liberation we use its passages selectively and the ones we select we re-tell to fit them into our stories. We re-tell the biblical stories in such a way that they may deliver from oppression rather than lend biblical authority to oppression. Of course, "inclusiveness sits in judgment on the biblical texts." In fact it ought to do so, for we recognize now, as the biblical authors did not, how contradictory exclusiveness of thought and language is to the core of the biblical Good News. While an inclusive translation may be "unfaithful" to the letter of the original text, one could assert that use of anything but an inclusive translation of the Bible in public worship will be unfaithful to its evangelical spirit.

In summary, for historical study of the biblical period it is essential that the oppressions as much as the liberating words of that period be accessible to us in a biblical text preserved from the revision and "improvement" of subsequent generations. For the growth in Christian identity that reading of the Bible during worship intends, however, the biblical word must become God's Word to us, a good word of liberation and hope. In public worship the Bible needs to become our word if it is truly to become God's Good Word for us today.

Using the Bible in Worship

Carl Graesser, Jr.

Christ Seminary-Seminex Professor of the Old Testament, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, California

When I was a child there was just one Bible, *the* Bible, the King James Version (KJV). Oh, I dimly remember that there was on my father's bookshelf a tome named something like *The Berkeley Version of the New Testament,* but that was an oddity. We had "the" Bible and used it in many different settings and ways. We listened to it read from the lectern, read it in our private devotions, studied it in Sunday School and Bible class, heard it preached from the pulpit, and memorized its flowing cadences for gold stars in weekday Bible school.

Today we have many "Bibles." They form a bewilderingly broad spectrum from more straightforward translations like the RSV to paraphrases as diverse as the *Cottonpatch Version* and *The Living Bible.* Thus in a day when few read Hebrew there is a unit in my exegesis class entitled, "On Using English Translations." We compare ten translations of a single pericope and suggest techniques for using this abundance as an *aid* to understanding rather than just a multiplication of confusion.

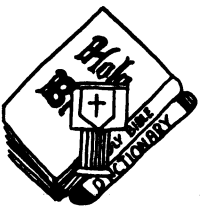
Today's plethora of translations teaches us several things. First, each of these translations has its own flavor and character, indeed, its own assumptions and purposes. It becomes clear that no translation is universal. Each is actually best suited for a slightly different function or setting: one for study in Bible class, another to uplift us devotionally, one for beautiful oral delivery, another to grip the hearer in proclamation. This leads us to recognize something which never dawned on me, at least, in the days of our "one" Bible. In differing contexts, we actually call on the Bible to function in manners subtly and not-so-subtly different.

Two such contrasting functions of the Bible are described by Gary Pence in a companion article in this present issue of *Currents.*[1] Pence states that the Bible can function to further study and "historical investigation" (as in a *classroom*) or it can aid us to hear "Good News today," that is, it serves as a "'living' word of divine liberation" (in *worship*). Building on this, we propose to argue that when discussing the Bible in worship, we need to make further distinctions. In fact, there are at least *three* different ways in which we use the Bible in the service of Holy Communion, not just one, as Pence implies. For that reason we do well to use several different translations to facilitate each of these several functions of the Bible in our worship. As our discussion proceeds, we will refer to the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* (hereinafter ILL) as is appropriate and indicate our understanding of its proper function in worship.

The Bible as Our Words

At times in the liturgy the words of the Bible become *our words* of worship

[1] "The Inclusive Language Lectionary and the Church's Holy 'Censorship' of the Bible," pp. 261-265.



and praise. This occurs, for example, when we read or sing the psalms. Several canticles are biblical words become our words, such as the *Glory be to God on High,* the *Holy, Holy, Holy,* and *Create in Me.* Several versicles make use of single biblical verses, such as "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare your praise." In using such biblical texts as our own words of worship and praise we are only continuing a tradition handed down through the ages by the saints of old, beginning already in Old Testament times.

It is instructive to note the translations of these psalms and canticles used in recent Lutheran hymnals. *The Lutheran Hymnal* published in 1943, simply used "the" Bible of its day, the KJV. *The Service Book and Hymnal* of 1958 also used the KJV texts. By the mid-fifties the RSV had not yet widely displaced the KJV in American Lutheran lecterns. We think it likely that it was not simple liturgical conservatism which commended the KJV to the editors of *The Service Book and Hymnal.* A more literary translation, the KJV's archaic poetic character lends an aura of sacredness to its texts. It enhances the singing of these canticles and psalms better than the more prosaic tone of the RSV.

A different tack was taken with the *Lutheran Book of Worship.* I was then a member of a faculty which was asked whether it would assist in the creation of a new translation for the Psalter in the hymnal-to-be. Our response was that the committee should not multiply translations, but rather use one already in existence. The committee wisely chose the best of both worlds. It used a special translation of the Psalter, but one already commissioned for the *Book of Common Prayer.* This translation aimed for "a plain and rhythmical expression of the sense of the original, even at the expense of the original"[2] and so was well suited for chanting and praying by contemporary congregations. It sought, and successfully we think, a poetic quality with flowing cadences suited for song and largely avoided the prosaic phrases that more literal translations tend to have.

However one judges the success of any particular translation of these biblical psalms and canticles, the point remains the same. The biblical texts sung by the congregation have a different function from texts read at the lectern or interpreted from the pulpit. It was recognition of this differing function that led to the preparation of a special translation of the Psalter, happily one that seems to suit this function well.

The Bible qua Bible

The Bible has at least two other functions in the service of Holy Communion, specifically within that portion termed

[2] *The Psalter: A New Version for Public Worship and Private Devotion,* Introduced by Charles Mortimer Gilbert (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), p. xii.

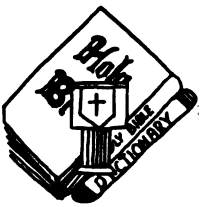
When language changes, it is time for a new translation.

the Liturgy of the Word. First of all, when read at the lectern, the Bible functions as God's *biblical* word, that is, as *Bible per se*. At this point in the Liturgy the book is central. The very furniture demonstrates this. The lectern is a Bible-stand, plain and simple. The ritual of the Gospel procession also highlights the function of God's Word *qua* Bible. The Book, often a large and ornate volume, is ceremoniously carried, sometimes even censed, and is clearly the focus of attention. Now in one sense it is true that modern committees intrude somewhat when they pick and choose, omitting portions of the Bible which they believe are less relevant and include rather pericopes which they feel speak most directly to God's people today. Yet they do not include readings from other literature, as the preacher often does in the sermon. They carefully choose a whole variety of texts, precisely from the Bible. In short, at the lectern the Bible functions as God's Word *qua* Bible, the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures.

If this be granted, it follows that the best translation to be used at the lectern is one with as little modern interpretation as possible. This logic driven to its end would dictate reading the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, an obvious folly. It is also to be granted that it is in the nature of language that any translations necessarily involve sensitive interpretation by the interpreter. However, the interpretation called for here is that which seeks the meaning of the original in order to present that meaning in intelligible English. This does not involve interpretation in the sense of focusing on applying the text to the needs and problems of the specific modern audience, which we suggest belongs in the pulpit.

Thus the best translation for the lectern will be one that is probably somewhat more literal than periphrastic, and generally avoids paraphrase. As much as possible the translation will be as clear as the original, but retaining the ambiguities and lack of clarity in the original. It will not choose one possible understanding and exempt the others. It will be intelligible, of course, to the hearers. When the language of the hearers changes over time, it is time for a new translation. When for example, the word "man" is no longer inclusive in common usage, then it is time to find other ways of expressing an original text which is inclusive. It should be noted that where the ILL has revised the RSV so as to translate such an original text inclusively, it has served us well, doing something which should be done in the translation used at the lectern. Happily, the RSV committee is at work preparing an inclusive language revision, one which will refer to human beings inclusively.

While speaking as much as possible the language of the audience, the translation read in the lectern will seek to avoid the preferences and proclivities, the theologies and ideologies of both translators and target audiences as much



as humanly possible. We listen to the Bible at the lectern to hear God's word, the witness of the apostles and prophets. We do not seek, at the lectern at least, the witness of modern translators/interpreters/appliers of that biblical word.

This is the key point here. The congregation is hungry to hear a Word clearly from *God*. It has not come to study the archaeology of an ancient people. But the fact that this Bible is a word written in the past, without obvious intrusion from the present, lends assurance that it is a genuine word from *God*. To be sure, the congregation also values the word of the contemporary prophet (speaker for God), but that it will hear in a few moments in the sermon. These differing media of God's Word, the lessons and the sermon, the past and contemporary witnesses, form a balance which the church has valued through the centuries.

Patently, there is no alternative to choosing pericopes. We can hardly read the entire Bible in one service! We could read the whole Bible in manageable pieces over a period of time. Most would find this less edifying. Gary Pence is correct that there is inevitably a type of "holy censorship" by the pericope-pickers. The gain in edification in this, however, is great, as anyone who has attempted to read through the whole Bible from beginning to end can attest. The possible danger of inevitable bias in the lectionary's choice of texts we try to mitigate by asking a committee, an ecumenical one at that, to make the choices.

It is to be noted, on the other hand, that choosing a pericope according to a theological criterion (however desirable or not) is a very different thing from purposely injecting that theological criterion into the very text and then calling that text biblical. The one presents a text which is biblical, the other adds to it. Pence seems to say that both are "holy censorship," different only in degree. We consider them to be different in kind, not only in degree. Against their best efforts, translators and committees do subtly affect the translation of the Bible with their personal theology. We suggest that that is a very different thing than consciously adding to or changing the text because of a desire to make it more relevant or to "correct" the theology or impression given by the biblical writer.

As we understand it, the ILL at certain points is functioning in just this manner, adding to the text to make it more relevant, to "correct" what it understands to be latent or even blatant patriarchal oppression. We suggest that such changes or importations into the text (such as Father [and Mother], Abraham [and Sarah]) are not appropriate to the function of the Bible at the lectern. That kind of shaping and application of the text to the contemporary scene does have a proper place in worship, however. It is appropriate, even necessary, in the *sermon*.

God's Word becomes inescapably alive.

The Bible Interpreted for Today

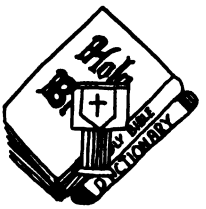
Finally the Bible functions in a third manner in worship. In the sermon preachers interpret the biblical word to the contemporary context, shaping and forming the Word of God so as to apply it most directly and forcefully to the congregation addressed. Here, too, the form of the furniture follows the function. The lectern was a Bible-stand, pure and simple. In contrast, the pulpit, though it has a reading desk, is conceived to be distinctly different from the lectern. The pulpit is designed to enclose the *preacher.* It deliberately sets this proclaimer on high, not only to enable hearers the better to see and hear, but also to elevate the significance of the proclaiming.

The goal of the sermon is contemporary interpretation and application of the Bible. The sacred task of preachers is to shape the biblical word so as to speak to us God's judgment and promise. We need to hear that word of judgment, cutting us to the very core of our being, so that we will see our need for a savior. When preachers have stirred in us recognition of our profound need, it is their happy and proper task to warm our hearts with the indescribably Good News. The purpose of the sermon is that God's Word becomes inescapably alive both in judgment and liberating promise. It is a great mystery of our faith. Happy is the congregation which experiences this often, that God's word clothes itself not in words of Hebrew or Greek, but in the very voice and person of the preacher.

We understand Pence's description of the Bible in worship to coincide rather closely with our third function of the Bible, in the pulpit. "In worship" the Bible "is to be above all a vehicle for the Good News now, for the revelation of the good and gracious God who comes today to deliver from all oppression—economic, political, racial, or sexual."

What sort of translation serves this third function best? If the translation for the lectern pays greater attention to the original text and its meaning, the translation for the pulpit fastens especially on the contemporary hearer, highlighting the relevance of the biblical word for the congregation in unmistakable terms. Here is the place for creative paraphrases which "hook" the hearer by familiar contemporary language. Such paraphrases would be out of place in the lectern but are the stock and trade of the insightful preacher.

Many of the functions which the ILL tries to accomplish are very similar to those just described. Almost all the changes in the ILL which are most controversial, the additions and changes in metaphors for God, belong to this category of interpreting and applying the Word of God. Thus the ILL can have a significant place in the Sunday Morning service, but in the pulpit rather than the



lectern. We would suggest that in accord with the views stated above, the Gospel *not* be read in the pulpit, but from the lectern or from the midst of the congregation. If one of the lessons forms the text of the sermon, it might be read once more at the beginning or in the midst of the sermon and *in an interpretive translation or a paraphrase.* This reading would then already be an integral part of the sermon itself.

The ILL is a creative "translation." It seeks to proclaim God's judgment on our sexism and draw out the implications of the Good News for our day and age. Whether the particular metaphors the ILL uses are the best ones is not the point being argued here. The issue is that the task which the ILL sets out to do corresponds in large measure to the preacher's task. Thus the ILL, or something like it, is not only welcome in the pulpit, it is plainly necessary there.

Is this schizophrenia, to use different Bibles in pulpit and lectern? The contrast alone does not discredit this idea. (One could argue that law and promise are the ultimate schizophrenia.) We would suggest that there can be positive values in recognizing these different functions of the Bible in worship.

The use of two Bibles can remind us of an important theological fact. We stand beneath the Word of God, not above it. Even in this day of multiple translations, the Bible is no wax nose to be twisted by this or that movement, however biblically oriented it may be. Even as we interpret and proclaim the Word which the Bible brings, that Bible is the very norm by which our proclamation is judged.

The use of different Bibles can be practical and pastoral. Where inclusive language causes conflict, congregations do well to discuss the differing functions of the Bible and purposes of different translations. Perhaps the use of several Bibles in the service would strike a compromise which would enhance life together. This could affirm quite pastorally the element of "truth" in each contrary opinion. It could aid each contingent to become more open to and understanding of the other.

Finally, we believe that in some cases the conscious use of several translations will help to rescue the congregation from a one-sided theology of the preacher. In the same way the traditional liturgy can rescue the congregation from the predilections or blind-spots on the individual pastor. The preacher will choose the translation to be used in the pulpit. Let a translation more conserving of the biblical tradition be used in the lectern. Perhaps then the congregation will have the better part of both worlds.

In sum then, the Church at worship rejoices to embrace a full range of her Lord's gifts: the sacred songs which become our own words, the prophetic and apostolic Word from the lectern, and yes, above all, God's contemporary Word from the prophet in the pulpit.

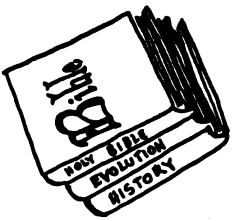
A Response to Carl Graesser

Gary Pence

When my colleague Carl Graesser speaks, he usually makes good sense. His proposed distinction between the Bible as "our words," as "God's word *qua* Bible," and as "God's interpreted word" I have found to be a sensible and thought-provoking contribution to our discussion of the place of the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* in Lutheran worship. I nonetheless wish to challenge Graesser on two counts. On the one hand, I believe he obscures the implications of modernity for our understanding and use of the Bible. On the other hand, he dismisses too quickly the distinction which I address in my article, namely, the distinction between worship and classroom as settings for use of the Bible.

Graesser invites attention to the issue of modernity by his treatment of "past and contemporary witnesses" to God. Although he speaks of biblical lessons, on the one hand, and sermons, on the other, as "differing media of God's Word" which "form a balance which the church has valued through the centures," Graesser himself appears to subordinate the contemporary to the past witness. Otherwise why does he assert that the congregation expects to hear from the lectern "a Word clearly from *God*?" The implication is that a contemporary word, a sermon, is less clearly from God than that recorded in the ancient text. He continues, "The fact that this Bible is a word written in the past, without *obvious* (emphasis added) intrusion from the present, lends assurance that it is a genuine word from *God*" (unlike the sermon?). Luther, of course, had declared the proclaimed word, the *viva vox evangelii,* and not the bare letters of the biblical text, to be the preeminent Word of God. He thereby saw the authority of the Word resting in its contemporary "modern" use. Graesser, however, seems to be proposing the view that modern thought, modern experience, modern wisdom and insight, even modern inspiration, if they were to influence the text, must be an intrusion which will rob modern worshipers of the assurance that they are encountering in the biblical lessons for the day "a genuine word from God." Hence, from the lectern any such intrusions (at least those that are obvious) must be avoided.

In whatever way we may wish to interpret Luther, however, and whatever weight of authority we may wish to grant to either ancient text or contemporary preacher, the fact remains that worshipers today are no longer hearing the pristine witness of the prophets and apostles in any case. Even if we were to read from the lectern only the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek texts of the lessons for the day in a vain attempt to exclude "intrusions from the present," our congregations will hear something far different from an *ancient* word. The radical shift in our most fundamental assumptions about and understandings of the world, the human person, and God summed up in the word "moderni-



ty" has made it impossible for a worshiper today to hear the ancient biblical texts, whether in their original language or in a nearly literal translation, as the same word from God heard by their first audience. Our life situations are different. Our fundamental understandings of those situations are different. Our motives and interests in reading the texts themselves are different. Modern biblical interpretation has developed in the acute awareness of the enormous gap between our age and the antique world which produced the biblical texts and bequeathed them to us.

We are not helped much, therefore, by Graesser's suggestion that "the best translation to be used at the lectern is one with as little modern interpretation as possible." *Every* modern translation, if it is to be just minimally intelligible, requires more than a little interpretation. In worship, however, when the ancient texts are to bear to a *modern* audience "a genuine word from *God,*" any usable translation will necessarily evidence considerable modern interpretation.

Worship, after all, is the church's primary setting for communication with God. Everything in worship becomes a medium for the Christian community's contemporary encounter with God. Everything said or done is said and done "for us and for our salvation." Throughout the event of worship the Bible functions as a medium of communication with God. Whether recast into the language of the liturgy itself, paraphrased from the pulpit, or read from the lectern, it is understood and used as Sacred Scripture, Holy Writ, God's Word. That is why, as Graesser aptly points out, the Bible used in worship is often a "large and ornate" book, "ceremoniously carried, sometimes even censed." Paul's letters were penned in common colloquial Greek, probably on cheap papyrus sheets. No matter. We have come to expect these "epistles"—God's Word—to be printed on fine paper, expensively bound, and carried before the congregation with pomp and ceremony. And we expect them to have a solemn "literary" sound befitting our notions of a proper word from God. Of course, we thereby permit the intrusion into these documents of the stage set assumed for twentieth century Lutheran worship. We conform them to our expectations of God. We perform on them our most subtle and insidious act of ecclesiastical "censorship." If the intrusion from the present is not "obvious," it is nonetheless significantly real. And that act of censorship, that intrusion from the present, we applaud and promote.

My point here is simply that worship is a communication event which functions according to its own rules; that those rules are designed to orchestrate a contemporary divine-human encounter; and that every use of the Bible within worship serves that encounter. In worship Christians seek the immediacy of the divine presence. If they feel distant from

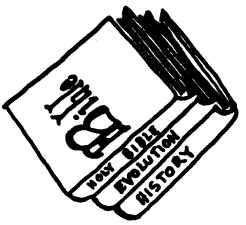
In worship, the Bible is being used to create and form our own faith community.

God in other settings, here they need God to be near. They want somehow to hear God and to be heard by God. The rules which define the ethos of worship, therefore, encourage a subjective involvement that comes with the immediacy of prerational experience. Worshipers are not engaged either in critical exegesis of a text or in critical reflection on the theology implied by a text. They are simply hearing and appropriating a text as an occasion for receiving and believing/trusting God. To serve that end every text used in worship and following its rules must be translated to facilitate that end. The modern congregation should be able to appropriate the text immediately, without first having to subject it to critical scrutiny and hermeneutical up-dating.

The setting for appropriate use of the "more literal than periphrastic" translation commended by Graesser is not worship at all, but the fundamentally different setting of the Sunday Church School, seminary, or university classroom. The classroom is also a communication event. Its rules, however, are designed to facilitate the distanced, objective exercise of intellectual faculties necessary for precise observation, careful analysis, and critical judgment. Although the Bible always remains in some sense God's Word for Christians and they would probably not be motivated to study it except for its ultimate faith significance, in the classroom nonetheless Christians (and others) gather to "study" the Bible, not simply to hear and believe it. Here it functions primarily as a collection of ancient documents, historical data providing (alongside archaeological and other evidence) at least limited access to the original experience of ancient Israel and the earliest church.

In the classroom and study (and lectionary committee meeting!), in the world of teachers, students, and scholars, the most literal translations offer data to the inquirer seeking insight into the ancient world. In the same setting modern interpretations of the biblical texts are proposed, are shaped, and are subjected to the objective authority of those texts in their original languages. The texts can be so treated because the students and scholars, whether Christian or not, have, through the use of modern scientific historical and interpretive methods, self-consciously distanced themselves sufficiently from the texts to let them speak for themselves. When racism or sexism or jingoism is discovered in the texts the readers do not imagine that they are hearing God's Word; they are uncovering the necessarily limited ("fallen!") character of the authors and of their earlier experience of God.

As I have asserted in my article, in the classroom the Bible is appropriately used to study and understand another faith community, ancient Israel or the earliest church. In worship, however, the Bible is being used to create and form our own faith community. In the classroom we



ought to apply our critical faculties to a text to extract from it what we can about the experience of our spiritual ancestors. If we discover that they lived in a primarily patriarchal world and that the assumptions that derived from that world are apparent in the biblical record, we can welcome that discovery and look for ways to apply it in our future interpretation of the biblical texts. In worship, on the other hand, we ought to be able to locate ourselves intuitively in a text, to feel it evoke and interpret *our* experience, and to find in it both judgment and affirmation of our experience and values. The text ought to be made available to us as worshipers in a form that will permit such identification, judgment, and affirmation to occur.

During worship, of course, some worshipers identify easily and immediately with the exclusive language of the traditional biblical text. Of these the majority may never have thought much about the issues of inclusive language or patriarchalism. They simply accept the text as it is and can't understand why others are upset about it. Other worshipers identify closely with the traditional text exactly because they share its patriarchal bias. When a preacher tries, as Graesser suggests, to correct during the sermon the patriarchalisms preserved in the biblical text previously read from the lectern, many worshipers will be confused and, perhaps, dismayed. The dismay of those worshipers committed to patriarchal values may soon turn to anger, and they are likely to invoke the biases of the ancient writers as "a genuine word from God" against the preacher's "merely human" reinterpretation. Unfortunately their pre-modern use of the Bible to defend positions which the modern church and Graesser himself(!) have rejected receives unwitting support from the distinction Graesser seems to make between the Bible as "genuine word from God" and the sermon as something less.

Ever larger numbers of worshipers, however, find that they can bear to hear the traditional text of the Bible read from the lectern only if they act during worship like students and scholars in a classroom. They find they must distance themselves from the biblical text. They must submit it to their own critique. If they are to identify with the text and make it their own, they find they must first mentally remove its patriarchal imagery and substitute more inclusive language. But why should they be expected to do so? As they engage in such a critical process they find it difficult to worship, to open themselves to the divine. They begin to wonder why the framers of the lectionary have not done the critical task for them, in the solitude of their study or during the debate of classroom and committee. But the framers of the ILL have done just that. The "gain in edification" that comes from their efforts will be great for any congregation gathered to worship and to hear throughout the worship event "a genuine word from God."

On Adding Divine Mothers to the Bible

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> Then comes the end, when Christ delivers all sovereignty to God, the Father [and Mother]. — 1 Corinthians 15:24a (ILL)

Should we interject into the biblical text words which depict the God of Israel as having feminine attributes? Is it appropriate to interpolate into the ancient scripture the reconception of God currently being devised by one school of contemporary theology, namely, feminist theology? The proposal to do just this is coming from *An Inclusive Language Lectionary* (abbreviated ILL) published by the National Council of Churches. The Readings for years A, B, and C thus far published have been commended to our use, so says the preface, "as a provisional, experimental, and responsible attempt to proclaim the biblical message in an inclusive manner." The import of the term "inclusive" here, quite obviously, is that ILL is repudiating patriarchy as a social structure and affirming the dignity and social equality of women.

Now, the goal of repudiating a social structure which diminishes the dignity of women and which restricts their roles as full and equal partners in society is a laudable goal. The Inclusive Language Committee chaired by Victor Gold should be commended for the scrupulously self-critical manner in which it reexamined the foundational symbols of our Christian faith in the honest attempt to clean house, to identify and rectify those points at which our tradition has contributed to gender oppression instead of redeeming people from it. The inclusive language proposal represents an honest attempt in this direction. And there is no doubt in my mind that in our time we must "proclaim the biblical message in an inclusive manner." However, there is one aspect of the ILL proposal which is problematic. I do not believe, as the ILL apparently does, that imputing goddess qualities to the God of Jesus contributes positively to the end of attaining social justice for women. It is this problem which is the concern of the present article.

What is the Issue?

I plan on providing my reasons for saying this, but first I think we need to get clear on what the issue is. In the preceding article on "Holy Censorship," Gary Pence rightly distinguishes between two kinds of so-called "inclusive" language in the new lectionary. On the one hand, inclusive language shifts away from masculine English nouns and pronouns when referring to people in general so as to make clear that women are included. "No man" is replaced by "no one," for example, and "he who ..." with "the one who ..." Most of us have confidence that such inclusive renderings are faithful to the Bible's intentions. On the other hand, the new lectionary deliberately attempts to strip the God of Israel and Jesus Christ from strictly



masculine associations whenever possible by replacing masculine pronouns with proper names. Where it is not possible to strip away masculine associations, such as in the use of the term 'Father,' a balancing feminine association is created by adding terms such as 'Mother.' Both of these techniques are dubbed as translations of the Bible into "inclusive" language.

This may cause a bit of confusion, however, because the issues involved in each are not identical. I believe it is advisable to use the term "inclusive" to refer to the inclusion of women with men through the careful re-rendering of pronouns. But it by no means follows that "inclusive language translation" aptly applies to the rewriting of the Bible in order to change one's doctrine of God.

It will be my thesis here that to attribute female qualities to the God of Israel by interpolating divine mother references is a mistake on a number of counts, the most significant of which is that there is no evidence that it would further the advance of women's dignity or women's rights in our modern democracy. My reasons for advancing this thesis begin with the observation (quite apparent to me) that the inclusive language lectionary is based upon current feminist theology. If this observation is accurate, then we might be able to pinpoint the problem. It is my judgment that current feminist theology is based upon some decisively weak, if not false, assumptions. It is these false assumptions, I believe, which have found their way into the thinking of the architects of the new lectionary and have led them into making rash and misleading textual renderings.

The Underlying Theological Argument of the Lectionary

The first observation we should make is that *An Inclusive Language Lectionary* appears to belong to the current genre of feminist theology. The structure of feminist theology as exemplified in the works of such people as Rosemary Radford Reuther, Sallie McFague, Mary Daly, and Letty Russell, seems to be reflected implicitly in the conclusions of the lectionary and is made quite explicit in the rationale given by the Appendix to the first volume. Granting variants and differing emphases among our feminist theologians, I will try to reconstruct the basic premises of the relevant argument which I think underlies the thinking of the lectionary committee. Most feminist theologians assume that

1. Existing divine father metaphors and symbolism necessarily lead to the social oppression of women;
2. We know theoretically that religious societies function paradigmatically, that is, human beings copy what they believe the gods do;
3. Divine symbolism in Christianity

God is not tied to any metaphor or symbol.

depicts God as an oppressive father, and this explains why Christian men who are copying God oppress Christian women;

4. But, in fact, God is transcendent and ineffable and, hence, not tied to any metaphor or symbol.

5. Therefore, we are free to re-symbolize the divine by applying feminine and gender-inclusive metaphors to God for the purpose of creating a paradigm of non-oppression which we can mimic socially.

Let us work here with the additional assumption which I hope most all readers of this journal are likely to hold, namely, we need to work vigorously to root out the oppression of women in our society and establish a more just pattern of gender interrelationships than has existed in the past. Let us assume that social transformation in behalf of gender inclusivity is our ethical mandate. But this mandate to strive for social justice is by no means a patented agenda of feminist theologians. It belongs to all of us. So, in my judgment, the prudent question then becomes: will this feminist argument help carry us toward meeting this objective? I think not. Why? Because the premises are weak and the argument misleading.

The first premise is actually a corollary of the second. With regard to the second premise itself, let us ask: how valid is it to assume the paradigm theory of religion and social organization? If this theory were valid, then we would expect that in existing societies where goddess worship dominates that we would find matriarchy instead of patriarchy, and where androgyny dominates we would expect to find social parity between the sexes. But this is not the case.

For example, Rosemary Reuther argues in her book, *Sexism and God-Talk,* that we should use Canaanite fertility religion critically to reassess Hebrew monotheism. She argues that goddess worship is older than the worship of a male deity, and she points out how in ancient Canaan the earth-mother was dominant. Now we must ask: does it follow that ancient Canaanite society was organized around matriarchy or gender-equality? Of course not. Even though according to Canaanite myths it was the female Anath who raised the dead Baal, Reuther must admit that Canaanite society was still ruled by a male king and the household by a male father.

Or, to cite a second example, one can go to Madurai in contemporary India and to the Temple dedicated to the goddess Menaksi. According to the Hindu myth of origin, Menaksi led her mighty army to victory over the forces of the male god, Siva, then married him and brought him back from the Himalayas to live with her in Madurai. The gold covered dome of the goddess Menaksi is three times as large as that given to the male deity, Siva. Both shrines face east with the goddess to the right and Siva to the left, which is a sharp contrast from



Indian society where normally the wife stands to her husband's left to signify her relative inferiority. So let us ask: does this clear priority given to the goddess make the surrounding Indian society non-patriarchal? By no means. The caste and family systems are still male-dominated. If the paradigm theory of religion were to hold, one would expect to find cases where social structure mimics such a divine pattern. But one looks in vain in both the ancient and modern worlds to find examples of societies where the paradigm theory of religion functions to establish either female dominance or gender equality. Whether the dominant deity be female, male, or a combination, patriarchy is still the order of the day for social organization. This in no way justifies patriarchy, of course. It only challenges the alleged helpfulness of the paradigm theory for opening up an avenue of social transformation.

Turning to premise four, let us ask what role divine ineffability is supposed to play in the argument. The first thing it does is drive a wedge between revelatory symbols of God and the mysterious being of God. God in Godself is said to be transcendent to all human metaphors and, hence, unfathomable. It follows that God is not literally the Father of Jesus Christ, or our father either for that matter. The Appendix to the ILL says that "God is not a father, any more than God is a mother, or than life is a dream."

The greatest hermeneutical sin we can commit seems to be to take the metaphor literally, that is, to think of God as actually being a father. How can we prevent this sin? Sallie McFague in her book, *Metaphorical Theology,* gives the answer which seems to have been assumed in *An Inclusive Language Lectionary,* namely, by creating and adding metaphors. This is a divide and conquer technique. It is assumed that by utilizing multiple metaphors that we are less likely to take some of the metaphors literally, particularly the Father metaphor. And, if we do not think of God literally as our Father in heaven, then we will not copy God in our social relationships and, thereby, we will advance the cause of gender equality on earth. The function of divine ineffability is to prevent human fathers on earth from mimicking the alleged divine father in heaven. There really is no father in heaven. There is only unfathomable mystery.

The argument is taken a step further in *An Inclusive Language Lectionary,* and this produces the conclusion in step five. Because God is essentially ineffable, then there are no particular metaphors which are inherently essential in contrast to other metaphors which are inherently inessential. So we are evidently free to make up and add new ones. By balancing the biblical male metaphors for God with added female metaphors, the ILL then relies upon the paradigm theory of religious behavior to advance the cause of establishing a human community

Does Christian theology actually teach that God is an oppressive Father?

based on gender equality. The Appendix puts it this way: "The metaphor 'God the Father and Mother' expresses the close relationship between language about God and language about human community. The mutuality and coequality of the persons of the Trinity is a model for human community." In short, if Father and Mother are equal in heaven, then we who worship them will strive for equality on earth.

But if premise four is taken seriously, it actually undercuts the conclusion in step five. If it is really true that we can sever the tie between the revelatory symbols for God and the ineffable reality of Godself, and if we know that God is really not either a father or a mother, then we have no authentic divine paradigm by which to justify replication in human community. If we knew that the true God is truly ineffable, then it would be ineffability that we would want to copy. But how could we ever do that? We could not, of course. So when we project onto heaven the image of a combination father-mother, we are fully aware that this projection is a metaphorical creation of our own here on earth. In reality we know that there is no gender equality in heaven for us to copy. There is only the ineffable mystery. Thus, the net effect of emphasizing the utter transcendence of the biblical God is to render the divine inaccessible to paradigmatic thinking and, hence, makes the whole enterprise of interpolating mother metaphors at best superfluous, at worst inconsistent.

The third premise, to which we now turn, is a curious one because in the feminist literature it is so elusive. Let us ask: does Christian theology actually teach that God is an oppressive Father and that earthmen ought to copy the heavenly paradigm of patriarchal oppression? If we were to answer 'yes' to this question, then in the name of social justice we would have sufficient warrant for transforming divine father symbolism. If we were to answer 'no,' then we might find ourselves vindicating divine father symbolism while attacking patriarchy on other grounds. What makes this topic elusive is that feminist theologians are reluctant to give a single answer to the question. Rather, they try to affirm both answers, and this introduces ambiguity into the argument. Let us turn to the ILL Appendix for a classical example of the ambiguity.

> It is also the case that Christians rejected as pagan the view that God is father of the world. For Christians, God is Father in relation to the Son. Christians are brought into this relationship because they are adopted as heirs (Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5).
>
> God, the Almighty Father, considered as the author of all things, is a Zeus-like figure, sitting on Mt. Olympus, a remote and solitary power. Such an authoritarian God causes earthly authorities to take their cues from "Him." God as Almighty Father



legitimates the authority of the fathers of the church, the father of the country, the father of the family.

This is not the way Jesus spoke of God as Father. *Abba* is an accessible, caring, revered figure.

The image of God as Father has been used to support the excessive authority of earthly fathers in a patriarchal social structure.

Now let me offer a bit of commentary. First, the Appendix author makes an important observation in the first paragraph. The origin of divine father symbolism for Christians does not come from a general concept of God as the creator of the world. It comes rather from the father-son metaphor which describes the relationship between the first two persons of the Trinity. That we today refer to God as "our Father in heaven" is the result of the prayer Jesus gave us and of his invitation to share in his special relationship to God. It is easy to forget this if we restrict our attention to the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, which associate creation and fatherhood in the phrase "God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." God is creator of all things, to be sure, but we understand him as Father primarily as the Father of Jesus Christ and then, only by adoption, as our Father as well.

But now look what happens. We shift to the second paragraph and find ourselves with Zeus sitting atop Mt. Olympus. Then nasty things are said about remote and solitary powers in heaven legitimating earthly patriarchy in the church, country, and family. But what are we talking about? Does the Christian Bible and the church which reads it teach the doctrine of Zeus? Or, is this a misreading of what the Christian church actually teaches? What is the status of this paragraph? It is not clear.

The lack of clarity regarding whether or not the Bible teaches that Zeus legitimates patriarchy is important to the obfuscation which follows. In the next paragraph we are told what the genuine teaching regarding God the Father should be, namely, that the heavenly Father whom Jesus tells us to address as *Abba* is accessible and caring. Now we ask: does Jesus' *Abba* legitimate earthly patriarchy as Zeus does? We must assume not. So, if we as Christians want to teach faithfully what Jesus has passed on to us, would we not want to teach that our Father in heaven is accessible and caring? And should we teach that God the Father is accessible and caring would this count as the official Christian teaching? If so, then why do we, when turning to the subsequent paragraph, find still another attack on the Christian teaching? Who is being attacked, Zeus or *Abba?*

This confusion provides an important step in the feminist argument for adding female metaphors for the God of Jesus. It must be assumed that the official Christian image of God as Father functions to legitimate terrestrial patriarchy if

We have long thought of sin as disobeying God's will.

there is to be sufficient warrant for changing that symbol. If it were clear that what Christians mean by God as Father is the *Abba* of whom Jesus speaks, then the heavenly Father alone would embody all the qualities of caring and community which the concept of inclusivity calls for. Adding divine mother imagery would then be unwarranted.

This opens up one final door to critical analysis. What do feminist premises imply regarding the doctrine of sin? We have already mentioned that, at least according to Sallie McFague, sin begins when we take divine father metaphors literally. But there must be more to sin than this. There is. What seems to be assumed, according to the paradigmatic theory, is that human beings normally copy the divine. It follows that if the divine paradigm is oppressive, then we humans will behave opressively. Sin in this case would be understood as behaving as God does. On the other hand, if the divine paradigm is communitarian and egalitarian, and if we humans follow suit, then sin would be understood as behaving contrary to God. What is important to note here is that we assume we know what sin is—sin is behaving oppressively—regardless of what God does or does not do.

How, then, do we overcome oppression within a religion dominated by divine father symbolism and its concommitant social oppression? To behave in accordance with this symbolism would be sinful. The way to overcome oppression, then, is to do one of two things: either deviate from the divine model or else create a new divine model. The ILL and most feminist theologians usually choose the latter method.

This is curious, however. In most religions—especially in Christianity—a human being is thought to be righteous when he or she mimics authentic divine activity. To deviate is to sin. We sin when we behave in an ungodly manner. In Christian theology we have long thought of sin as disobeying God's will. According to the traditional Christian view, it is possible—even quite normal—for us to have a vision of God being just and loving yet willfully choose to behave unjustly and unlovingly. What seems to be developing in contemporary feminist theology, in contrast, is a theory of sin in which the evils of social oppression are due to human faithfulness to the divine paradigm, a paradigm which itself is sinful in structure. In order to rid society of sin, then, we are told we must reconstruct our image of God which, in turn, will reconstruct the order of society. The result is that our own ethical standards are de facto the source of our image of God. And our image of God is one we create through metaphorical appellation. In effect, we have dubbed ourselves the standard setters. We have placed ourselves in the driver's seat. We ourselves decide right from wrong and then on this basis we decide which images to apply to God.



All of this simply sidesteps what I believe to be the real direction theological thinking should follow. I think the first and basic theological task is to try to understand what has been revealed to us in Scripture about the God who raised Jesus from the dead. In addition, we also have an important ethical task, namely, to seek to establish a society in which social equality and humane community prevail. I believe the second prescinds from the first. However, this does not seem to be the direction followed by the inclusive language lectionary committee when dealing with the question of interpolating female images of the divine. Unfortunately, the resulting doctrine of God imparted to the lectionary seems to be based upon such a mishmash of weak assumptions and *non sequiturs* that we simply cannot expect it either to open up genuinely new theological insight or effectively to advance the cause of equality in community.

Where Do We Go From Here?

My critique of the ILL and feminist theology is by no means intended to give aid and comfort to those who wish to return to the good ol' days of patriarchal oppression. I wish only to raise the theological issue regarding the grounds for apprehending the reality of God and the ethical issue regarding the grounds for pursuing social transformation in behalf of the dignity of women.

Briefly put, I believe the original revelatory symbols ought to remain accessible to us and to Bible readers in every age. We must operate with the assumption that metaphors such as "our Father in heaven" coming from the mouth of Jesus are closer to the original revelation of God than are our current ethical agendas. Our hermeneutical task, it seems to me, is to try to interpret these ancient symbols, not to create new ones. By taking this approach our posture will be one of listening to God's Word, not telling it what to say.

When it comes to our ethical agenda, I believe we should have the courage to admit that *we* today are creating our standards of what is right and wrong. We are not simply copying ancient or eternal paradigms. We are striking out in new directions. If God in any way be our model for this, it would be the quality of creative redemption that we should emulate. The phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:24 which follows directly the one quoted at the beginning of this article reads: "after Christ has destroyed every rule and every authority and every power." At the consummation of God's redeeming work all human authorities and hierarchies and structures of oppression will be eliminated. What might this mean for us now? I believe this could inspire us toward bringing into existence a new society based on equality and humane community even if there has never been a precedent either in heaven or on earth. It is okay to introduce

The promise of the Gospel is that something new is coming.

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something new. We do not have to copy anybody in the past, either in heaven or on earth.

This is our ethical mandate: to pursue social transformation with a vision of human justice and loving community based upon our most conscientious insights regarding God's will for the future of creation. The promise of the Gospel which begins with the resurrection of Jesus is that something new is coming. There will be a new creation and new life. There is nothing about God's creative or redeeming work that implies we are stuck with ancient or eternal patterns. Change and transformation are indelible characteristics of our relationship with the God who raised Jesus and who promises us new life in him. And through baptism we can be walking now in this new life (Rom. 6:4). Living with the freedom to create and transform the world in which we live is part of the gift and ethical responsibility God has given us.

Thus, we cannot permit something like the paradigm theory of religious behavior to inhibit our creative responsibility. The ILL and feminist theologians want to be creative. But what they want to create is a different past, a Bible which did not exist in the ancient world when it was first written. They want to create new metaphors for life in heaven. That creative energy would be better put to use in the direct attempt at social reconstruction today here on earth.

Rosemary Reuther rightly acknowledges that the ideal of equality between women and men is a strictly modern ideal. It did not and could not have existed in the ancient world when the Bible was written. This fact certainly affects how we read the Bible, of course. Now we who hold this ideal look at the Gospel of Luke and notice how deliberately Jesus affirms women and grants them dignity in a fashion quite revolutionary for his time. But we cannot forget that for nearly two millennia the Christian church has not noticed this about Jesus, or if it has, it has not granted it the significance we do now. Our interpretation today is a new one. We should admit it and shoulder responsibility for it. We should not pretend that the ancients saw things just the way we do.



Language for Those Who Have Ears to Hear

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> You urge me to revise the Old Latin Versions, and, as it were, to sit in judgment on the copies of scripture which are now scattered throughout the world. Inasmuch as they differ one from another, you would have me decide which of them agrees with the Greek original. The labor is one of love, but at the same time both perilous and presumptuous. For in judging others I must be content to be judged by all; and how can I dare to change the language of the world in its hoary old age, and carry it back to the early days of its infancy? Is there a man, learned or unlearned, who will not, when he takes the volume in his hands, and perceives that what he reads does not suit his settled tasks, break out immediately into violent language and call me a forger and profane person for having had the audacity to add anything to the ancient books, or to make any changes or corrections therein?[1]

The setting is Western Christendom, sometime in the early years of the fifth century. The speaker is Jerome, the acid-tongued monastic, complaining to his superior, Damasus, the Bishop at Rome. The situation is one that Jerome's contemporary Augustine described in *de doctrina christiana.* While Jerome ranted, Augustine complained:

> We can enumerate those who have translated scripture from Hebrew into Greek, but those who have translated it into Latin are legion. In the early times of the faith, whenever anyone found a Greek codex, and thought he had some facility in both languages, he attempted to translate it.[2]

Attempting to halt this furious production of Latin translations of sacred text, Damasus appointed Jerome to the task of preparing an official translation of the Scriptures into Latin. Jerome obliged, but the task took its toll. From all corners and cathedrals in the Latin-speaking world, he met with only abuse for his efforts. Augustine wrote from North Africa of the outcry raised over the translation of the book of Jonah, particularly the section in which Jerome, following the Hebrew text, translated Jonah into lying under an arch of ivy. The North Africans, however, had so accustomed themselves to Jonah lying under a gourd, that they lept up in fury.

The people were unable to tolerate the excision of a beloved, but badly inaccurate biblical picture: Jonah seeking shelter under a gourd. They had their Bible, that is, their favorite of a thousand codices, and they wanted to keep it. This is the story of the monolithic presence of a particular translation of scripture within a culture.

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[1] Jerome, "Incipit praefatio sancti Hieronymi presbyteri in Evangelio," *Biblia Sacra: Vulgata,* 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1975), 2:1515.

[2] Augustine, *de doctrina christiana* 2.11.

The initial effect of the feminist movement was conversion of the ear.

I cannot speak of the *Inclusive Language Lectionary* (ILL) without thinking of Jerome and Damasus, Augustine and North Africa, Jonah and the gourd. There are differences. The ILL specifically states that it is not a new translation of scripture. Nothing like the Bishop of Rome or the magisterium behind the man could grant the ILL "official sanction." Further, there is nothing of Jerome's acerbity in the ILL prefatory material and appendices. But I am haunted by the similarities between the fifth century and the twentieth: 1) the profusion of inclusive language renderings of scripture, 2) the difficulty of trying to "change the language of the world," and 3) the "violent language" invoked against anyone who has the audacity to "add anything to the ancient books." In my contribution to this series of articles I would like briefly to examine the three similarities stated above and then to offer some thoughts on both inclusivity and God-language.

The Situations of Jerome and the ILL

1. The Profusion of Inclusive-language Lectionaries

The occasion for the ILL is important and too quickly forgotten. If one's sense of the occasion evaporates, then the ILL does seem to be a new translation of the Bible, a feminist manifesto, as Ted Peters charges, a sermon masquerading as an innocent lectionary, as Carl Graesser suggests. What was the occasion for the ILL? The occasion was a situation of dire need. Women have been edited out of jobs and wages, salaries and careers, pulpits and professions—even the language itself.

The latter is a particularly neuralgic point. English has no word for generic humanity. The words "man" and "mankind" filled the vacuum. Suddenly, the words lost their force. People no longer heard "women" and "children" in the words "man" and "mankind." There was a huge semantic revolution.

Let's arrest the revolution for a moment. What happened? There was massive aural conversion. Ears were suddenly deaf to once-familiar connotations. The ear was converted. The initial effect of the feminist movement was conversion of the ear. A revolution in language was on.

The revolution had two fronts. More moderate feminists moved to adjust language to fit the dictates of a new aural consciousness. Where language was "exclusive," one tinkered with nouns and pronouns to "include" women. This more moderate approach is similar to the integrationist movement among black North Americans: Where blacks were excluded from white society, there were adjustments to "integrate" them. More radical feminists decided to re-invent language altogether. A cadre of feminist writers moved into science fiction. Tired of language they judged to be patriarchal



to the core, these people wrote "heterocosms": other worlds without patriarchal sensibilities. This more radical linguistic approach is similar to the black nationalist movement: some blacks decided that integration into white society was just not enough, and opted out entirely. No amount of adjustment could accomplish the radical change they sought.

The shock waves of this semantic revolution hit biblical language somewhat later than they rocked secular speech, but the effect was even more traumatic. The more moderate reaction was to include women in biblical speech and narrative, to adjust nouns and pronouns to be "inclusive." Slowly biblical speech altered. The objects of prophetic derision became "foolish women and men" or "foolish people." The biblical figures Esther, Ruth, Rachel, Tamar, Rahab, Mary, Martha, and a prodigal daughter gradually gained voices. I heard myself addressed for the first time as one of the "sisters in Christ." More radical reactions, however, surfaced. Mary Daly presented one in *Beyond God the Father.*[3] The book has been misread, as if Daly's intention had been to present a Mother-God, or a God-dess in a work entitled *Alongside God the Father.* Daly has been credited with illuminating the feminine aspects of God and uncovering the matriarchal elements of religion. In fact, her proposal was far more radical. She jettisoned what she judged to be a patriarchal attention to God as Noun and proposed that God be Verb.

Radical voices were lone, sporadic, and quickly silenced by marginalization or misreading. The moderate voices, however, gained strength. These were not the voices of rabid feminists, trained in radical institutions. There was change in churches and Bible study groups across the country. I can enumerate neither the names nor the places across the country where I opened a worship Bible to find the word "sisters" penciled in next to the word "brothers," "women" next to the word "men," "children" next to the word "sons." I looked more carefully: the words had been erased and repenciled in, not just once but a number of times. The scenario was suddenly transparent. An "exclusive" reader had come along, erased the previous lector's emendations to the text, and read the text "exclusively." Then an "inclusive" lector would come back and re-edit the text. We had an all-out language war going on in the margins of worship Bibles across the country. I noted in the margins of my copy of Augustine's *de doctrina christiana:*

> In the early times of the faith, whenever anyone found an RSV and thought she or he had some facility in biblical language, she or he attempted to render it into inclusive-langage.

[3] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

The ILL is responding to changes already in place.

What was desperately needed, was a single version of scripture in "inclusive-language" done by people who knew biblical languages and would faithfully and consistently render biblical texts into "inclusive-language."

We may well wish to question how "faithful" was the rendering, as the presiding bishops ALC, LCA, AELC have done. We may well wish to charge "ideological bias," as Ted Peters does in his essay. But the fact remains: something had to happen. Someone had to confront the profusion of inclusive-language lectionaries scrawled in the margins of Bibles everywhere and present an informed and critical rendering of scriptures in "inclusive-language." Even those who criticize the ILL have had to adjust their speech at podium, lectern, and pulpit, as they seek to "justify the ways of God to men"—and women.[4]

2. The Difficulty of Changing Language

"How can I dare to change the language of the world in its hoary old age?" Jerome was aware of the audacity of his task. Yet even Jerome, whom one might rightly suspect of courting controversy, seems unprepared for the wrath he actually incurred. His work on the *Vulgata* exhausted him—indeed, it probably killed him.

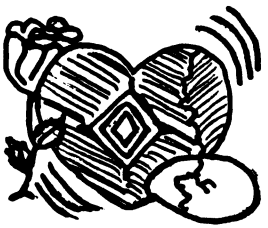
We hope the ILL team fares better than Jerome. They too are aware of the audacity of their task. The prefatory material is cautious: the ILL is "a first attempt to rethink the language of scripture as inclusive of both men and women, and as such it is provisional and experimental" (Introduction, Year A). The ILL is an offering to the church "as a provisional, experimental, and responsible attempt to proclaim the biblical message in an inclusive manner" (Preface). Despite the caveats, however, the ILL faces the same charge: "It's changing the language of the world!"

Bless the critics! They give the ILL power that it neither claims nor deserves. The ILL is not acting to "change the language of the world"; rather, the ILL is responding to changes already in place. The ear had been converted. In the face of ecclesiastical paralysis, the ILL team moved in so that people could keep hearing.

The more moderate response to the semantic revolution guides the ILL team. Changes are limited to nouns and pronouns referring to humanity and Deity, with some attention to substantives that might be either racist or anti-Semitic. These broad changes are justified; brackets offer suggested emendations. We sense we are in the middle of a semantic minefield.

Yet these changes are explosive. Finally, the threat in changing language is that language changes. If you are in the presence of "sisters and brothers" long

[4]John Milton, *Paradise Lost I*,1. 26.



enough you'll miss the women, if they evaporate. While it was easier to hear psalms decry the "foolish man," "foolish people" is infinitely more accurate. The difficulty with changing language is that language changes things. The *Vulgata* may have been the end of Jerome, but it was also the end of Jonah's gourd.

3. The Violence of the Debate

Let's help Jerome to be "inclusive":

> Are there any people, learned or unlearned, who will not, when they take the volume in hand, and perceive that what they read does not suit their settled tastes, break out immediately into violent language and call me a forger and a profane person?

There is a lot of violence in the inclusive-language controversy. Not using inclusive-language registers as an *ad feminam* attack; using inclusive-language "exaggerates" a point. When God is referred to as male or female, one's hackles rise. Those who wish to keep God male pour imprecations upon those who make God female. Those who wish to make God female pour imprecations upon those who wish to keep God male. The violence feeds on itself.

Our wrath is really with God, who will not be hung with politically correct genitalia. Our wrath is really with God, whom we keep wishing we could make in our own image. Our images are—at least by today's definition—primarily male or female. We have elements of a holy war, with both sides claiming as standard-bearer God, gracious and merciful, generous and genderful. In fact, God is neither incarnate in gender, nor is God incarnate in language. God is incarnate in Jesus Christ. We are only made in God's image. The reverse is not true, not even possible.

Inclusivity and God-Language

1. Inclusivity

There are exclusive conceptualities underlying the best "inclusive" rhetoric. "Inclusive-language" is itself shocking evidence of this. The word "women" is added to "men," "Mother" to "Father." Where are children? How are they included? What others might be excluded?

The ILL for Years B and C admits its own short-comings on this point with passing mention of handicapped people, people of other races, and Jews. The introductions to Years B and C state: "Contemporary English usage also suggests that we refer to a 'person with a disabling condition' rather than a 'cripple' or a 'crippled person.'" Thus, "the blind" become "those who are blind"; "the lame" become "those who are lame." Darkness can also be excluding imagery. Therefore, "Where darkness is set in contrast with 'light' and has a moral connotation, a substitute word for darkness is supplied—for example, 'the

light shines in the deepest night' (John 1:5)" (Introductions, Years B and C). The existence of excluding imagery affecting groups other than women appears to be an awareness that dawned *after* publication of ILL, Year A. But clearly the male-female concern dominates these other concerns in all years. We have an attempt "to rethink the language of scripture as inclusive of both men and women" (Introductions, Years A, B, and C), but only secondarily handicapped and non-handicapped people, dark-skinned and non-dark-skinned people, Jews and non-Jews? One concern prevails at the expense of others. Is this "inclusivity"?

My deepest concern with inclusive-language is that it treats only nouns and pronouns; it focuses our attention on nouns and pronouns. This truncation ought to make both poet and theologian squirm. The pronouns "he" and "him" are expanded by gender. "Lord" becomes "Sovereign One." "Son" becomes "child." "The Son of man" becomes "the Human One." "King" becomes "Ruler" or "Monarch." "Brethren" become "friends and neighbors," "sisters and brothers." But inclusive-language is therein gramatically exclusive.

What about the adjectives? The psalmist's emphasis is not on the maleness of "man," but the "foolish"-ness of all people. What about the conjunctions? Of that critical phrase from the Old Testament—"but God said"—the word of accusation is not "God." More important, what about the verbs? "And he kissed him" (Mt. 26:49). The emphasis is neither gender, nor two males in intimate physical contact. The emphasis is on betraying. To focus our attention exclusively on nouns and pronouns obscures the presence of a God who acts in us and through us, because of us and in spite of us.

2. God-language and God's Language

"God-language" is accepted theological jargon for the language we humans use to address God. Language has limitations, and the ILL team acknowledges this: "Words used to describe God reflect limitations—words and language convey as best they can what is virtually impossible to describe" (Preface, Year A). This is God-language from below, as humans use words to apprehend deity. What if God-language were from above? What if God-language were God's language? What if God's language were about the words God uses to address us? How then would we respond?

What about God's language? God spoke, and things were created: heaven, earth, seas, and dry land. God spoke, and things were distinct one from another. Sky was something different than sea. Dry land was something different from sky. Adam was a quick study. Given the task of naming God's creatures, Adam spoke. The opossum was something different from the alligator; the partridge, from the egress. God spoke, and Moses trembled. The words were a fiery circuit of being: "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 4:14). The Hebrew peoples demanded more precision, and they got a word that defied pronunciation. God spoke, and a pregnant Jewess received instruction: "And his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means God with us)" (Mt. 1:23).

Two things characterize God's language. First, God is activity and motion, passion and creation. This force impressed Luther. He wrote in his commentary on the book of Genesis: "Through His speaking, God makes something out

of nothing" (Gen. 1:3).[5] God speaks, and things happen. We hear, not *who* God is, but *how* God is. Second, what happens when God speaks? What happens is relationship. We hear how God speaks to the creation, to the creatures, to the people of Israel. God's language establishes relationships.

It is precisely this relationality that inclusive-language obscures. At stake in God's language is not maleness, femaleness, or multi-genderness. There is suddenly a relationship between male and female, Jew and Greek, creator and creatures. At stake in God's language is not the essence of God or the essence of humanity or the essence of opossum. There is suddenly a relationship between opossum and partridge, human and animal, creator and creature. At stake here is not who God is, but how God is. At stake here is not the essence of Emmanuel, but the presence of God. Obsessed over static nouns and pronouns, the substantives of scripture, inclusive-language drags our attention away from activity and motion, passion and creation.

It is verbs, neither nouns nor pronouns, that convey that action, motion, passion, and creation. These verbs connect in many and various ways deity and humanity: "forgive," "judge," "worship," "praise," "beseech," "create," "befriend," "behold," "be still." Verbs—and not nouns—approximate the way God is with us. Verbs—and not nouns—apprehend the Emmanuel.

The verbs were so powerful to Luther that he wanted to engrave them on the cranium of every Christian. His explanation of the Creed in the Small Catechism is a flurry of activity. God "creates, sustains, provides, protects, and preserves." Our response is "to thank, praise, serve, and obey." Christ "was begotten and born." Christ has "redeemed, delivered, and freed us." Our response is to "live under him and to serve him" (*Small Catechism: II,* The Creed). At the heart of Luther's theology is Emmanuel. At the core of his catechetical instruction is elaboration of *how* that God is with us.

The ILL speaks to ears that have been converted. They can no longer hear as they once have heard. Who we are is recast; men and women, brothers and sisters, children of God. Who God is is re-imaged: Sovereign One, Ruler, Monarch, Mother. Our ears, however, are in need of further conversion. If we would hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of God-with-us, we need to hear *how* God is with us. We need to look at *how* God is, rather than *who* God is. Verbs—and not nouns—will guide us. For this hearing we need, not a new lectionary, but new ears. The language is there, if only we will hear it.

"Those who have ears, let them hear."

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[5] *Luther's Works: Vol. 1,* ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958, p. 16.

What are They Saying about Armageddon?

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A recent book asserts "it used to be only religious fanatics who warned about Armageddon. Now it is a household word."[1] Both parts of the statement are perhaps somewhat exaggerated, but on the whole it is not far off the mark. In the second of the debates between President Reagan and Walter Mondale, the President was questioned about his views on Armageddon, and that alone demonstrates that the topic has gained national interest. The question was no doubt prompted by published reports that on several occasions Reagan has expressed his belief that Armageddon may well occur during the present generation. Ronnie Dugger, for example, in an article published in the *Washington Post* (April 8, 1984) asks in its title "Does Reagan expect a Nuclear Armageddon?" and goes on to wonder whether President Reagan might "be predisposed to believe that he sees Armageddon coming and that this is the will of God? Might his religious beliefs affect his willingness to use nuclear weapons?" Put in those terms, the question acquires a certain urgency.

The answer to the question "what are they saying about Amageddon?" depends on who "they" are. Generally speaking, the ones who have made the term so prominent are fundamentalistic preachers and authors.[2] The most widely read of these is no doubt Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). This book was on the best seller list for a substantial time, and is touted by the publisher as "the bestselling non-fiction book of the decade, selling more than 18 million copies world-wide." About 30 million people are supposed to have read it. Ten years later Lindsey did a follow-up called *The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon* (New York: Bantam, 1980). But this may be only the tip of the iceberg, for there is a whole spate of similar publications, from a 46-page picture book entitled *The Beast* (Chino, CA: Chick Publications, 1966) to a 490-pager by William Dankenbring, *The Last Days of the Planet Earth: A Survival Guide to the End of the World* (Altadena, CA:

[1] Mike Russ, *The Battle for Planet Earth* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1981), p. 145.

[2] Refutations of this approach also appear. A recent one is Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle: Five Predictions That Failed* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1985), which attempts to show that the scenario is not developing as Lindsey said it would. My own impression is that Lindsey's phraseology has generally been cagey enough to avoid being absolutely painted into a corner, which is not to deny that much of what Bacchiocchi says is valid. But those who accept Lindsey's identifications of modern events with biblical references will rarely notice his "updatings" and shifting positions.

Triumph Publishing Co., 1981).[3] In general these books present a message that is virtually identical as to broad outlook and sometimes even down to minute details.

What are They Saying?

What is the message presented in these works? The following summary is taken mainly from Lindsey, though, as indicated above, he is in broad agreement with numerous other works that fall into the same genre. The present generation is the one that will witness Armageddon because all the pieces of the puzzle are now falling into place; that is to say, all the prophecies that relate to the climax of history have already been fulfilled or are on the verge of being fulfilled (*Countdown,* p. 12). First of all, a great deal of emphasis is put upon the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. This is taken as the fulfillment of biblical prophecies and the beginning of a whole series of events that form the countdown to Armageddon: "The Jews are God's timepiece." Since the assertion in Matthew 24:34, "this generation will not pass away until all this takes place," is somehow taken to refer to our time, and since a biblical generation equals forty years, some authors fix upon 1988, as *the* year, i.e., forty years from the establishment of the state of Israel. Other important pieces falling into place are the unification of the Arabs, the rise of Russia and China, and the establishment of the European Common Market, which is taken to represent the return of the Roman Empire (*Countdown,* pp. 13-14). Since some apocalyptic descriptions seem to suggest thermonuclear bombardments, the modern capability of causing such destruction also argues that the time has arrived.

The Action Begins

The scenario unfolds as follows. The European Common Market (the old Roman Empire under a new guise) completes its development into an economic and political confederacy of ten nations. A particular individual (who is already alive and probably a member of the Common Market Parliament) will become leader of it and, because of the reputation and prestige he gains, will acquire dictatorial powers. This man is, in fact, the Antichrist, the Beast. Because of his great powers of leadership and the universal desire for peace, the Antichrist comes to be acknowledged as ruler of all nations (*Late Great,* p. 141).[4] Associated with him and aiding him there is now a one-world religion, an amalgam of the present institutional churches, eastern religions, mind expansion, and witchcraft; this is Babylon, the Scarlet Harlot of Revelation 17-18, though it comes to completed form only at the beginning of the Tribulation (*Late Great,* pp. 104-119, 121-122).

The Tribulation is the seven-year period before the second coming of Christ (or, more accurately, between the two second comings), when all the "real Christians" will have been removed from the earth. Before this happens there will

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[3] Some of the others are: Dana Adams Smith, *Armageddon in the Middle East* (New York: John Day Co., 1981); Stephen D. Swihart, *Armageddon 198?* (Plainfield, NJ: Haven Books, 1980); and John E. McConner, *Armageddon—When and Where?* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1974). A recent one, John Wesley White, *Arming for Armageddon* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1983), carries a foreword by Billy Graham in which, after reviewing current preparations for war, he states that "a scrutiny of current events demonstrates that we could very well be living close to what the Bible calls the 'time of the end'" (p. X).

[4] N.B. The various printings of this book do not always have the same pagination.

appear a Jewish False Prophet, an Israeli leader who will make a pact with Antichrist, involving a rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple and the placing of the idol of Antichrist within it. This is the sign that the final seven year period has begun. At this moment all the "real Christians" will be taken up in the great Rapture into the clouds to meet Christ, who will take them to heaven (*Late Great,* pp. 131-132; *Countdown,* pp. 170-171). Lindsey gives what is no doubt thought to be a diverting description of cars and planes loaded with hapless passengers crashing out of control as the "real Christian" drivers/pilots are "raptured out" (*Late Great,* p. 125)—an expectation that occasions the smug bumper-sticker warning, "In case of rapture, this vehicle will be unmanned."

For three and a half years peace prevails, but then comes the final drama of Armageddon (which Lindsey refers to as World War III) as Russia and its allies, including Egypt and the Black African nations, invade Israel. The motive for the invasion is Israel's great wealth; if this wealth is not yet in evidence, it has nevertheless been foretold, and (it is claimed) the mineral deposits of the Dead Sea alone are worth one trillion, two billion, seventy million dollars—more than the combined wealth of France, England, and the United States (*Late Great,* pp. 143-145). Egypt, the Arabs, and the Africans invade from the south, while the Russians stage their own invasion. But in a classic doublecross, after overrunning Israel they go on to occupy Egypt and Africa. But now comes upon the Russian forces a terrible shower of fire and brimstone, which Lindsey thinks probably refers to nuclear bombardment—not upon them only, but against various continents, probably including America (*Late Great,* p. 150). This destruction of the Russians (though apparently attributable to the revived Roman Empire, under Antichrist) causes a large number of the Jews to be converted to Christ, and these in turn evangelize others (*Late Great,* pp. 131, 156).

After the neutralization of the Russians, the Euphrates is dried up, thus facilitating the invasion of Israel by two hundred million Chinese (Lindsey here uses the racist term "the Yellow Peril"). At this point Antichrist mobilizes the forces of his ten-nation confederacy to counter them, setting up the final battle, which is that of Armageddon. The destruction will not be limited to the Middle East; Lindsey speaks of a holocaust that will destroy every city and island and wipe nearly all human life off the planet (*Late Great,* p. 155; *Countdown,* p. 99). This great battle would lead to the final destruction of all, but now Jesus Christ returns to save mankind from self-extinction. (We ask: "what is there left to save?") Jesus having landed at the Mount of Olives, a split is made in the earth forming a gigantic bomb shelter into which the converted Jews rush; this saves them from the destruction Jesus unleashes upon the armies gathered there, a destruction which Lindsey again identifies as a thermonuclear blast (*Late Great,* pp. 163-164). After this there will be a judgment of all those then on earth and the establishment of God's kingdom for 1000 years. At the end of the 1000 years there will be another rebellion and then the establishment of a new heavens and new earth for all eternity (*Late Great,* p. 165).

Is This the Bible?

As outlandish as some of these positions appear, these authors believe they have derived them from the Bible; Lindsey, in particular, is very quick to

canonize under the authority of the inerrant Scriptures what is at best his own particular interpretation of Scripture. He repeatedly uses expressions such as "therefore, the Bible teaches us," "the prophets have revealed," "the Bible has foretold," etc. (*Late Great,* pp. 66, 77, 104, 115-116, 132, 140, etc.)

Where do these authors obtain the positions they promote? Certainly not primarily from Scripture. The Bible does not speak of Russia, Red China, the Arab League, the European Common Market, or nuclear war. Anyone who is intent on seeing these current events in the Bible and is willing to cut it loose from the controls of historical criticism is certainly able (with a little—or rather a lot—of ingenuity) to read it into the Bible. The biblical material for all this comes from a hodge-podge of texts from Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel, and Revelation (Apocalypse), with scattered passages from other books. The term "hodge-podge" is used advisedly. It is as though the individual verses of the Bible were dumped on the table like so many pieces of an Erector set; each one lies there without any literary genre or literary or historical context, waiting to be built up into whatever structure the interpreter conceives.

How much of what these authors write of is actually found in the Bible? Very little. Their starting points, for example, the founding of the modern state of Israel, is not a biblical datum at all. Old Testament prophets (especially Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) warned of the destruction of Israel (which came to pass in 721) and of Judah (which came to pass in 587); some of these same prophets, as well as others, promised a later restoration, a promise which began to be fulfilled after Cyrus the Persian's conquest of Babylon (539 B.C.) and his decree of restoration in 538. But there are no biblical prophecies of a new destruction and restoration of the Jewish state. The establishment of the state of Israel is an event of great historical significance and of deep meaning to the Jewish people, but it does not relate specifically to biblical prophecy.

The climax of the fundamentalists' scenario centers around a word which occurs only once in the entire Bible. Revelation 16:14-16 speaks of gathering all the kings of the earth for battle "in a place called in Hebrew 'Armageddon.'" "Armageddon" is the traditional English name, but the Greek has the rough breathing (Harmagedon),[5] and is itself *presumably* a transliteration of a Hebrew *har-megiddon,* i.e., mountain (or mountains, mountain country) of Megiddo. As a geographical term it has never been satisfactorily explained. The Plain (or Valley) of Megiddo is well-known, but there is no Mount Megiddo,[6] nor even any "mountain of Megiddo," though some authors have thought the reference is to the Carmel range. There are some references to climactic battles in the Old Testament. The prophet Joel speaks of Yahweh bringing all the nations into the "valley (or plain) of Jehoshaphat," shortly later referred to as "the valley of decision" (Joel 4:2, 12, 14 in Hebrew and NAB; 3:2, 12, 14 in RSV and some other versions). "Jehoshaphat" means "Yahweh judges," and it is clear that the name pertains to no actual geographical site but is contrived simply to express the Lord's role as judge. Lindsey identifies it with Armageddon, but that is a gratuitous assertion. Ezekiel 38-39 speaks of Gog and allies coming

[5] The earliest New Testament manuscripts did not have accents or breathing marks; the rough breathing on this word would have been supplied by a later copyist or editor.

[6] Which does not stop some of these authors from speaking confidently of "Mount Megiddo" throughout.

for battle, but the locale is given simply as "the mountains of Israel" (39:2-4). Zechariah 14:1-5 also speaks of a gathering of the nations for battle, but here it is at Jerusalem. Obviously each of these biblical authors has his own conception of the conditions of this last great battle, and it is not legitimate to attempt to pretend the variant details can be harmonized into a single scenario or to relate them to the locale of Megiddo. (Lindsey weasels: he speaks of a great battle raging throughout Israel with its vortex centered in the Valley of Meggido—*Late Great,* p. 154.)

Why does the Bible speak about a last great battle at all? Is it an assured biblical teaching that such will come to pass? By and large the references to a climactic battle are found in apocalyptic passages of the Bible and constitute part of what may be called the "apocalyptic pattern." The nature of apocalyptic literature is complex, but for present purposes it can be said (with some oversimplification) to be crisis literature whose aim is to give hope and to exhort to constancy. The present crisis unrolls under the watchful eye of God; the present suffering will last only a limited time (three and a half years comes to be the standard period[7]), after which God will intervene to bring judgment upon the persecuting power. Sometimes the nations in general are seen as enemies of God and of his people, and then God's intervention is conceived of as a battle against them. But a battle is by no means an invariable part of this pattern. Chapter 7 of Daniel depicts, under the symbolism of four monstrous beasts, a succession of four great empires (the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks), attention being focused on the last of these, which was contemporary to the author and involved in a religious persecution of the Jews. But then God sits down in judgment, the fourth beast is killed and its body destroyed (verses 9-11). The establishment of God's kingdom is then symbolized by the advent of "one like a son of man" (i.e., a human figure, contrasted with the beasts that represented pagan empires), to whom is given dominion and power (verses 13-14).

Apocalyptic Made Easy

In order to understand better the high-handed manner in which Lindsey has combined passages which have little or nothing to do with each other, it will be necessary to review a little of the historical background of Daniel. When Alexander the Great swept through the Middle East in conquest (334-323 B.C.), he put together a vast empire and succeeded in hellenizing large portions of it. When he died childless, his empire was divided among his generals. Only two of these came into the present picture: Ptolemy, who held Egypt, and Seleucus, who held Syria and territory eastward through Iran. Both laid claim to Palestine, including Judea. The Seleucid dynasty succeeded in enforcing its claim by seizing this territory under Antiochus III, though this was not the end of the military actions between these dynasties. Antiochus IV (175-163), wanting to strengthen his hand against the rising power of Rome, attempted to unify his land by a more thorough-going hellenization, a policy that eventually led him to the use of force against recalcitrant Jews.

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[7] Cf. Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 (a time, two times, and half of time); 9:27 (one half of a week of years); Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 (forty-two months); 11:3 and 12:6 (twelve hundred and sixty days); 12:14 (a year, two years, and half a year).

This brief sketch helps us to understand how it happens that the book of Daniel identifies the Syrian Seleucids with the Greek Empire of Alexander and why this "fourth beast" is depicted as so much more fearful than the others. The ten horns on the beast's head symbolize ten kings; then another horn appears, this last one representing Antiochus IV—who is described contemptuously as a little horn who speaks boastfully (7:8). This historical sketch also provides background for chapter 11, which is largely given over to a thinly veiled description of the campaigns of the Ptolemies and Seleucids, several generations of each being covered. Each mention of "the king of the north" is a reference to one of the Seleucids, while "the king of the south" refers to one of the Ptolemies.

In his identification of the participants of the final great battle, Lindsey utilizes especially Ezekiel chapters 30 and 38-39. Chapter 30 makes reference to the day of the Lord and the destruction that is to come upon Egypt, along with "Ethiopia, Put, Lud, all Arabia, Libya, and people of the allied territory." All this Lindsey takes to be a reference to the Arab league and to the nations of Black Africa, and this "alliance" he identifies with "the kin of the south" of Daniel 11 (*Late Great,* p. 61). Yet Ezekiel 30:10 specifically names Nebuchadnezzar, the sixth century Babylonian king, as the agent of destruction. Lindsey acknowledges that the reference is to "the time when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Egypt and her allies," but then adds quite gratuitously "but its greater fulfillment is future" (*Late Great,* p. 67). Ezekiel 38-39 speaks of bringing "Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal," along with Persia, Cush, and Put, as well as Gomer and Beth-togarmah, against the mountains of Israel, there to be struck down by God. This, for Lindsey, is Russia and her allies. He makes much of the fact that Gog is said to come "from the uttermost parts of the north" (Ezekiel 38:6, 15; 39:2—though the Hebrew expression is perhaps more accurately translated "from the recesses of the north"), asserting that the only land mass far north of Israel is Russia. Biblical scholars tend to see the tribes referred to as centered, rather, in Asia Minor, though in fact, given the Syro-Palestinian geography, almost any invasion of Israel in ancient times, except one coming from Egypt, would come from the north.[8] Lindsey's detailed reconstruction of the scenario of his climactic battle is based, for the most part, on his fusion of these two Ezekiel passages (30:1-9 and 38-39) with Daniel 11, even though they have nothing to do with each other.

Lindsey's introduction of a revived Roman Empire in the form of a ten-nation confederation (European Common Market) is equally tortuous. He interprets Daniel's fourth beast as the Roman Empire rather than the Greek; he does this at the expense of telescoping the Medes and the Persians into one "beast," the second. History flies out the window as Lindsey has the Medes con-

[8] In Jeremiah 4-6 there are a series of oracles about "the foe from the north," sometimes using diction virtually identical to the Ezekiel passages (cf. 6:22), though the sixth century Babylonian conquest is the fulfillment of those threats. The same Hebrew expression is used in Jeremiah 31:8 for the return from Assyria of the remnant of Israel. Using exactly the same Hebrew expression as in the Ezekiel passages, Isaiah 14:13 speaks of the "mount of the assembly in the far north"—a reference to the mythical "mountain of the gods." And Psalm 48:3 (48:2 in RSV) speaks of "Mount Zion, in the far north"; the description is possibly explicable as an assimilation of Mount Zion to the "mountain of the gods," but not even Lindsey would locate Mount Zion in Russia!

quering Babylon in 530, though it is historical fact that Cyrus the Persian first conquered the Medes, Babylon's erstwhile ally, then took Babylon in 539. Lindsey's Roman Empire comes in two phases, the second phase somehow being found on the ten horns of the fourth beast's head, though elements of his reconstruction are taken also from the beast of Revelation (see especially 11:7; 13:1-8; and 17:3, 7-14). The beast of Revelation *does* represent the Roman Empire (though not in two phases), we being now in the first century A.D., the time of the persecution of Christians by Rome. The beast of Revelation is, in fact, a composite of the four beasts of Daniel, having seven heads and ten horns, the total of the heads and horns of those four, and sharing other characteristics with them (cf. Revelation 13:2 with Daniel 7:4-6).

But there is nothing here to take us into the 20th century, for the visions of Revelation find their explanation in events contemporary with their composition. The ten horns (identified as "kings" in 17:12) are not a ten-nation confederacy, but probably represent contemporary governors in the Roman Empire. Antichrist is not explicitly referred to in Revelation, though the emperor was virtually the embodiment of the empire, and so the "beast" could stand for the empire, the emperor, or both; the most common understanding of the "number of the beast," 666, is that it represents the numerical value of the Hebrew letters that spell Neron Caesar (i.e., Nero). The "kings of the East" who are to be allowed to cross the Euphrates (16:12) are not the Red Chinese descending to the Middle East but, in all probability, the Parthians, who terrorized many parts of the Roman Empire in the first century.

The Rapture

It would be neither possible nor profitable to deal with all aspects of Lindsey's fanciful futurizing. All that has been attempted here is to show how little it rests on Scripture. One other element, however, one that is likely to be especially puzzling to mainline Christians, is worth mentioning, i.e., the "Rapture." This concept, common to many fundamentalistic groups, is based largely on 1 Thessalonians 4:17. In the context St. Paul is consoling the Thessalonians over those who have already died, even though the (imminently expected) return of Christ has not yet taken place. He says that they have not perished but would, at the Lord's return, rise and that the living "will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord." The early Christian expectation was of the Lord's return to earth, and that is what is envisioned here. The imagery and even the terminology (cf. *parousia)* was often taken from visitation by the emperor. What is intended in the present text is that the faithful, both the living and the dead, will go forth to meet the Lord as an official welcoming committee to escort him to earth.[9]

Believing Can Make It So

If the reconstructions of these authors have so little to commend them, what is the point even of discussing them? It is important to do so because if enough people believe them, they—or at least

[9] In Acts 28:15 the same Greek terminology is used of those who come from Rome to meet Paul while he is still at a distance.

certain aspects of them—could become self-fulfilling prophecies. Here it is important to distinguish what can and what cannot happen by purely human agency: if we speak of the end of the world, the end of history, the return of Christ, this is something which can occur only by God's will and initiative. But if tens of millions of people in this country are convinced this is about to happen and that it is intimately linked to World War III and to a world-wide nuclear holocaust, those people have little reason to think it is worth working for peace, disarmament, the easing of international tensions, etc.[10] Since Lindsey & Co. believe the scenario described above has been prophesied, they also believe that it is certain, destined, to come. This is seen in Lindsey's very diction: The Common Market *must* come to unite, it *must* tap its potential to oppose Russia, there *must* be a shift of power to western Europe, the Antichrist *must* emerge, etc. (*Countdown,* pp. 108-132). For these people World War III and world-wide nuclear holocaust are certain to come.

Lindsey's comments on the U.S. are curiously inconsistent. On the one hand, he dedicates lengthy sections to excoriating U.S. policies of misreading Russian intentions, selling out to them, appeasement, disarmament, etc., adding more of the same with reference to China (*Countdown,* pp. 68-86, 90-96, 133-157). And he argues for the rejection of SALT and SALT II and for the building of more and bigger ICBMs. "The Bible is telling the U.S. to become strong again. . . . It is time to use our vast and superior technology to create the world's strongest military power. Only this will stop the Soviet's insane rush toward nuclear war" (*Countdown,* pp. 149, 154). Yet on his reading of the Bible, this can hardly help: "So from the standpoint of Biblical prophecy, the U.S. *must* fade from its place of leadership for the west and its former superpower status" (*Countdown,* p. 132).[11] The U.S., he thinks, will probably be aligned with the restored Roman Empire, will be among those countries that will send troops when Antichrist mobilizes, and be among those countries devastated by nuclear holocaust. In other words, the military might he is urging is destined to be used on the side of Antichrist and to contribute to the general carnage—without its having any possibility of affecting the outcome. Curiously, Antichrist, the Beast, turns out to be the defender of Israel in the face of attack from Red China!

Quite in line with what James Barr had said of fundamentalists, Lindsey has little use for the organized churches.[12] Every attempt at unity seems to be at the expense of selling out on doctrine. The "one-world religion" that he sees emerging is Babylon, the Scarlet Harlot of Revelation; for him this is the development to which the institutional churches and the ecumenical movement come; and he relates this specifically to the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, and to

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[10] Lowell D. Streiker, *The Gospel Time Bomb: Ultrafundamentalism and the Future of America* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1984), warns that the movement can generate danger "as ultrafundamentalist cults act out their apocalyptic fantasies" (p. 5); see also pp. 107-112.

[11] The emphasis is his. See also *Late Great,* pp. 84, 150, 173.

[12] James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), early notes as one of the most pronounced characteristics of fundamentalists an assurance that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really "true Christians" at all (p. 1). Barr sees the fundamentalists' contrast between "real Christians" and "nominal Christians" as absolutely central to their view of things (p. 14). Being a "real Christian" has very little to do with the organized churches at all.

"ecumaniacs" (*Late Great,* pp. 104-105, 119, 172). In a chapter entitled "Polishing the Crystal Ball," Lindsey says, "Look for the papacy to become even more involved in world politics, especially in proposals for bringing world peace and world-wide economic prosperity" (*Late Great,* pp. 173-174). Even the quest for world peace is thus suspect, just as are all those other means of seeking unity and resolving tensions.

A Tale of Two Eschatologies

The texts that Lindsey throws into his melting pot usually begin with some formula referring to future times: "in the last days," "in those days," "on that day," etc. Such formulas are often quite vague and look forward simply to the time of the new order expected by the prophets. The point to be made here is that in addition to the violent texts that Lindsey loves, there are a whole series of others that speak of a future peace, unity, and harmony based on the acceptance of God's truth. One of these is the matchless Isaiah 2:2-4, which depicts all nations streaming to Mount Zion to accept the Lord's instruction, beating their swords into plowshares, and not training for war again. In Lindsey's scenario, this can come to pass only during the millennium, after Armageddon, after the return of the Messiah; ". . . the Bible teaches that lasting peace will come to the world only after Christ returns and sits upon the throne of David in Jerusalem and establishes His historic kingdom on earth for a thousand years."[13] Thus for anyone who believes this, including politicians and churchleaders, there is hardly any point in working for peace, for it can't come about.

But the assertion that this pilgrimage to Mount Zion is situated after Armageddon is just another arbitrary element of Lindsey's scenario. Elsewhere I have argued in greater detail [14] that there are two incompatible eschatologies in Scripture, that characterized by Armageddon, and that which is expressed in this Isaiah text and others like it. Among these may be mentioned Jeremiah 3:17: "At that time they will call Jerusalem the Lord's throne; there all nations will be gathered together to honor the name of the Lord at Jerusalem, and they will walk no longer in their hardhearted wickedness." Again, "many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day, and they shall be his people, and he will dwell among you, and you shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you" (Zechariah 2:15); "He" (the ideal king of the future) "shall banish the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; the warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations" (Zechariah 9:10); "On that day Israel shall be a third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land, when the Lord of hosts blesses it: 'blessed be my people Egypt, and the work of my hands Assyria, and my inheritance Israel'" (Isaiah 19:25). This conversion of the nations is not compatible with a destructive judgment that is conceived as the end of history, to be succeeded only by the full establishment of God's kingdom. There is no way it could follow such judgment (after which the nations are hardly still in ex-

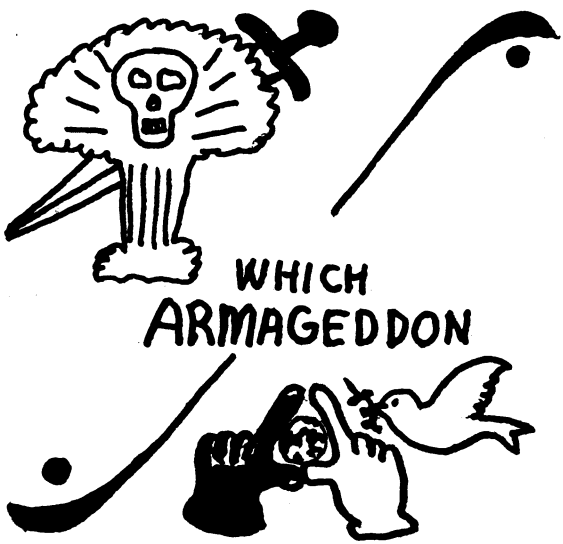
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[13] *Late Great,* p. 159. This fatalistic determinism means that no help can come from the U.N. (though this is explained on the grounds that "Jesus has been excluded from the premises"—ibid.).

[14] "Mount Zion and Armageddon: A Tale of Two Eschatologies," in *Sin, Salvation, and the Spirit,* ed. D. Durkin (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 134-145.

istence), and no way such judgment could be visited upon the nations that "walk no longer in their hardhearted wickedness." The texts speak of "the nations," not some charred fragment left after the destruction of virtually everything that is.

To assert that there are two eschatologies and that they are incompatible is also to pose the question, "Which one will come to pass?" I would again insist that no human power can bring in the eschaton, but if Scripture poses alternative eschatologies, it suggests that we have the choice of preparing the way for one or the other. It is no doubt true that we will never have perfect peace, in the eschatological sense, in our world, but it needs to be asked (and answered), whether the conviction that Armageddon is inevitable, does not run the risk of being a self-fulfilling prophecy. To preach that World War III *will* occur because it is foretold in the Bible is to discourage the very attempt to avoid that catastrophe. No doubt we could make a fair approximation to the horrors of Armageddon (especially with the arms build-up urged by Lindsey, Falwell, et al.), but we would be left only with the shambles of the world as we know it, not the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ. The restoration of unity through ecumenism and the promotion of peace among nations is not yet Isaiah's vision of the pilgrimage to Mount Zion, but it is the closest approximation we can make, and can move a merciful Lord to bring us the rest of the way.



Soul Peep

I AM your clergyman
licensed by municipal
  state
  and ecclesiastical authorities
available for your wedding
  baptism
  funeral
  or the ceremony
of your choice.
  My rates are reasonable.
You can call night or day.
  And you do
  for
I am an integral part
  of every important event
  in your family.
Without me
  your life
  would be hollow
  and empty.
I can prove it.
Whose face beams
  from your wedding photos—
the ones on the coffee table—?
Mine.
Uh huh.
Droplets of water
  falling on baby's forehead
  glisten
  from whose hand
  in the movies
  of her baptism?
I'd know that pinky
  anywhere.
Who's that chucking
  little Tommy
  under the helmeted chin
  on videotape
  as he begins his Pop Warner
    football career?
Remember?
I gave the invocation
  and then
  God gave
  the go-ahead
for his little cleated shoes
  to run, to win
You bet.
I always sit at the head table
  with my spouse
  and you.
When the torrent of champagne toasts
  numbs your brain
  while loosening your tongue
I cluck
  thick, half-looped clucks
  at your obscenities
  on cue.
Then I say grace—
  I always say grace
  for verily
I AM
  a functionary.
  I function for you.
I AM your priest.
I have access
  to the Lord
  in his courts.
  Therefore
I am deadly serious about celebration.
My right thumb intuits the whereabouts
  of my left
  at all times
  and vice versa.
When the altar cloths are white
  instead of the green
  you are expecting
I know why.
But I'm not telling
  until the precise moment
  after which you've ceased to care.
Oh, I can be pompous
  sometimes
  in that humble-funny jowly way
    of mine
that makes you chuckle
  as you think
"The man is full of hot air,
  to be sure,
  but it's OUR hot air, now, isn't it?"

I watch you carefully
  while pontificating
  for EXACTLY that reaction
behind the glaze
  of your eyes
  where your simple spirit sits.
I deserve your respect.
  It is so ordained.
  as am I.

I AM your minister
I exist to serve you
  and your needs.
I wipe the noses
  of your children
  and their pets.
I wander the bright panelled maze
  of hospital wings
  searching
  for you.
There at your bedside
  I hold your hand
  I lick your wounds
I gaze awestruck
  at the suppurating stitchpinned
    thighflesh
where once
  your varicose veins
  bulged blue.
I am
  alone
  privileged
  to view
  to feel
the terrorizing marks of your humanity,
  to respond
to your deathslash fright.
"There, there," I peep.
  "It's all right."
"There, there," I point.
  to him
  who
  alone
  kills
  and makes alive.
Don't look at me
  for crying out loud.

Of course, I can be vulnerable
  when in my opinion
you might be released
  from some deep pain
  by revelations only
I can provide
  dazzling you with Light from
  my darkness
  which is yours.
It's all done with mirrors.
I am authentic.
  No one can dispute that.
Do you like me?
  I know you as you really are
Like me!

I AM your pastor.
I care.
I cut myself
  shaving
  occasionally
  distracted by you.
You drag me into the morass
  of your petty existence
  over and over again
and I am there
  with you
  for you.
  Always for you.

I AM you
  in my way.
When I stand before you
  bonafide benefactor in benedict
I can read your mind—
  "If I were in his shoes
  that's just how I'd behave."
You are satisfied.
  I can tell.
Do you love me now
  or must I continue to prove
  step by weary
  step
  that I can
  Dance?

Frederick Schmidt

Dialog with Gay and Lesbian Lutherans: A Response

Ralph W. Klein

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Lutherans Concerned/North America, a U.S./Canadian organization of gay and lesbian Lutherans and non-gay supportive friends, has recently issued "A Call for Dialog," a theological position paper directed primarily to their fellow Lutherans. In twelve dispassionate, but pain-filled pages, they plead for drastic changes in the church's attitude and practices, and for full acceptance of themselves as sisters and brothers in the faith. It is a sign of hope that such matters can be discussed openly in today's church, and it is a sign of theological maturity that the paper itself speaks responsibly on a number of highly-charged issues. The paper may be ordered for $1.50 from Lutherans Concerned, P.O. Box 10461, Ft. Dearborn Station, Chicago, IL 60610-0461. Individuals congregational adult education programs, church boards, and all leaders could do well to study and discuss this paper—and enter into dialog with it.

In the following paragraphs I intend to summarize the main points of the paper and raise some questions about it. I have also invited Lutherans Concerned to continue the dialog in *Currents* by responding to my paper.

A Call for Dialog (hereafter: A Call) consists of four parts: Gay and Lesbian Persons in the Church; Theological Issues; Biblical Issues; The Ministry of Reconciliation.

Part One notes that as many as one in ten Lutherans may be gay while conceding that this is a guess extrapolated from general societal statistics. In any case, there are thousands of gays and lesbians in our churches, many of whom are afraid of "us," as we are of "them." They have suffered from poor counseling, lack of due process, and the absence of serious study of the issue; many of them have left the church under duress or in disappointment.

Part Two, Theological Issues, states two incompatible alternative views that bedevil all discussions of this issue.

> **One point of view argues that there is one normative, heterosexual, orientation operative in human beings—a prescientific view which prevails in biblical and church historical literature. Heterosexuality alone is divinely willed, thus any variation from it, such as the homosexual orientation, is a reflection of the flawed, broken nature of the world after the Fall.**

Opposed to this is a second view:

> **The other point of view regards the creation as more mysteriously diverse in matters of sexual orientation—a reality which contemporary scientific research is continuing to elucidate. Orientations such as bisexual and homosexual have a causality totally apart from the willfull disobedience of the human family (the Fall) or the choice of any individual, and are to be understood as still another facet of the complexity of God's created order.**

In my judgment, these two paragraphs are indeed the nub of the issue, and all of us need to ask ourselves about the sufficient reasons—biblical, theological, psychological—that lead us to choose paragraph one or paragraph two. The paper's authors reject any attempt to forge a middle ground, probably because that middle ground means homosexual orientation is o.k. but sexual expression is not. The difficulty I have with these paragraphs is that they are incomplete and therefore misleading unless they address the question of sexual expression.

Part Two continues with the discussion of five theses (here abbreviated): Human sexuality, without distinction based on sexual orientation, is a gift of God; human sexuality manifests itself in a variety of gender orientations; All sexual orientations (from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual) are gifts of God; Love is the criterion by which our sexuality is judged; it is inappropriate to condone sexual orientation and condemn sexual expression.

The first three of these theses only spell out the implications of the second paragraph in bold type above. The fourth and fifth forge new ground, where extensive additional study and dialog are needed. The authors show the absurdity of the distinction between condoning homosexual orientation while condemning homosexual expression. Celibacy is a gift given by the Spirit only to the few, and the choice offered by the church with its condoning-condemning statements is not between homosexual expression of affection and heterosexual expression, but for homosexuals it is between homosexual expression and no satisfying relational intimacy whatever.

If the church were to adopt the second paragraph in bold type, however, it surely would want to raise additional concerns about the ethical questions involved.

1. What legimates genital sexual expression? We all know that there is considerable variation between church policies and actual practices in Christian heterosexual relationships today. While the church wrestles with pastoral questions about pre-marital and extra-marital sex and with the growing number of divorces, it surely does not want to surrender its view that genital sexual expression is to take place within a relationship sanctified by the promise of life-long commitment. *If* the church were to adopt the second bold paragraph above, it would insist on something approximating "marriage" between same-gender partners, and break-ups in such marriages would call for the same kinds of pastoral care now exercised in broken heterosexual marriages. How would the dialog partners from Lutherans Concerns react to this?

2. A related problem concerns promiscuity. Again, there is no need to be hypocritical about the actualities of heterosexual practice, but surely the church is right in condemning promiscuity, and, as far as I know, promiscuous genital sexual expression outside of a committed relationship has also often been found to be harmful psychologically in a variety of studies. The perception many of us heterosexuals have is that many gays and lesbians are promiscuous, and, in fact, this seems to be a major contributing factor in the AIDS epidemic. "Love" as the criterion for evaluating our sexuality seems to be hopelessly ambiguous and inadequate. Love can too easily be confused with infatuation or passion. Must not there be added to love the notions of promise, trust, and intention for life-long commitment?

In Part Three, the authors discuss the few biblical passages that speak directly to the topic. They show that Genesis 19,

for example, reports an attempted gang rape of male strangers, without immediate relevancy for the question of homosexuality. They note the silence of the Four Gospels, and the ambiguity of the Pauline passages, in which the apostle seems unaware of gender or sexual orientation, and in which the persons condemned by him are also idolatrous pagan unbelievers, in addition to their being homosexuals. The authors of A Call argue that the condemnations in Leviticus are cultic rather than moral.

What they miss in noting the ambiguity and silence of the Bible is that our moral judgments are not limited to the Bible. Some of our opinions are based on a sense of what is naturally right according to nature. The same Leviticus chapters that condemn homosexual acts also condemn bestiality, incest, and intercourse of a couple during the woman's period. The first two of these I find morally wrong, contrary to nature—as does every reader of *Currents*. The third strikes us more as an esthetic question, devoid of moral implications. If we condemn bestiality and incest because they seem immoral and contrary to nature, how do we respond to fellow Lutherans who perceive homosexual genital expression as immoral and contrary to nature? We could dismiss them as bigoted or ignorant—but to our great peril. What the authors of A Call neglect is that many will make the judgment that homosexual expression is "naturally" wrong, and that it is very difficult for a person to change such views or for others to falsify them. A call to dialog, of course, can help us to see that such feelings are without biblical base (or biblical contradiction for that matter), but patience and tolerance for such opposing views may be necessary *from* the homosexual community as well.

In addition, it is worth noting that our ethical opinions are formed by ecclesiastical tradition as well as by biblical data. While the Bible itself may be ambiguous or silent, and while it may seem to ignore issues like the "givenness" of sexual orientation, the church through its education, moral discussions, and life together has often drawn the conclusion that homosexual genital expression is wrong. Granted, it may have erred in this, as it did at times in condemning dancing or birth control, but any discussion of moral issues in the church needs to be aware that both Scripture *and* tradition do play a normative role in ethical questions.

Part Four of A Call invites all to a ministry of reconciliation and acceptance. It presupposes, therefore, that its readers adopt the second bold paragraph—though many in the church, of course, will not; and it neglects the questions I have raised about what level of commitment permits genital expression and about promiscuity. Strangely, A Call says nothing about church leadership, such as the ordination of practicing homosexuals, though I suppose that this would naturally follow if one were to practice a ministry of reconciliation.

I would wish my remarks to be understood in a context of dialog, as questions raised by a sympathetic person, who is as aware of the ambiguities of sexual ethics and of areas in which we should say "We don't know," as are the authors of A Call themselves. I support enthusiastically their call for discussion and hope that the church itself, its homosexual and heterosexual members, and its sense of purpose and mission will be enriched through the exchange.

Preaching Imagination

Travis DuPriest
Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin

Preachers and listeners both know that there are as many styles and structures of sermons as there are preachers: exegesis and application, thematic suggestion, three-point outline, story telling dialogue, litany of questions or images, stream of consciousness, or a pot pourri of all styles and structures.

The homilist who has done homework is familiar with the empassioned and dramatically-vivid pictorial sermons of the middle ages; the classical orations with divisions of topics and *applicatio* of the Renaissance; the fluid, reasoned sermons of the enlightenment; as well as the fiery, melodious chants of American Blacks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The well-read homilist knows the homely dialogue of Aelfric, the compelling language and logic of John Donne, the luxurious extended metaphors of Jeremy Taylor, the clarity of Thomas Sterne, the compassion of Absalsom Jones, and rhetorical eloquence of Martin Luther King.

But while each era and each preacher finds a structure and style for presenting the good news, each era and each homilist shares one stylistic technique—the essence of any convincing and attractive piece of prose, written or oral—the well-chosen specific illustration. The example. The specific example of plain, concrete language, which example ignites the hearer's imagination. It is just this specificity which allowed sermons of the past—and can allow sermons today—to pierce through the numbness of the human mind and heart and to trigger both the individual and collective storehouses of images and metaphors which link us to our spiritual roots.

What listener could not see and feel the vividness of Aelfric or Donne? Aelfric's expanded dialogue and enlarged vision are fetching indeed: "... holy Stephen was filled with the Holy Ghost, and looked towards heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right of his Father ... 'My Lord, place not thou these deeds to them as sin.' And he then with that word departed to the Almighty Saviour whom he had seen standing high in heaven." (Homily for Dec. 26, Benjamin Thorpes, trans.) And Donne, explaining that Christ does not spurn the world or work with less industry than the adversary, writes, "He preaches in populous cities, he preaches in the desert wilderness, he preaches in the tempestuous Sea: and as his Power shall collect the several dusts, and atoms, and Elements of our scattered bodies at the Resurrection ... so he collects the materials, the living stone, and timber, for his Militant Church" (from "Two-Part Sermon on Fishers of Men," Dec. 19, 1619; Carrithers text).

How, though, do we tap these roots so that our own memories and those of our congregations will be filled with powerful, healing, and reconciling metaphors and images? The answer: preach Christ crucified and risen. But it's not that simple, as we witness when we look at *the*

ways, the means, each of these great preachers labored over in order to preach Christ. As Marshall McClughan reminded us, the medium is the message, which, interestingly enough, is the way we understand Christ, the medium who was the message. To be sure, nothing replaces a firm familiarity and respect for Scripture. Nothing. And yet scripture needs to be brought alive—the stories retold, the songs resung—in order that the proclamation ring true, as well as clear. We make use of this resource of specific example which triggers memory and taps our spiritual heritage by preaching imagination.

The great 19th-century American preacher, Horace Bushnell, said that Jesus is God's gift of imagination to us. Here is our locus. If God could imagine Christ and give us the gift of his Christ, then we in turn need imagine Christ in our world so that as preachers we make known the ways of God to all of humanity.

Yet we are not all creative artists. We cannot every Sunday or saint's day recast the story, recall a personal anecdote or fabricate an analogue. But artists can and do! To trigger memory powerfully and honestly and for our sermons to work their deep magic within the context of the liturgy, we seek out storehouses of images and symbols in literature both sacred and humanistic. The same images are in graphic art, music, dance, photography, sculpture, and architecture, but let us look specifically at literature.

In literature, as well as other forms of art—and here I mean the literature which we elevate above popular literature, the literature of ambiguity which thrusts us into the complexities of life—we see ourselves in moments of joy and pain, moments of loss and confrontation, moments of quest and arrival. Because literary images and narratives often form analogues to scriptural narratives or concepts, they give listeners fresh ways of seeing themselves, a scriptural or Christian perspective, while preventing the dull, repetitive, and uninspiring clichés and platitudes which often pass for proclamation.

Now, out of the thousands of themes that emerge from Scripture and which can be paralleled with thousands of themes from literature, let us focus on one example. The Gospel for the day focuses on the disciples' fear of death and misunderstanding of Christ's own impending death. You want to preach the need for death and the possibility of new life as an on-going cycle for Christians.

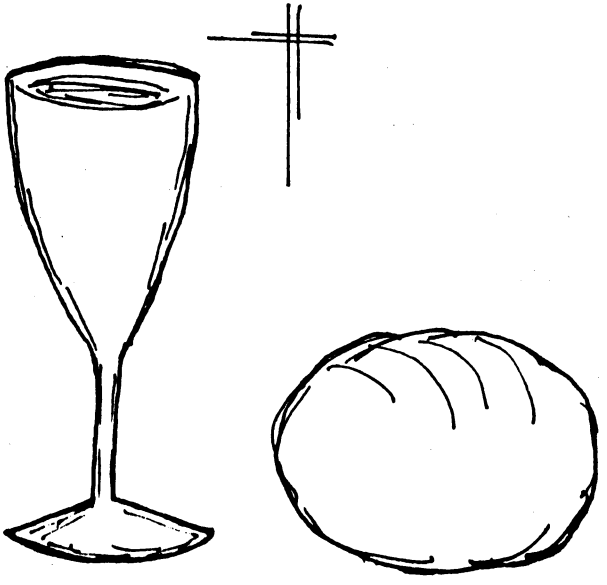
Try to go deeply into a life. Such a short story as Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path" or Elizabeth Robert's "On the Mountainside" will benefit us. In "A Worn Path," for example, Old Phoenix Jackson yearly walks the journey into Nachez against all odds of nature, health, age, and ridicule in order to get medicine for her grandson who has an incurable throat. By showing us an elderly woman—named after the bird of mythology which burns and is then reborn from its own ashes and which becomes a symbol of Christ's death and resurrection—Eudora Welty shows Phoenix's endurance, persistance, and love incarnate, "unencumbered love" as one critic puts it, as a standard for honest-to-goodness Christian charity; she has what Christ wills us to have, a devotion to those around us, so that our family devotion spreads out in ever-broadening circles of friendship, into "bonds of love," as Jeremy Taylor would say. To be fully human then, to be Christian, is to know how and when to die, as Phoenix dies to self-service, to fear, to anger and to know that you will rise again, as Phoenix lies on her back

like a June bug patiently waiting to be picked up. To learn to die and rise again, daily—throughout life.

Our preaching—along with instruction and home life, of course—sets the pattern for our communicants' conceptions of God. The Word we preach and the way we preach it shape who God is in the mind's eye. As in fathering or mothering we can "preach" law and punishment or we can "preach" love and responsibility, that is, listing the "thou shalt not's" or imagining Christ present even during catastrophe and discipline, so from the pulpit we preach the God we imagine—God who keeps lists and scorecards or God who, with us, imagines new beginnings and new changes for starting life afresh each day.

Through imagination—our own and that of others—Christ comes into our situations. We become friends with Christ in our own lives. By imagining the kingdom of God we ask, explore, and dream ourselves anew. We potentially become a child newly engaged with life, a child who can inherit the kingdom. Just as God's gift of Christ keeps us balanced between a world with norms and rules and a world with eternity and surprises, so our sermons can provide the image or story which remind us of our balance and make us fall more deeply in love with God.

By preaching imagination our sermons potentially become instruments of grace and mercy and peace. We fulfill our vows as ministers of Word and Sacrament, and all of us—priest and laity together—draw closer to becoming the people of God worthy to stand before God, receiving his gifts of bread and wine and water and wonder.



Books about Nicolaj Grundtvig Worth Discussing:

*A Grundtvig Anthology: Selections from the Writings of N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872)**

*What Constitutes Authentic Christianity?***

Michael Root
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, South Carolina

Few have made an impact on their nation's religious life as Nicolaj Grundtvig has in Denmark. Anyone who wrote more than a quarter of the hymns in the hymnal used throughout the country is guaranteed an influence. Unlike Victor Borge and dairy products, however, Grundtvig has not proved an export item. If his name is recognized at all by most American theologians, it is as a figure Soren Kierkegaard poked fun at. Grundtvig has had his American admirers among the "happy Danes" of the old AELC. Grundtvig promoters in this country have faced the difficulty of the language barrier. Few scholars read Danish, and until the appearance in 1976 of a volume of *Selected Writings,* Grundtvig was almost entirely untranslated into English. The publication of two new translations calls us to assess his significance.

Grundtvig lived an active and long life. A thorn in the flesh to church leaders, he was shunted aside into hospital chaplaincy in Copenhagen from which he nonetheless exerted a widening influence. In addition to his work in the church, he inspired the Folk School movement. He was a member of the 1848-9 Assembly to produce a Danish constitution, and later a member of both houses of the parliament. He died in 1872, just short of his eighty-ninth birthday, having preached the previous day. His writings are voluminous and wide-ranging, including poetry, hymns, histories of the world, political pieces, educational proposals, studies of Norse mythology, and much else. They are also highly uneven. The prose rambles, and the poetry displays what Niels Jensen, the editor of the *Anthology,* calls a "grandiose lack of conventional taste."

Nevertheless, Grundtvig is worth the trouble it takes to read him because he struggled with fundamental problems and proposed promising solutions one

**Edited by Niels Lyhne Jensen. Cambridge: James Clarke; Denmark: Centrum, 1983. 195 pages. Cloth.*

***By N.F.S. Grundtvig. Translated by Ernest Nielsen. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985. 119 pages. Paper. $6.95.*

does not find elsewhere. Two of his most important issues are reflected in the two new translations.

First, Grundtvig struggled with the relation between creation and redemption, or as he put it, between innate and reborn humanity. He said two things about this relationship. On the one hand, creation forms the background the gospel presupposes. God's redemptive act in Christ presupposes a world to be restored and redeemed. The value of this world does not derive from redemption; it has an innate value as a creation of God, however much that value is stained by sin. Creation and redemption relate with the sort of asymmetry found between earlier and later events in a story. Grundtvig's critical affirmation of the world as created can be found in the historical and cultural writings that make up the bulk of the *Anthology*.

On the other hand, redemption is not reduced to an evolutionary continuation of creation. Creation alone, for all of its innate goodness, cannot redeem. The message of redemption is not creation clarified, a re-presentation of what is the case always and everywhere. "The true, original Christianity is a new thing on earth, something that nobody knows unless he (or she) has heard God's Word about it ..." *(Anthology,* p. 139).

Grundtvig points to something Lutherans intermittently sought in the 19th and 20th centuries: a theology that insists on the message of redemption in Jesus alone but which is not singularly Christocentric, i.e., which does not derive the existence and value of human life from its relation to Christ. The Christocentric scheme Grundtvig rejected is endemic in modern theology, found in both Barth and Schleiermacher. Lutherans have on occasion insisted that such a narrow Christocentrism does not serve the gospel. In such schemes, the gospel seems to triumph today but the law is sure to triumph tomorrow. Unfortunately, these Lutheran voices have had little impact. At a crucial moment, too many in Germany sided with fascism. Grundtvig comes from a different strand in the Lutheran tradition, one that is not entangled in German politics and that structures itself by the creation-redemption dialectic rather than the law-gospel dialectic. American readers have encountered Grundtvigian theology (perhaps without knowing it) in Regin Prenter's dogmatics, *Creation and Redemption.* The most important references to Grundtvig were dropped from the English translation of Prenter, but Grundtvig's insistence on "Human first; then Christian" pervades and structures Prenter's theology.

Second, Grundtvig struggled with the impact of scholarship on the authority of the Bible. He had less difficulty with the skeptical conclusions of the historians (which he rejected for the most part) than with the more fundamental problem of the dependence of faith on a book open to widely variant interpretations and in need of validation and exegesis by scholars. In *What Constitutes Authentic Christianity?,* a series of articles written and published over a six month period in 1826, Grundtvig works his way through the problem, until on the last pages his "discovery" appears. The Word of God is primarily the living word heard in the congregation. But amid the babble of words spoken in the church, how can we pick out the word of authentic Christianity? Grundtvig looked to the actual life of the congregation for an answer. He found that at the crucial moment in which new persons are joined to the life of the church, the church confesses in unequivocal terms its faith. The Creed, the narrative summary of the faith passed down in the living

voice of congregations gathered at font and altar, is a sure indicator of what is authentic Christianity. This living word in the life of the congregation then forms the right context for the reading of the Bible.

Grundtvig did not develop his discovery with complete consistency. He is unclear whether the Creed is a rule of faith because of its place in the life of the church or because of its source in the Apostles. But in the late 1820's he was already feeling his way toward what would now be called a post-critical way of reading the Bible, a reading that moves beyond interpretations that might be given by a secular historian and considers the text as scriptures of a living, present community of which the interpreter is a part. In addition, Grundtvig's turn to a living rule of faith present in the confession of the congregation was a turn to a richer and more ecumenically fruitful understanding of tradition than has been common among Lutherans. Again, a look at a Grundtvig-influenced theologian, such as Prenter, shows the ecumenical implications of Grundtvig's "evangelical catholicism."

The earlier volume of *Selected Writings* focused on Grundtvig the theologian and presented him in perhaps the best possible light. The two new translations present him warts and all. Unlike the earlier volume, both books include entire texts without cuts, and thus Grundtvig's tendency to run on is more evident. Precisely because *What Constitutes Authentic Christianity?* shows Grundtvig working his way to a new answer to the question, it does not offer a unified statement. The reader who picks it up and reads it may be left wondering just what Grundtvig means to say. With the exception of one sermon, all the texts in the *Anthology* come from the mature Grundtvig. The selections seek to give a balanced view of Grundtvig's many roles.

Grundtvig is not a theological giant. He will always be in the shadow of Kierkegaard. Nevertheless, he is a witness to the illumination that can be shed by lesser lights. We can still learn from him, even if he will not be able simply to repeat what we hear him say.

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

Book Reviews



THE PASSION OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK. By Donald Senior, C.P. (The Passion Series 2) Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1984. 173 pages. Paper. $8.95.

Donald Senior, Professor of New Testament at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, interprets the Markan passion to highlight the significance of the unique. He wants his reader to "experience in a new way the power of this narrative." He succeeds admirably.

Senior first outlines the "Preparation for the Passion" in Mark (pp. 15-39). In it he discusses John the Baptist as a forboding parallel to Jesus' rejection and death, the plots against Jesus in Galilee and Jerusalem, and the "Way" the Son of Man must go (Mk 8:22-10:52). The passion predictions are the key to the motif of the way that the community of disciples must also walk. It is a powerful reconstruction of the background to the Passion.

The bulk of the book is devoted to a meticulous interpretation of the Markan Passion Narrative (14:1-15:47). In it Senior shows how a critical reading of the text aids in understanding its meaning and significance. No preacher who reads this text will fail to be enriched. Senior interprets the details of the text, invokes the scholarly literatures, and allows his reader to participate in the debates. But the learning is not paraded; it is used to open the text. I did find one omission surprising. The Jerusalem ministry (11:1-13:37) that immediately precedes the passion narrative gets little attention; yet it sets the immediate stage for the arrest, trial, and death. Fuller use of it would have made a good book better.

In his final section (pp. 139-158) Senior pulls the strands of interpretation together. Jesus' death, the climax of his life for others, is the prelude to his vindication as Son of Man. It is thus the matrix for a theophany in which God paradoxically shows his power in weakness. That christological interpretation has ecclesiological implications. Disciple and community must be as non-triumphant and open as Jesus, while the church that follows its Lord counts the cost of the mission to the world and then joyfully undertakes it.

Senior earlier published a parallel volume on Matthew; volumes on Luke and John are yet to come. The present volume is both profoundly exgetical and immensely practical. Its clarity will be appreciated; its writer's own original contributions may be missed because of the clarity of the argument and the facility of expression. But they are there. One example must suffice. Because the cross is the consequence, in a profoundly true sense, of the ministry, the cross in Mark is "an *active* symbol" of Jesus' commitment to give life to others (p. 140). The phrase "active symbol" is an apt formulation that captures the reader without his/her perhaps recognizing in its power the freshness. One blossom from an entire bouquet. The readers of this journal should mark this book as a must purchase in the next year of Mark in the lectionary cycle. It deserves it.

Edgar Krentz
Christ Seminary-Seminex
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

THE SEXUALITY OF CHRIST IN RENAISSANCE ART AND IN MODERN OBLIVION. By Leo Steinberg. New York: Random House, Pantheon, 1983. 223 pages. Paper. $11.95.

Steinberg's book is a serious investigation into the history and theology of Christian art. Our concern here is piety, not pornography. But piety is compelled to ask uncomfortable questions when they are thrust upon us.

The art of the Renaissance thrusts such questions upon us. The book includes 246 plates of painting and sculpture which depict the Virgin Mother fondling the genitalia of the infant Jesus, of the babe deliberately exposing himself or engaging in public self-play, of the magi staring at the babe's private parts, of the slain Jesus with erect penis, or of the *Corpus Christi* with a limp hand resting on the groin. The sheer number of such works of art require us to pose the question: why? Does this artistic theme represent a perversion of the humanist inclination in Renaissance art? Leo Steinberg, Benjamin Franklin Professor of the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania, suggests theological reasons for the *ostentatio genitalium,* the depiction of Jesus' reproductive organs.

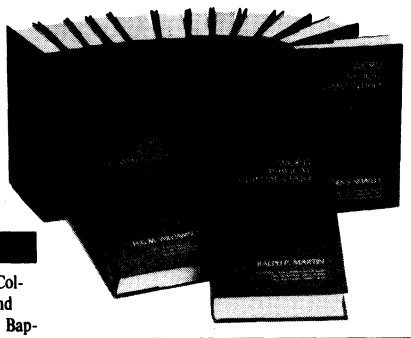
At stake is the doctrine of the incarnation. In a postscript by Jesuit theologian John W. O'Mally, we are told that the mystery of the incarnation was emphasized by theologians during the Renaissance. Artists, following theologians, sought to revere the divine in, with, and under human form. The visual proclamation of the Gospel traced the move from heaven to earth. Steinberg writes, "... the objective was not so much to proclaim the divinity of the babe as to declare the *humanization* of God." (p. 9) Representing the divine in human form presented the humanistic artists of the fourteen century with a problem. Whereas the earlier Byzantine iconography portrayed Christ as king arrayed in robes and symbols of glorious divinity, the humanistic artists of both Italy and north of the Alps wanted to find subtler, less obtrusive means for acknowledging divinity amidst humanity.

Two related theological themes become principal candidates for artistic depiction, mortality and sexuality. To profess that God is embodied in human nature is to confess that the eternal became subject to death and to sexual regeneration. St. Gregory is noted to have said that even though God deprives individual people of immortality the race as a whole continues through sexual activity. The two—death and sex—belong together with our humanness. It follows that they must both apply to the incarnate and salvatory Christ. But how? Answer: by Jesus' overcoming of concupiscence. Whereas we ordinary mortals yield to temptations of the flesh, Jesus does not. Though the slain Jesus if often depicted by artists with an erection—which Steinberg thinks is a visual metaphor for resurrection—we know that Jesus did not yield. He maintained his virginity. "In Christological terms," writes Steinberg, "just as Christ's resurrection overcame the death of a mortal body, so did his chastity triumph over the flesh of sin." (p. 17) The significance of Jesus' exposed genitalia in art, then, is to depict the divine within the human; for though Jesus was stimulated by the flesh he overcame temptation and, by overcoming temptation, was able to grant his spiritual progeny eternal life.

Jesus' victory through chastity reverses the fall of Adam and Eve. Whereas the human pudenda were a mark of shame following the Eden transgression, the pudenda of the New Adam are no longer a mark of shame. Their visual portrayal marks the retrieval of our prelapsarian condition of innocence. This is most vividly portrayed in the famous nude statue of the Risen Christ, Michelangelo's masterpiece which stands in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome. A visitor to Rome today may miss this theological subtelty, however. The prudes of the intervening centuries thought decency and good taste to be more important than redemptive innocence, so they covered Jesus' genitalia with breechcloth. Our modern culture, which views such renaissance depictions as "bad taste," has simply lost the religious message of the fourteenth century and entered what the book's title dubs theological "oblivion." This leads Steinberg, who is not a Christian theologian but an art historian, to say

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that "we may take Renaissance art to be the first and last phase of Christian art that can claim full Christian orthodoxy." (p. 72)

To evaluate Steinberg's contribution, we could follow the path of the art historian and say that he has given us a reasonable solution to a mystery; he has explained the *ostentatio genitalium* of the Renaissance artists. Or, we could follow the feminist path taken by Jill Raidt while responding to Steinberg at a recent meeting of the American Academy of Religion. For Professor Raidt, Steinberg's work only proves what we knew all along, namely, Jesus' bare phallus represents the Christian God who is male and not in need of any female counterpart. Once Jesus' victory over death and concupiscence has been attained, we will no longer need a means for propagating the race, and this in turn means there will be no need for mothers in heaven. Or, we could follow the path of contemporary libertines who complain that Christianity is too austere a religion, a religion which denies human sexuality in the very celebration of Jesus' overcoming of concupiscence.

The significance, I think, lies elsewhere. The reading of this excellent book reminds us that art speaks, that it presents the Gospel in a way that can be heard. Steinberg hears the message, even if as art historian and not as witness for the Christian faith. The message of the fourteenth century is the message of the first century, namely, out of divine love God has descended into the depths of the human condition and through Jesus Christ promises to bring humanity to its consummate fulfillment. The creaturely realm, no matter how it might appear to have been abandoned to concupiscence and death and whatever other mortal ills might assail it, has not been left alone. God has entered it, suffered its alienation, and brought it back to himself. The depiction of Jesus' genitalia is a visual metaphor for the divine presence.

In our own century, if we are tempted toward hedonistic indulgence on the one hand and conscription of the divine for ideological purposes on the other, the same message is of value. We are more likely to take sexual imagery as literal rather than metaphorical, because we tend to interpret liberation of the creation as license for concupiscent behavior. We are tempted to think that Jesus would bless our natural emotions and prurient proclivities within this world rather than call us to the radical discipline of a transcendent world. Again, we tend to project onto heaven our beliefs regarding the way life should be on earth. When we seek political justice, we picture Jesus as a liberator. When we seek democracy, we picture the Trinity as social and, of course, with each member equal. When we seek gender equality in society, we explore images of God which include female-male equality, mutuality, and maybe even sexuality. We may erase the distinction between heaven and earth by redesigning the transcendent realm on the order of the mundane realm. In short, rather than listen for the faint sounds that heaven has come down to earth we shout that we have found a way to elevate our earth up to heaven. We have lost the subtlety of the Renaissance. Perhaps what we could learn most from Steinberg's analysis of the Renaissance is that heaven has come to earth, that God has become human, and that in doing so God has alienated himself from himself so that we might be brought back to himself.

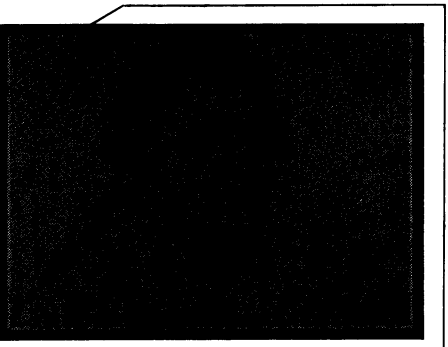
Ted Peters
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Berkeley, California

THEOLOGY AND THE CHURCH. By Juan Luis Segundo. New York: Seabury, 1985. 188 pages. Cloth. $15.95.

I have not read many books of only four chapters, but the number is deceptive when we refer to this one. The main chapters, 2 and 3, are about sixty pages each. But the author thinks it is important not to write more chapters just for the sake of following a form. This book is a response to the papal Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation, which is divided into two distinct parts that demand respective treatment.

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theological ferment in Latin America is viewed by the official voice of the Roman Catholic church, through the instructions given by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The Instruction intends "to draw the attention of pastors and theologians, and all the faithful to the deviations and risks of deviation, damaging to the faith and to Christian living, that are brought about by certain forms of liberation theology, which use, in an insufficiently critial manner, concepts borrowed from various currents of Marxist thought." Segundo demands of the Instruction that it state the particular theology which is the basis for this warning. He does not underestimate the importance of the Instruction, but gives it a comprehensive analysis, in an effort to find: 1) the arguments presented as the basis of the negative judgment of such "certain forms of liberation theology;" and 2) the theological perspective from which liberation theology is viewed and declared inclined toward an earthly reductionism.

In his analysis, Segundo uncovers what at the outset is not so clear in the text of the Instruction. The theology used as the basis for such judgment by the Sacred Congregation is uncritically anti-Marx, anti-Enlightenment; pro-neutrality in regards to the social and moral crises of Latin America, spiritualistic and individualized, to the point of transcendentalizing the nature of sin out of human history.

If the reader wants a realistic picture of the nature and practice of Christian reflection and action in Latin America today, as well as the scope and limits to the use of Marxist thought expressed by most writers of theology within the context of liberation struggles, this is an excellent, though difficult, book to read. The readers should carefully read the Instruction of the Sacred Congregation, presented as the only Appendix, first.

Robert Navarro
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

BUDDHISM MADE PLAIN. By Antony Fernando with Leonard Swidler. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985. 138 pages. Paper. $9.95.

This book is a valuable tool for the next phase of ecumenism with which this reviewer is deeply concerned. There are helps for pronouncing the names of the Pali Texts. Len Swidler helps us understand the timeliness of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and that the aim is mutual transformation of our own understanding of self and tradition, which is accomplished by a probing of the vital core out of which each tradition lives before its exteriorization and ontologization. Swidler's personal contribution was to recast the book so it would include the Jew as the third partner in the dialogue.

Fernando's work begins by asserting that Yeshua and Gautama had the same aim: "a healing of the injured interior of human beings" (p. 5). The book has two parts: human liberation according to Gautama; and Human Liberation: the inner affinity among the views of Gautama, Yeshua, and Judaism. The first part reviews Buddha's four noble truths for us from a Theravadin perspective (most work in Buddhism in the United States has been from a Zen and Mahayana perspective; Theravada is the cultic-ritual Buddhism of, e.g. Kampuchea and Vietnam. The distinctions between these forms are analogous to the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism.) In the second half of the book, Gautama's antitheism is compared with the preaching of prophets in Israel and Yeshua on experience *above* concept, and Fernando pushes us to analyze "God" in terms of the experience we summarize in this term, now wholly conceptual in the West. This book is a very good introduction indeed. I commend it especially for campus ministry.

Jay C. Rochelle
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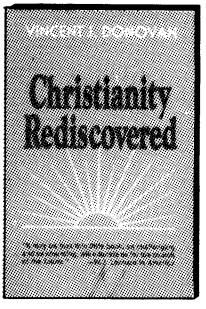
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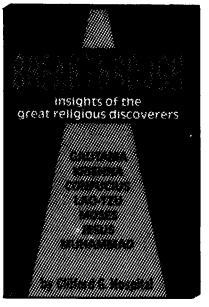
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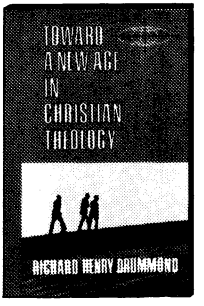
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THE THOUGHT OF PAUL TILLICH. Edited by James Luther Adams, Wilhelm Pauck, and Roger Lincoln Shinn. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. xi and 404 pages. Cloth. $24.95.

John E. Smith, in his article, "The Impact of Tillich's Interpretation," in *The Thought of Paul Tillich,* writes that "... you can think with him or against him, but not without him." (p. 258) As if to accentuate this truth, David Tracy points out in his article on "Tillich and Contemporary Theology," that Tillich engendered no particular "school" bearing his stamp. (p. 260) Rather, some twenty years after his death, the legacy of Paul Tillich pervades all aspects of theological enquiry so that many contemporary theologians, consciously as well as unconsciously at times, "live and breathe and have their being" according to Tillichian categories. Furthermore, as this present volume amply demonstrates with selections by renowned scholars relating Tillich's thought to art, depth psychology, literature, Jewish and Catholic thought, the new religious movements, et al., Tillich's influence, perhaps uniquely among twentieth century theologians, was felt among disciplines that reached far beyond the bounds of Christian theology proper.

One should not approach this collection of eighteen essays purely as an appraisal of Tillich's thought. For that, Kegley's recently updated *The Theology of Paul Tillich* functions quite well. Rather, *The Thought of Paul Tillich,* while dealing with such major themes as correlation, New Being, and Ultimate Concern, does so with mind to relate them to current concerns that often elicit different answers than the ones Tillich himself might have envisaged to the concrete questions of his own time.

While all the essays are insightful, the one written by Langdon Gilkey on "The New Being and Christology" struck me as especially helpful for the Christian seeking to better understand the place of Jesus as the Christ vis-a-vis the other world religions. Gilkey's amplification on Tillich's motif of the concrete medium of revelation sacrificing itself for the sake of that which it reveals offers some real possibilities for current ecumenical dialogues.

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A Call for a Community of Theologians

John H. Tietjen
President, Christ Seminary-Seminex

Among twelve other major responsibilities the Division for Ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been assigned the following tall order:

> This division, through a committee comprised of representatives of the division, seminary faculty including Lutheran faculties teaching at non-Lutheran seminaries and schools of theology, members of this church who teach on college religion faculties, and bishops, shall provide for a regular and representative convocation of theologians involved in the teaching ministry of this church. This committee shall assist in planning of meetings, determining membership, and setting agenda.

What if the "regular and representative convocation of theologians" did more than play the game of theological jousting?

What if the committee responsible for the convocation identified the theological issues confronting Lutherans in America and established an agenda and a program for dealing with those issues?

What if the theologians of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America decided to be a community to lead the church in theological study, discussion, and understanding?

There is no dearth of issues confronting us. The CNLC compromise on the issue of ministry requires a six year church-wide "study of the nature of ministry, leading to decisions regarding appropriate forms of ministry that will enable the church to fulfill its mission." There is no way to deal with the nature of ministry without facing up to the nature of the church. What was alleged to be a major theological difference over an emphasis on congregation versus a stress on the church's corporate expressions disappeared in the final CNLC discussions. But the issue is there and needs attention.

Ecumenicity is a related issue. The issue is not *whether* to be ecumenical—on that we have consensus—but *how*. We need guidance to help us out of the trap that has been laid for us requiring us to tilt in either a Catholic or a Protestant direction. As we deal with the issue of ecumenicity we come face to face with the issue of Lutheran identity.

The subject of the present issue of *Currents,* inclusive language, is part of the larger issue of what it means to be an inclusive church. Though there may be sociological overtones, the inclusiveness issue is every bit as theological as the problem of the apostolic church over whether a Gentile first had to become a Jew in order to be a Christian.

Some would insist that the above issues are too internal to the church and therefore not the real theological issues confronting us. As we look outward some of the issues are liberation of the

oppressed, nuclear war, bioethics, abortion.

We have significant resources to deal with the agenda. There are almost 300 faculty at our seminaries and an untold number of Lutherans on other seminary faculties and teaching religion and theology at colleges and universities. There will be 66 bishops and theologically trained staff serving the church-wide organization and the synods. And we must not forget the more than 12,000 pastors and the theologians among the laity.

Do we have the will to marshall the resources to deal with the theological issues facing us so that the church can be edified for its mission? Shouldn't seminaries and their faculties lead the way?

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