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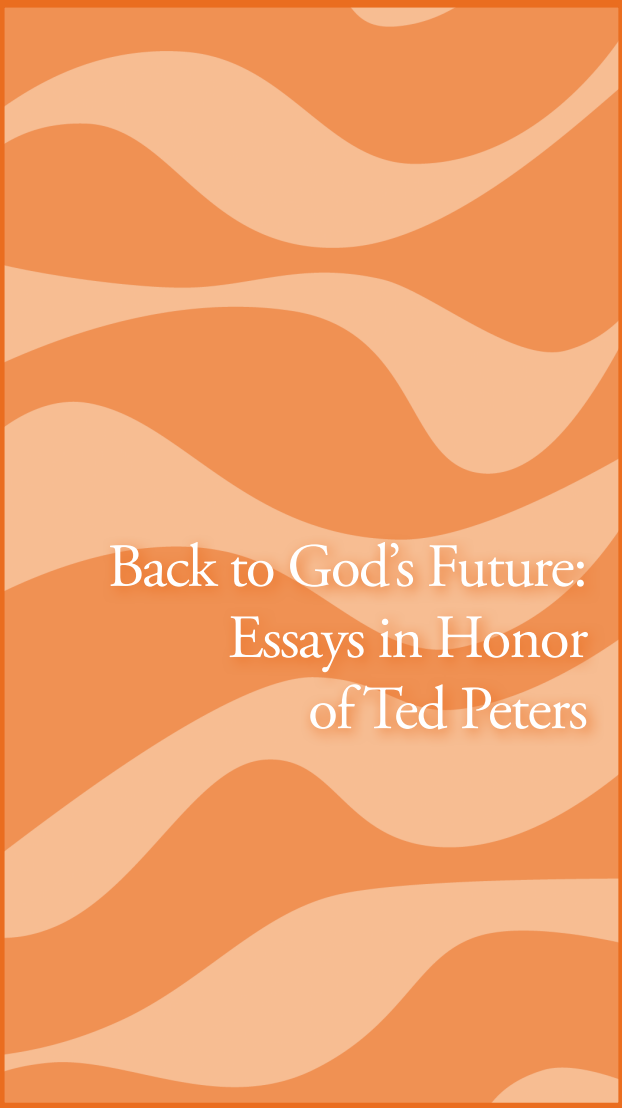

Back to God's Future: Essays in Honor of Ted Peters

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Preaching Helps

Back to God's Future: Essays in Honor of Ted Peters

It is an honor to present this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* as a tribute to the theology and scholarship of our colleague, Ted Peters, who retired this spring from full-time faculty service as Professor of Systematic Theology at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union. He served in this capacity for more than three decades, and hence has influenced a generation of pastors, professors, and parishioners to realize that God's work in the world can be most fruitfully understood as a creative interaction between theology and science—philosophically, methodologically, and pastorally. In the essays that follow, we invite you to consider the array of implications for life and ministry that flow from Ted's own insight that "all things gain their being and their meaning, not from their moment of origin, but from their place in the new creation."[1]

Michael Aune's essay considers Peters' correlational theology in contrast to what has been called a theology of retrieval or a theology of interruption. Such a contrast, Aune argues, contributes to a more robust and, hence, more definite christological and particular content for our talk of grace. It also assists us in remaining faithful both to the irreducible particularity of the incarnation of the grace of God—*and* to our own Lutheran theological tradition.

David Balch and Adam Pryor demonstrate how the historical Jesus based his distinctive command to love enemies on a theology of creation, different therefore from either Aristotle or Ambrose. They conclude that Peters helps us understand that God's eschatological redemption so reconfigures the past that inter-ethnic dialogue in the present mutually confers dignity on the "other," proleptically anticipating hope for our future final dignity.

Carol Jacobson shows how Peters' retroactive ontology as well as his proleptic theological method provide a much needed corrective to open theism's "fixed pie" conception of freedom as well as its reliance on an upward understanding of causation. Peters' insistence upon the resurrected Jesus as the embodied anticipation of the whole creation's future, she argues, effectively grounds *both* genuine human freedom *and* an assured future for the cosmos where God will be all in all.

Moses Penumaka's essay asks what it means for those presently suffering to assert that, since Jesus' Easter resurrection, we have reason to believe the future will be different from the past, that eschatologically the lion will lie down with

1. Ted Peters, *Anticipating Omega: Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 28.

the lamb. Discussions of precisely how this will happen, he argues, are destined to remain merely hypothetical until the voices from the margins, the voices of the victims, the women, the dalits, the aboriginals, the homeless, 'the victims of the unfitness' are heard.

David Ratke takes up themes of dialogue and hospitality, which he finds both at the center of the Christian vision and integral to Peters' approach to thinking theologically in view of postmodern realities like holism and pluralism. Genuine hospitality and authentic dialogue, Ratke observes, have been an integral element of Scripture from beginning to end. Thus, the church is called to be inclusive and relational because God is inclusive and relational.

Robert Russell identifies Peters' concept of "retroactive ontology" as the most innovative proposal, among many, for intellectual interaction between theology and science. He maintains that we owe Peters a debt of gratitude for the important distinction he makes between the "immediate future" and God's "ultimate future" for the world. Such a distinction points to new areas in research physics that one might explore when starting from Peters' view.

Jane Strohl observes that among the many paradoxes of Luther's theology is his understanding of eschatology. On the one hand, he offers a fiercely apocalyptic vision, and at the same time, Luther concerns himself with commonplace matters of human community—marriage and child rearing, appropriate education for both girls and boys, caring for the poor, and the like—all of which assume the birth of future generations for whom provisions must be made.

A multidisciplinary academic and a faithful representative of the Lutheran tradition, Ted Peters offers an important lens through which to view God's future, the world's future, and our own future as well. With love and gratitude for his friendship, and in deep appreciation of his collegiality, his scholarship, and his countless other ministries for the gospel's sake, we and the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary faculty dedicate this issue to him.

Carol R. Jacobson and **Adam Pryor**
Co-editors of the August 2012 issue

What's Needed in Theology? World-view Construction, Retrieval, or…?

Michael B. Aune

Professor of Liturgical and Historical Studies, Dean of the Chapel, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Graduate Theological Union

Introduction

When describing the current context in which theology is done, the term "postmodern" or a variant thereof is usually employed. Such a term, moreover, has enjoyed nearly canonical status for almost two-and-a-half decades. Seminarians invoke it with all the solemnity of liturgical prayer (if they actually believe such a thing exists anymore). Colleagues employ the term to show other colleagues that they are hip to what is going on in academic circles and to show our friends across the street (as we often say in Berkeley to refer to the godless world of the university) that we can play *wissenschaftliche* hardball with the best of them.

Given this current scene, what is a Christian theologian to do? My colleague and friend Ted Peters—to whom this essay is dedicated—has responded to this question by articulating a systematic theology rooted in the traditional biblical symbols and yet in conversation with this postmodern time. Reviewers have hailed his *God—the World's Future* as an exemplary model of theological construction and depth that critically engages our current context because it shows how Christian faith is relevant and can contribute to humanity's, if not the entire universe's future. This illustrates very well what one commentator on the newer projects in systematic theology calls the complementarity or "partnership of retrieval and recontextualization."[1]

More recently, Peters has engaged what can only be called a belligerent atheism that angrily denies the existence of God in whom we place our faith. In a brief essay written for his Danish colleague Peter Widmann's *Festschrift* titled, "The Systematic Theologian at Work in an Atheistic Context," he employs the major insights and contents of *God—the World's Future* to provide what I would call a "Cliff's notes" version of this larger work to address this atheistic challenge with its "trash talk" of theology as "a non-subject…vacuous…devoid of coherence and content."[2] Such a challenge confronts us with the question once again of the nature of the theological task. Peters' answer:

> today's theologian is an intellectual carpenter whose business is worldview

1. Gabriel Fackre, "The Surge in Systematics: A Commentary on Current Works," *The Journal of Religion* (1993): 234.

2. Richard Dawkins, "From the Other Side: Richard Dawkins Responds," *Science and Theology News* 6:2 (October 2005): 38; cited in Ted Peters, "The Systematic Theologian at Work in an Atheistic Context," *Gudstankens aktualitet: Bidrag om teologiens opgave og indhold og protestantismens indre spaendinger: Festskrift til Peter Widmann*, Red. Else Marie Wiberg Pederson, Bo Kristian Holm og Anders-Christian Jacobsen (København: Forlaget ANIS, 2010): 55–75. Here: 55. Subsequent quotations from this essay will simply give the page number in parenthesis.

> construction—that is, the theologian constructs a speculative picture of the whole of reality, within which everything is oriented toward the God of grace. Our day-to-day experience along with our secular knowledge of the magnificent world in which we live can be properly understood only in relationship to the God who created and redeems all things. And, furthermore, we Christians understand this God to be gracious (55).

In what follows, I want to use Peters' essay to illustrate an understanding of a particular theological method—a *correlational* one (though he doesn't quite call it that, preferring instead the term *hermeneutical,* but the point or the dynamic is the same). It is to connect or *correlate* something in the past, whether message, faith, *kerygma,* the inherited tradition that confessed the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ[3], to its current setting by constructing a view of the world that is an understandable and believable portrayal of reality—of the world that is loved by a gracious God. Hence, my task in Part I, is to summarize this essay so that in Part II I can contrast to and a supplement to this approach to theology as worldview construction with one that is known as a "theology of retrieval" or a "theology of particularity."[4]

Such theologies

> seek to give close attention to significant theologians of the past—particularly before modernity—in order to call into question and reframe the contemporary theological discussion. **The point is not to repristinate these past theologies, but to read past theologians in a way which allows for them to call us into question.**[5]

Moreover, these theologies give more singular attention to what the Germans call the *inhaltliche Bestimmtheit*[6]—"a precise and definite content" of this grace. This is theology's *Sollgehalt*—not "what you gotta believe" but what needs to be there—"the required content" of the Christian message that makes our theological talk identifiably

3. Orthodox theologian John Behr gives us a helpful reminder about the Incarnation. He writes in his book *The Mystery of Christ* about seeing "a greater depth of meaning" in this term. It is "only in light of the Passion that we can even speak of "Incarnation" so that the sense of this term is pregnant with a greater fertility…. our encounter is with the eschatological Lord, the Coming One, that is not just the second person of the Trinity born of the Virgin Mary but rather than an *interpretation* made only in light of the Passion. In short, Incarnation refers to the entire saving event which, for Behr, is the Passion of Christ.

4. Others might speak of a theology of "interruption" that seeks a more critical engagement with modernity and postmodernity. E.g., see Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York & London: Continuum, 2007). Like a theology of "retrieval," it is a *mode* of theological work that treats "pre-modern Christian theology as a resource rather than a problem" for recontextualization of the Christian message. John Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology,* eds. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, Iain Torrance (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 585.

5. Interview with J. Todd Billings discussing his new book, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Baker Academic, 2011). http://www.credomag.com/2012/01/17/interview-with-todd-billings-on-union-with-christ/. My emphases. Accessed March 25, 2012. See also Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," 583–599.

6. See Matthias Wolfes, *Protestantische Theologie und moderne Welt: Studien zur Geschichte der liberalen Theologie nach 1918* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 573ff. Also, my "Discarding the Barthian Spectacle: Conclusion—Might We Be Liberals After All?" *Dialog* 46/2(Summer 2007): 153–165.

Christian.[7] Such *Sollgehalt,* finally, takes its bearings from the ground of Christian belief itself, "expressed on the one hand by John 1:14 ("And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us") and on the other hand by the resurrection narratives…."[8]

I. Christian theology as worldview construction

Let me proceed, first, with the heart of Peters' essay—worldview construction or "Worldview Construction as Indirect Apologetics" (64ff.). As noted earlier, he presents his theological response to atheism's challenge and its denial "of the God in whom Christians believe." Such a response takes the form of "indirect apologetics" where the task is to draw a picture of reality "which includes the natural world studied by the scientist along with that of the creator's creator and redeemer." This portrayal, argues Peters, "must be more comprehensive if it is to depict a world loved by a gracious God (64). Moreover,

> what this means is that the response of the systematic theologian to the atheist denial of God is indirect rather than direct. The relative adequacy of the theologian's argument will be determined by its ability to illuminate a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of reality (64).

Peters acknowledges here his indebtedness to Pannenberg's description of the theological task who states that the presentation of a systematic account of Christian doctrine—of God, creation, human history as a history of salvation—must possess an inner consistency but also a consonance with the biblical witness and a coherence with "all matters that have to be taken into account."[9] We are still in the realm of speculation and hypothesis-construction, however, because theological work remains under the eschatological proviso. It is admitting this provisionality of our theological statements, even though they are "strongly assertive… is a condition of being taken seriously with their truth claims" (65).[10]

What now remains is the task of identifying the principal cultural context to which the theologian presents h/er picture of reality. This modern or postmodern understanding of reality, for Peters, involves two hermeneutical questions. The first, which is well known to us at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS), is:

> …how can the Christian faith, first experienced and symbolically articulated in an ancient culture now long out-of-date, speak meaningfully to human existence today as we experience it amid a worldview dominated by natural science, secular self-understanding, and the worldwide cry for freedom?" (66)

7. Edward H. Schroeder, "The Relationship Between Dogmatics and Ethics in the Thought of Elert, Barth, and Troeltsch," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 36/11(December 1965): 744. In one of his "Thursday Theology" postings—June 8, 2006—on the topic of "The Trinitarian Dogma," Schroeder noted—"A 'dogma' (according to what the early church meant by the term) is NOT what you've 'gotta' believe in order to be a Christian, but what 'has to be' at the center of Christian preaching in order to make that proclamation 'Gospel.'" Werner Elert's simple "*fester Satz*" was "*Dogma ist das Sollgehalt des Kerygmas*." "*Fester Satz,"* literally "a solid sentence" that Elert would dictate to his Erlangen students. The concern here is what can give us the best language for theological articulation and proclamation.

8. Anthony J. Godzieba, "Incarnation, Theory, and Catholic Bodies: What Should Post-Postmodern Catholic Theology Look Like?" *Louvain Studies* 28(2003), 225.

9. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Historicity of Nature: Essays on Science and Theology,* ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen (West Conshohocken Pa.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 7.

10. Citing Ibid., 8.

The second hermeneutical question for Peters is the "postmodern addendum":

> …how can the Christian faith be made intelligible amid an emerging postmodern consciousness that, although driven by a thirst for both individual and cosmic wholeness, still affirms and extends such modern themes as evolutionary progress, future consciousness, and individual freedom? (66)

Postmodernism, according to Peters, can either be "holistic" or "pluralistic." The former seeks to overcome the subject-object split and return to the whole. The "pluralists" —much too generous a name in my book— are characterized by deconstructionism, fragmentation, repudiation of "hegemonic meta-narratives," the cultural politics of difference, etc. Now, what is the theologian to do? S/he can go for the "modern" version of the world and an accompanying affirmation of a "single planetary reality united by reason, science, and technology" (67). A theologian who wishes to be "postmodern" will attend to the world's pluralism as a reality as well as an ideology—and perhaps its romanticism about "globalization."

Peters, however, is not particularly interested in embracing this pluralistic worldview or "supra-worldview" (68). He still wants to address the aggressive atheistic worldview that purportedly rests on scientific authority and has no room whatsoever for any religious or theological claim. "Theology," in the words of Sam Harris, "is now little more than a branch of human ignorance. Indeed, it is ignorance with wings."[11]

In the midst of this belligerent talk of the denial of God's existence, Peters asks whether such an avowal of this so-called "God-Hypothesis" that rolls all of the deities into one is at all adequate. That is, does God provide a rational and scientific explanation of the natural world as the atheists aver? No. Rather, to affirm God's existence "expands our ability to explain the reality in which we live…." But such an affirmation is not the "product of scientific explanation" (72). Moreover, Peters argues, there is no need to invoke God in a specific scientific explanation of the natural world. In the end, we do need an explanatory framework that provides us with a way of dealing with "ultimate reality in its most comprehensive scope conceivable" (73). This ultimate reality is the God of Israel, according to Peters (73). Scientists cannot account for this. It cannot answer the questions of why the world exists at all or why the human mind is attuned to nature's laws.

But Christian theology can incorporate into its purview that world studied by natural science in order to provide that more comprehensive and more illuminating portrayal of reality in order to underscore the gracious God's creative and redemptive action. For Peters, this is much more expansive than the view of the world limited by material explanations (73). This understanding of the natural world is to be incorporated into the work of the systematician because s/he is "seek[ing] a theology that allows for the full presence of God in, with, and for the world created by him, without reducing God to the world or to a consequence of the world."[12]

In the end, if the theologian is both to earn an honest living and continue to engage in the task of worldview construction, there will need to continue to be a respectful and mutual dialogue with scientists and a readiness to expand their respective horizons of understanding. It comes down to this—

11. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 14.

12. Philip Clayton, *God and Contemporary Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 236; cited in Peters, 73.

> …the theologian should seek dialogue with laboratory scientists who pursue authentic scientific research, not atheists such as Dawkins who substitute materialist ideology for actual science. It is crucial for today's theologian to distinguish sharply between authentic scientific research and the claims of materialist ideology. The former provides contextual meaning, while the latter requires theological engagement (74).

Moreover, the systematic theologian needs to be hermeneutically astute—engaged in the interpretation of scripture *and* interpreting the reigning understanding of reality in the present. What makes this work distinctive is that h/er formulations about the world—"a world created by the God of grace and slated for ultimate transformation into a promised new creation" (74)—are to be as comprehensive in scope as possible:

> *describing* reality at the highest level of generalization concomitant with its ultimate meaning—and consistent with one another so as to construct a single coherent worldview…[*and*] *contextual[ing]* historic faith commitments in light of the understandings which influence, if not dominate, the contemporary context…. (74–75)

We see, then, the complementarities of "retrieval" and "contextualization" in offering "a comprehensive and integrated rendering of the classical doctrines of Christian faith responsive to historical context,"[13] but in "self-conscious opposition" to a *Zeitgeist* shaped by atheism. Hence, the Christian theologian is to construct "an intelligent and credible picture of reality that includes God's Trinitarian interaction with the world" (75). Such a portrayal is to meet the criteria of both *explanatory adequacy* that can give the community of faith its self-understanding *and* a point of departure for the apologetic task. In so proceeding, the theologian needs to know the difference between research science and atheistic materialism. Natural science, in providing material for the constructive work of theology, can only enhance, if not strengthen, our appreciation of the work of God the creator who has made that world continuing to be discovered by science.

But Christian theology can incorporate into its purview that world studied by natural science in order to provide that more comprehensive and more illuminating portrayal of reality in order to underscore the gracious God's creative and redemptive action.

13. Fackre, "Surge in Systematics," 224.

II. Now what? Questions of theology's method and content

Most of the systematic theologians I know and read are concerned with *context* and that certainly exemplifies Ted Peters' work. *Context* is **the** watchword of today's theology and plays the decisive role as the theologian seeks to interpret Jesus' message in its original context *and* to formulate it anew in a particular cultural situation. Making the connection between these two is the so-called *method of correlation* or some version of it and many, if not most theologians operate with some version of it. We all learned from Paul Tillich, for example, that theology arises in the response of revelation to the questions of the situation and then "systematic theology… makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions."[14] Our late PLTS president, Timothy Lull, was always fond of saying that "the world sets the theological agenda." Peters, too, follows this method and the existential question emerging from the postmodern situation he is endeavoring to address is that of world and worldview—can they be of God and hence, oriented to the God of grace, thus offering a counter-argument to the challenge posed by atheists?

The manner in which Peters addressed this question was to affirm that God is gracious and that a God of grace has created the world. This is the so-called "core" of Christian faith that can now be correlated with our modern/postmodern context. The assumption here is that there is some sort of continuity between the Christian message and the present context—an "*intrinsic link* between the significance of revelation, faith, church, and tradition, and the context in which they are given form." [15]

For example, "the modern strivings for rationality, human freedom and social liberation are regarded as privileged *loci theologici* from which the recontextualization of the Christian faith in this God who is involved salvifically with human beings and their histories could take place."[16] Where human beings struggled for human dignity, God could not possibly be absent. "Secular culture was no longer considered to be alienated from Christianity, but rather the place where God was actively present in the struggle for an authentic subjectivity and social justice."[17]

Here has been a starting-point for so-called "modern theologies." These strivings and principles thus are presumably continuous with modernity because there is the striving for rationality and emancipation, *and Christian faith.* What the theologian does, then, is *to critically (cor)relate* the saving message of Christian faith with this modern context. In seeking this consensus between culture and faith, a correlation theologian tends to assume that a Christian is "as modern as the average modern human being" and offers "even a surplus where modernity reached its limits (e.g., eschatologically correcting mere inner-worldly Utopian expectations)."[18]

This modern project of practice and theology is, hence, one in which nearly all Christians could participate, along with others of good will, and for good theological

14. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* Vol. I (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 62.

15. Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval*, 7.

16. My discussion here follows Boeve, 32ff and also Boeve, "Beyond the Modern-Anti-Modern Dilemma: *Gaudium et Spes* and Theological Method in a Postmodern Context," *Horizons* 34/2(2007): 295ff.

17. Boeve *Horizons*: 295.

18. Ibid. These are Boeve's emphases.

reasons because "the whole of created reality in which we live comes to us as grace in the ordinary things of everyday, in the face of our fellow human beings and in the great aspirations of present-day humanity."[19] Here is that continuity between Christian faith and context, insofar as secular reason reaches truth, Christian faith cannot but comply with it.

In this case, faith adds to, or qualifies, what human beings know by secular reason alone; or faith makes visible and motivates what is already at work at the heart of the modern project—plausibility and rationality. And it can be communicated in a universally acknowledgeable language, because we have presumably learned the art of dialogue between faith and modernity. But yet all is not well in the land of correlationist theologies. As Neil Ormerod observed over fifteen years ago, with such an impressive pedigree of the method of correlation, what problems could there ever possibly be?[20] Shouldn't it be obvious that this is *the* method—the preeminent theological method—that we should be employing? For how can God not be present in that modern project where we all participate together—with others of good will—for those great causes of rationality and emancipation? There is somehow a universal truth simply residing deeply within us, ready to be activated.

Really? But that's the problem. Is it true that there exists "a potential consensus between modern culture and Christianity when related to each other in a mutually critical manner?"[21] Is it true that "there should be no discrepancy between being a sincere modern human being and being an authentic Christian"?[22] But, why should we even think that we are to submit ourselves as theologians to some sort of ambivalent episode in human history for which we should be articulating the faith? Why should modernity or post modernity or whatever we call this present time somehow be "the hidden *norma normans non normata* that decides what can and cannot be said and done in contemporary theology?"[23]

Is it not one of the theologian's tasks to critique modernity—the context in which s/he finds h/erself? Yes, it is. That critique can proceed in one of several ways. It can tell the current context to go to hell because it is unredeemable anyway, and then present a totally anti-modern or anti-postmodern theology that challenges the so-called modern project at every turn, exposing its intellectual and moral bankruptcy.[24] Much more charitable, however, is an approach such as exemplified by John Behr in his book *The Mystery of Christ.*[25]

19. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Eindresulaat,* in *Het Tweede Vaticaans Concile,* Vol. 2 (Tielt/Den Haag: Lannoo, 1986), 69; cited in Erik Borgman, *Edward Schillebeeckx: A Theologian in His History, Volume I: A Catholic Theology of Culture (1914–1965),* tr. John Bowden (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 358.

20. "Quarrels with the Method of Correlation," *Theological Studies* 57(1996): 710.

21. Boeve, *God Interrupts History,* 34.

22. Ibid. My italics because, in my judgment, this expresses so well a general ethos here in the Graduate Theological Union.

23. Erik Borgman, "Retrieving God's Contemporary Presence: The Future of Edward Schillebeeckx's Theology of Cultures," *Edward Schillebeeckx and Contemporary Theology,* eds. Frederiek Depoortere, Lieven Boeve, & Stephan Van Erp (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 235. My ensuing discussion here depends on Borgman, 235ff.

24. Theologians need to read a work like Bruno Latour's, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) in order to rethink the definition and constitution of modernity itself. His work might also inspire us and instill in us the hope that postmodernism is not the only possibility at present.

25. *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death.*

He appropriates a "pre-modern perspective in a cautious post-modern fashion…."[26] What that means is that one pursues theology that does not simply speak about God in the abstract, nor satisfy itself with a historical report about events in the past, but which contemplates the transforming power of God through the Cross."[27] It is here in this event, argues Behr that we begin to find the theological method of the early church—a method that reaches backward and forward from the Passion for entering into the mystery of Christ. "The Christ of Christian faith," writes Behr, "revealed concretely in and through the apostolic proclamation of the crucified and risen Lord in accordance with the Scripture, is an eschatological figure, the Coming One."[28] More can be said about this way of doing theology but for now let it be this—"The reappropriation of a pre-modern perspective in a cautious post-modern fashion…might point a way out of the quandary in which theology has found itself in recent centuries, and forward to a space in which we can appreciate the integrity and unity of the discipline of theology and see anew its vision"—to place us once again in a position to recognize the eschatological Lord. So, here, a premodern theology—instead of being a problem—is a resource for our contemporary theological responsibility.

Or, the current context can be *interrupted*, intruded upon. Grace radically enters, intrudes into an existing context. Grace can also halt an existing understanding—for the sake of opening them up anew toward the reality of God in Jesus Christ. But for this *interruption* to actually work, in my estimation, requires a retrieval of aspects of the Christian tradition that tend to be ignored or forgotten as theology became "modern" and now "postmodern."

26. Ibid., 19.

27. Ibid., 43.

28. Ibid., 17.

However, these theologies of retrieval are *not* some direct form of theological conservatism, repristination, or even a neo-orthodoxy.[29] Rather, they seek to retrieve what is forgotten as a pre-condition to a fuller, more *theological* understanding of modernity or however we call our present time. This is no simple return from the fleshpots of the present to what might be considered a more authentic teaching from the past. Some may think that but ultimately, theologians of retrieval are attempting to respond adequately to our situation—to seek what would be a true "orthodoxy" in the sense of here and now—where the subject matter of Christian theology is Christ—the one of whom Scripture has spoken and still speaks and is recognized in the breaking of the bread. Failure to appreciate this leaves us in a kind of modern theology "that can only be described as an odd mixture of metaphysics and mythology."

But to speak of *orthodoxy* does not at all imply that there is some unchanging substance. Rather, it has to be "re-invented" or, in the words of Lieven Boeve, "recontextualized"[30] because modern cor-

29. Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," 584ff.

30. *God Interrupts History,* 37. In another essay, Boeve notes, "The concept of recontextualization…functions descriptively and normatively. As a *descriptive* category, it assists in the analysis of the ways in which tradition has been challenged by contextual change and novelty, to its uncritical embracing and adaptation." The *normative* function of this concept is to take the contextual challenges to Christian faith seriously "in order to come to a contemporary theological discourse which at the same time can claim theological validity and contextual plausibility." Cited in "Retrieving Augustine Today: Between Neo-Augustinianist Essentialism and Radical Hermeneutics," *Augustine and Postmodern Thought: A New Alliance Against Modernity?* eds. L. Boeve, M. Lamberigts, M. Wisse (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2009), 1.

relation theology suffers from *too little* recontextualization, not *too much.* Or, it has to be "retrieved" and, hence, seen as "a response to a self-bestowing divine reality which precedes and overcomes the limited reach of rational intention."[31] That is, there has not been enough questioning or challenging of the presupposition of continuity of Christian faith with the present. Nor have theologians realized their own hidden complicity with modernity, employing with particular aplomb, it seems, the epistemological and cultural values of the situation in which we find ourselves. As a result, such theology may seem too facile, too consensus-oriented, and too continuous with our liberal or conservative notions of truth and meaning.

We have forgotten that there is a *particularity* of Christian faith and it is difficult to determine what that is if we are basing our work on human conceptual patterns derived from results of the social sciences or philosophy. We need to be reminded—as theologians of retrieval and of Christian particularity are wont to do—"There is no automatic link between the generally human and Christian particularity."[32]

Now, I think such a theology of retrieval or of particularity can shed further light on Peters' essay on "theology as worldview construction," as I stated in the introduction to this essay, by providing a more robust *inhaltliche Bestimmtheit*—"a precise and definite content" to his talk of a God of grace.[33] Though there he emphasizes "the God of grace" or a "gracious God" occurring about eight times during the course of his essay, I cannot help but notice that there is not much of a christological actualization of that grace.[34] There is a brief mention of a "gracious Trinitarian interaction with the world" but that is about all. The emphasis on "grace" and "gracious" not only here in the Peters essay but also in much "Lutheran-speak" these days feels flat, abstract, formulaic—without much *inhaltliche Bestimmtheit* or *Sollgehalt.*

I realize very well that there are contemporary Lutheran systematic theologians who are not interested in whether their theology is somehow "Lutheran." Mark Mattes has observed in his review of *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology,* for example, that many of the essayists in that volume "contend that Lutheran theology has a future, but only to the degree that it is not uniquely Lutheran."[35] Or, to be offering a Lutheran theology is to be offering no theology at all because theologians are to be serving the whole church. It is simply preaching to the choir as David Ratke has noted in his essay "Lutheran Systematic Theology: Where is it going?"[36]

But if we take the agenda of a theology of retrieval seriously then it cannot be some sort of "theology-in-general," broadly applicable to or interpretive of all Christian traditions. Liturgical theologians, for example, are just beginning to learn that there are *particular* forms, texts, styles of expression, sounds, words, beliefs—and not

31. Webster, "Theologies of Retrieval," 584.

32. Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 38.

33. See footnote 6.

34. I do realize that Peters devotes over 150 pages in *God—The World's Future* to Christology so I am quite curious why there is this christological lack in this essay on theology as worldview construction.

35. Review of Niels Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters and Peter Widmann, eds, *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62/1(2009): 97. Mattes also has published a much lengthier review in the *Lutheran Quarterly* 19/4(Winter 2005): 439–457.

36. *Dialog* 40/3(Fall 2001): 217.

just one size fits all.[37] Hence, for theologians to say—*Lutheran* theologians, mind you—to say that offering a Lutheran theology is to be offering no theology at all is simplistic, if not totally naïve—comparable to the assertion I hear in my field that there is no such thing as "Lutheran liturgy." This may be a subtle ecumenical point, as it is sometimes said, but the larger reality, if you will, is a pastoral—if not anthropological one. The reality is one of *identity*—of *particularity.*

And that brings us to the question of *Christology*—Christology comprises an entire section in his *God-the World's Future* of two significant parts—"the Person and Work of Jesus Christ" and "the Work and Person of Jesus Christ." In this discussion, Peters notes his problems with "Chalcedonian incarnationalism.[38] But to say that such a Christology makes it difficult to actually relate God to the world is not really true. It is exactly the opposite.[39] Moreover, we don't have access to "the originary experience of Jesus" anyway. But maybe we can get Peters off the hook with his notion of "prolepsis" for helping us make sense of "God with us."[40]

A more adequate Christology will be substantially aided by a theology of retrieval or by the reappropriation of that "pre-modern" perspective now curiously "post-modern"—to move our understandings beyond the abstract and formulaic that I mentioned earlier. If the ground of our faith is to be found in Christology—John 1:14 ("And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us")—and the narratives of the resurrection—if our fundamental commitment is to the truth of God's incarnation in Christ—then we do need some assistance in making this revelatory particularity public and rationally accessible—because it still is the case, I would hope, that the real business of theology—while perhaps important to fend off the belligerent challengers to Christian faith—is still about learning how to deliver the gospel.[41]

We can proceed even more boldly in our theological work, then, from the unique event of God's revelatory initiative—that paradigm of the incarnation that is concrete, particular, and historical—that radical particularity of "the trinitarian God assuming human reality in the person of Jesus Christ as the Word truly made flesh."[42] This particularity of the Incarnation—and its retrieval—can "be the ground of a theological method that is accountable both to revelation and to the long tradition of practices and reflections" while also speaking to our contemporaries.[43]

Other discussions of the centrality of grace—both as content and as charism—of our tradition are quite emphatic that the gracious God is, in the words of Robert

37. See my "The Current State of Liturgical Theology: A Plurality of Particularities," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 53/1-2 (2009): 209–229.

38. *God—the World's Future:* 231.

39. See John J. O'Keefe, "Impassible Suffering? Divine Passion and Fifth-Century Christology," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 39–60. O'Keefe argues that our perception of these christological debates needs to be corrected by the larger and much more fundamental question of whether and where God contacts the world at all. He notes, "If we do not have a sufficiently incarnational Christology, we may even today complain with Cyril: 'they do not understand the economy.'" (60).

40. See "Will God Save The World Or Not?" in this issue, page 290.

41. Robert Kolb, "Lutheran Theology in Seventeenth Century Germany," *Lutheran Quarterly* 20(2006): 455.

42. See my footnote 3 for a more expansive definition of the Incarnation.

43. Anthony J. Godzieba, Lieven Boeve, Michele Saracino, "Resurrection—Interruption—Transformation: Incarnation as a Hermeneutical Strategy: A Symposium," *Theological Studies* 67(2006): 778.

W. Jenson, "an event, indeed a history."[44] Moreover, this event has a name—it is Jesus Christ—and his particular life and death—where "God is there for us and that this is favor and not disaster."[45] But to posit that it is this one who is God's act of grace to and for us, brings us to what Jenson has termed "the notorious *communicatio idiomatum genus maiestaticum* (communication of the attributes of majesty) and indeed of *genus tapeinoticum* (of humility)."[46] Why notorious? Probably because Luther had made it so in the eucharistic controversy with Zwingli and Oecalampadius who just couldn't "get it" that the affirmation of God's turning toward us in grace—means we can say "Here is God"—and that means, too, that we must also say "Here is Christ the man."[47]

It is this retrieval of the communication of attributes "without reservation" that helps us to understand what a theology of grace is—"God favoring us with himself" and to place it at the center of our practices and reflections. If our Lutheran theological tradition can remain faithful to this irreducible particularity of the Incarnation of the grace of God while continuing to incorporate other useful insights that have emerged in our history for the sake of the larger continuing theological enterprise of the whole church, then our colleague Ted Peters is right. He has reminded us of the foundation that is worthy of future theological construction—and, hence, of the future of our Lutheran theological tradition as well. And that is not necessarily a bad thing.

44. "Triune Grace," in *The Gift of Grace,* 23.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid. We also see this in the controversies over the Lord's Supper and Christology where the Concordists used this *communicatio idiomatum* between Christ's divine and human natures in behalf of the doctrine of the presence of his body and blood in the Lord's Supper. See the "Catalogue of Testimonies." For a fine recent discussion, see Charles P. Arand, James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 227–253; and 274–276.

Jesus' Creation Theology and Multiethnic Practice

David L. Balch

Professor of New Testament, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and Graduate Theological Union

Adam Pryor

Doctoral Candidate, Graduate Theological Union

Reading studies of the historical Jesus, it is surprising that his crossing the ethnic border into Samaria has not been emphasized.[1] This essay suggests that one source of this socially provocative action was Jesus' Jewish reading of Genesis, Leviticus, and Deutero-Isaiah, that is, creation theology in Torah, developed in the context of Roman Imperial colonization of Judea. We will first note some texts in which Jesus appeals to God as Creator, and second, connect this with his integration of ethnic others, in particular Samaritans, among his disciples. Third, Jesus' provocative act of ethnic boundary crossing implies a political/theological friendship ethic different from Aristotle's.

A. Jesus' creation theology

Israel's confession of one, unique God responsible for history, creation, and salvation is central to Jesus' thinking and preaching. These themes are developed especially with regard to how he understands the kingdom of God. His understanding is most akin to the post-exilic writing of Deutero-Isaiah, which emphasizes the eschatological features of this confession (Isa 40:3–4; 41:4, 21–29; 43:10–13; 45:5–7). Much as the prophet announced salvation with the cry, 'Your God reigns" (Isa 5:27), so too did Jesus (Mark 1:14–15).[2] However, Jesus is not alone in this process of reinterpretation. For example, while we find Jesus proclaimed the gospel of Deutero-Isaiah to beggars, as with "Blessed are the poor" (Q/Luke 6:20b, alluding to Isa 61:1), Kloppenborg Verbin[3] identifies a Qumran text with the same allusion, "For the heavens and the earth shall listen to his Messiah…. For He shall heal the critically wounded, He shall revive the dead, He shall send good news to the afflicted (Isa 61.1), He shall satisfy the poor…, He shall make the hungry rich…." (4Q521, trans. Abegg [AcCordance]). Jesus' blessing of the poor is part of a wider search in Judea in a colonial context for how to interpret these scriptures. What then might we highlight as notable themes in Jesus' acts of reinterpretation?

We suggest two critical and related features. First, protology, the original will

1. Ethnicity and race are extraordinarily difficult to define. See Eric D. Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations: The Function of Race and Ethnicity in Acts 16* (WUNT 2.294; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), chaps. 1-2, who surveys scholarship, cautioning against essentializing; ethnicities are socially constructed, but nevertheless powerful categories.

2. Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 81, 88.

3. John S. Kloppenborg-Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 123.

of God at creation, and eschatology correspond in Jesus' sayings and deeds. Creation and salvation are not disparate concepts with a radical break between them; instead, salvation stands as the end toward which creation moves. This paradigm is not without precedent. Leo Perdue, in his form-critical analysis of the wisdom sayings of Jesus, distinguishes between an older wisdom, as a "paradigm of order," and a newer wisdom, as a "paradigm of conflict."[4] The connection of protology and eschatology we find in Jesus' sayings and deeds fits neatly within this newer paradigm: the saving act of God's eschaton is already in motion within this world in conflict with and working to overcome the evil of this world. Second, we do not stand idly by in the midst of this in-breaking of the kingdom of God. The connection of protology and eschatology implements a wisdom tradition theology of creation with definite ethical ramifications. Jesus implements a wisdom theology of creation (akin to the Perdue's newer paradigm) that is saturated with a radical prophetic ethics of the present. The kingdom of God implements the original will of God as it unfolds a new reality with a distinctive ethical structure by which we participate in the new reality.[5] To draw a hard distinction between the protological and eschatological features of Jesus' theology of creation would be inauthentic; they form a fluid unity rooting his ethical developments.

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This context sheds important light on how we can read the threefold command to love that is so central to interpretations of Jesus' ethics: love of neighbor, love of enemy, and love of God.[6] Love of enemies is particularly important because the absolute demand to love enemies (Q/Luke 6:27a; Matt 5:44a) is grounded in a distinctive Jesuanic protological/eschatological creation theology (Q/Luke 6:35; Matt 5:45): "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous." The ethic of love is tied to our recognition of being part of the wide breadth of God's creation, with a duty to inculcate the kingdom of God in the world through our way of being with one another. These love commands and the grounding in creation theology press the adherent beyond any confining nationalism.

Two examples regarding foreigners help bring the implications of this insight into sharper perspective. First, keeping with

4. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q,* 382, n. 40, citing J. Gammie and L. Perdue, *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 457–478; compare Perdue, "The Wisdom Sayings of Jesus," *Forum* (2/3, Sept. 1986), 3–35.

5. Schnelle, *Theology*, 108–114.

6. Schnelle, *Theology,* 118–121.

themes developed out of Isaiah, we find other authentic Q and Markan texts referring not to the poor of Isaiah, but rather to foreigners. "Then people will come from east and west, [from north and south,] and will eat in the kingdom of God" (Q/Luke 13:28/ Matt 8:11).[7] Not only Jesus, but both apocalyptic and other Jews were reflecting on the relation between Israel and the peoples of the world—those to the east and west—as well. Decisively, Jesus' saying in Q/Luke 13:28–29 includes ethnic others from east and west *eating* in the kingdom of God. Conflicts within contemporary Judaisms as well as conflicts within Jewish Christianities and Gentile Christianities show that table fellowship was a decisive issue. Jesus emphasizes the praxis of this eating in the eschatological promise by choosing table fellowship with those who had been excluded—a praxis with traces in all the sources.[8] Linking table fellowship to this eschatological procession of Gentiles to Jerusalem, Jesus' table fellowship with the unclean in Galilean villages signals through ethical praxis the in-breaking of God's kingdom that forms his theology of creation and eschatology.

Second, Jesus' typical activities of healing and exorcism involved both Judeans and ethnic others. He healed the Capernaum centurion's slave/servant, remarking, "not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Q/Luke 7:9). Jesus breathes "woe" on the Galilean towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida, "For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon [Syria], they would have repented long ago…." (Q/Luke 10:13). Further, he exorcized a demon from the daughter of a Gentile woman, a Syrophoenician (Mark 7:26–28; compare Matt 15:21–23 [a Canaanite woman]), after she famously debated him on the meaning of their ethnic and gender differences. These three authentic sayings from Q all assume some tension between Judeans and others: a Roman centurion, Tyre and Sidon, as well as a Syrophoenician. The Gospel of Thomas 53 is similar, although available only in Coptic translation, not in the earlier Greek texts. Both the a) multiple attestations and b) their coherence suggest that these miracle/exorcism stories correspond to Jesus' Isaianic hope for the eschatological pilgrimage of Gentiles to Jerusalem.

B. Social consequences of Jesus' theology of creation: crossing the ethnic frontier into Samaria

Given the connection between an ethic of love and an eschatologically driven creation theology, it behooves us to look more closely at the implications of those instances where Jesus advocates crossing ethnic/nationalistic borders, since these instances overflow with meaning as we attempt to understand what it is to live into the kingdom of God today. On this point, Josephus is helpful as he is specific about conflicts between (some) Judeans and (some) Samaritans. We briefly recount two of his stories, which illustrate these tensions and their ethnic symbols. Alexander the Great approached Jerusalem (narrative time: fourth century BCE) and was shown the book of Daniel (*Antiquities* 11:227), which declares that a Greek should destroy the Persians. He supposed this Greek to be himself, Josephus tells us, and so he granted Jews in Jerusalem and those in Babylon the right to live by their own laws (11:338). He then visited the Samaritans and their metropolis, Schechem, who saw that he had honored the Jews, so they determined to profess themselves Jews. Josephus rather declares them "apostates (*apostaton*) of the Jewish nation" (11:340). "If anyone were accused by those of Jerusalem of having eaten things common, or of having broken the Sabbath, or of any other crime of the like

7. As editor, Luke added "from north and south," seen again in the story of the southern Ethiopian/African (Acts 8:26–40).

8. Schnelle, *Theology,* 107–108.

nature, he fled away to the Schechemites…" (11:346–347).

The second story: Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria took Jerusalem and installed a garrison of Macedonians, but impious and wicked Jews also lived there, according to Josephus, who caused their co-citizens much suffering (*Antiquities* 12:246, 252; narrative time: second century BCE). Antiochus built an idol altar on God's altar and offered swine, forbidding Jews to circumcise their sons, which many obeyed (12:253–255). When Samaritans witnessed this suffering, they denied they were Jews, but rather claimed to be a colony of Medes and Persians, with which Josephus agrees (12:257). Samaritans say rather that they choose to live according to the customs of the Greeks (12:263). In this context, Josephus begins narrating the revolt of Mattathias the Maccabee against the Syrians (12:265).

In Josephus' narrative time, the conflicts between Judeans and Samaritans are centuries old, going back to Alexander the Great and Antiochus. The Judeans' neighbors, the Samaritans, were occasionally their cultural/religious/political antagonists, viewed by some as "apostates." When Judeans from Jerusalem had violated key identity symbols/commandments (not keeping kosher, violating the Sabbath, or obeying Antiochus' order not to circumcise their sons), some of them fled for safety to Samaria.[9]

We are neither arguing that Josephus' description is objective and historical nor that he correctly describes all Jews and all Samaritans.[10] Since Josephus was himself Judean, however, it is plausible that historically, some Judeans in the first century CE felt the way he did about Samaritans and that the conflict Josephus describes also reflects historical tensions within Judea and Jerusalem. As such, we are not arguing that Jesus' position on these issues was unique; on the contrary, he addressed contemporary ethnic negotiations in a colonial setting where diverse Judeans constructed Jewish identity in diverse ways.

Conflicts between Jesus and some other Jews occur along these fault lines: some fellow Jews criticize his eating habits (Mark 2:15–17, 18–20; 7:18–19; Q/Luke 7:22, 34; 10:8; 13:28), and others dispute the meaning and practice of the holy Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28; 3:1–6; 7:1–2; 12:13; Q/Luke 7:30; 11:39–44; GThom 39 [Greek text], 89, 102). Though the gospels never narrate conflicts about circumcision, the other two customs/laws (kosher and the Sabbath) are not simply traditional religious rituals; rather, they are symbolic boundary markers between Judeans and foreigners/outsiders, powerful dividing lines between constructed ethnicities. By walking across the border into Samaria (Luke 9:51–55), healing a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11–16), and narrating the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–29, judged authentic by almost all scholars), Jesus would generate a powerful response, as Josephus insists, in some Judean audiences.

After specifying these conflicts, two clarifications remain: 1) to articulate how we understand these conflicts theoretically and 2) to make clear that the tensions outlined are not between Jesus the Christian and other Jews. Jonathan Z. Smith is helpful in this regard. He provides two models of social change, refusing to value only one of

9. See also Josephus, *War* 2:232–246; *Ant*. 18:30; 20:118; compare Matt 10:5; Acts 1:8; 8:25; John 4:4-30.

10. Josephus is not always consistent (see *Ant*. 2:290), but before and after the time of Jesus, he repeatedly narrates political and military conflict between Jerusalem and Samaria-Sebaste, precisely the social context that we are describing. See e.g., *Ant.* 11:84–116; 12:156; 13:74–79; 18:29–30; 20:118–136 (compare *War* 2:232–246).

them.[11] "Order can be creative or oppressive. The transgression of order can be creative or destructive. Yet the two options represent such fundamentally different worldviews that 'to change stance is to totally alter one's symbols and to inhabit a different world.'"[12] Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God by both word and deed, for example, by crossing the ethnic boundary into Samaria, created a new world; his words and deeds did not leave Judean institutions as they were.

As Jewish, Jesus advocated a new order that he also practiced. Actually, he claimed to be practicing the order of God's creation, which is multiethnic. This is such a powerful term that it needs definition. Contemporary Judaisms were multiethnic, in the sense that many Jews in different geographical locations, in Rome, North Africa, Greece, Syria, and Persia, for example, as well as in Judea lived orthopraxic lives. When Jesus the Jew crossed the boundary into Samaria, and when he told the parable of the Good Samaritan, he was "multiethnic" without orthopraxy.[13] The Samaritan in Jesus' parable loved God and loved his neighbor as himself (Luke 10:27, 37, citing Deut 6:4 and Lev 19:18) as a Samaritan,[14] which as Josephus, himself a Judean, defined their practice, did not involve keeping kosher or resting on the holy Sabbath.

Contemporary discussions of ethnicity insist that ethnic identities are negotiated, particularly when difference is encountered in a colonial context. Such encounters evoke discursive justification of particular cultural practices, which is why many, probably most, contemporary students of ethnicity deny that any static list of ethnic characteristics is adequate.[15] Interpreting Judea in the first century CE, it would be inadequate to list kosher, Sabbath, and circumcision as religious laws that distinguish Judeans from other ethnicities; such a list has no single *sine qua non* that defines a particular ethnic group. Ethnic difference is malleable, even mutable. In the texts quoted above, we hear Judean ethnic identities being constructed and contested by diverse colonized Judeans.

We focus on a particular example of a Judean ethnic boundary construction in the citations given above: circumcision. Shaye Cohen with many contemporary scholars argues that there was no single, objective definition of Jewishness in the ancient world, that Jewish identities were "subjective…, constructed by the individual him/herself, other Jews, other gentiles, and the state."[16] There was no evidence that individual Jews were easily recognizable in antiquity: neither somatic difference, clothing, ritual participation, nor circumcision were reliable ethnic markers. "How then, did you know a Jew in antiquity when you saw one? The answer is that you did not. But you could

11. J.Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 129–146, cited by David Rhoads, *Reading Mark: Engaging the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004).

12. Rhoads, *Reading Mark*, 164, quoting J.Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*.

13. Again, this was not unique. See e.g., 1 Macc 1:43, 52; 2 Macc 4:13–17; as well as Josephus, *Ant.* 11:346–347 and 12:246, 252, cited above.

14. In general, colonizing Greeks (Antiochus IV Epiphanes) demanded identity of religious practice, that Judeans eat pork sacrificed to Zeus (see 2 Macc 6–7), but colonizing Romans allowed diversity in practice. Compare the contrast between Greeks and Romans by A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 33–35. Given this distinction, the colonized Jewish Jesus' parable and multiethnic practice is Roman, not Hellenistic.

15. Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations,* 23, 39, 44.

16. Shaye Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 3.

make reasonably plausible inferences from what you saw."[17]

Cohen's conclusion is one-sided, inquiring primarily about Jewish ethnic symbols, not also about the power of Greco-Roman institutions on the other side of the ethnic boundary, that is, the social power of those symbolic institutions to include individuals and ethnic groups or to exclude them. In the contemporary West, a Conservative or Reformed Jewish male may be relatively invisible; in ancient Greco-Roman gymnasia, an orthopraxic Jewish male was publicly visible. One of the core symbols of Greco-Roman culture was the gymnasium, where Greek men exercised nude, and Roman men and woman bathed nude.[18] Romans discovered concrete, and one of the key symbols of ancient Roman culture that remains until the present day are aqueducts that they constructed to bring water from some source to their cities, in which they constructed fountains and baths. Gymnasia were core cultural symbols of colonizing Greeks and Romans by which they distinguished between civilized and barbarian, between those who bathed nude and those who did not. Circumcised Jewish men—in Jerusalem,[19] Antioch, Alexandria, or Rome—faced a defining choice whether to participate in Greco-Roman culture or not when they decided whether to bathe nude or not, whether to join the "civilized" or not. "In those days out of Israel came sons, transgressors of the law, and they persuaded many…. And they built a gymnasium in Hierosolyma [Jerusalem] according to the precepts of the nations, and they fashioned foreskins for themselves and apostatized from the holy covenant…." (1 Macc 1:11–15 NETS; compare 2 Macc 4:9, 12). The choice was not merely philosophical or rational, and the consequences were not only individual. For Jews it was both religious and cultural. The choice for Jewish individuals or communities was a bodily decision, a choice of the gut, not merely of the mind.

In a gymnasium Jewish men were clearly visible, different. If they bathed nude, their circumcision was ridiculed by the "civilized" and their nudity forcefully challenged by traditional compatriots. In a core institution of Greco-Roman culture, virtually a *sine qua non*, the gymnasium, Jewish men were visible and exposed in a non-traditional way. Cohen incorrectly asserts that Judaism moved from an ethnic, geographically defined people to a cultural, religiously defined one. Those who circumcised their sons and rejected nudity in gymnasia/baths had to construct an identity visibly separate from "civilized" Greco-Roman culture and its symbols. What should be clear from this consideration of circumcision is that Jesus proposes a way of being multiethnic without imposing orthopraxy on other ethnic groups. In crossing the ethnic border with Samaritans, he confronts critical symbolic boundary markers and advocates for a radical shift in worldview.

As to the second necessary clarification, that this conflict was not between Jesus the Christian and the Jews, J.Z. Smith explains, all institutions, including religious ones, face social change, face the alternatives of order or transgression of order. Contemporary

17. Cohen, *Jewishness*, 67, quoted by Barreto, *Ethnic Negotiations*, 17.

18. Garrett G. Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1999). Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, 169–190.

19. See Monika Bernett, "Space and Interaction: Narrative and Representation of Power under the Herodians," pp. 283–310 in *Contested Spaces: Houses and Temples in Roman Antiquity and the New Testament*, eds. D.L. Balch and A. Weissenrieder (WUNT 285; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 289–297, citing Josephus, *War* 1:401–425; *Ant.* 15:266–388; 16:143–144 on Herod's building program, including aqueducts and gymnasia. Herod dramatically changed the architecture of Judea immediately before and during Jesus' lifetime.

religious institutions, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist, have been hearing persuasive feminist critics for two centuries. Our contemporary churches, synagogues, mosques, etc., have more recently begun facing gay/lesbian critique of traditionally homophobic practices. Such critique/change evokes conflict and reinterpretation of Scripture, e.g., two years ago the ELCA voted to permit those bishops and synods that choose to do so to ordain qualified gay and lesbian individuals as pastors, with institutional conflict before and after the decision. In this example, there is a radical change in the interpretations and praxes of the denominational group (a transgression of previously established order), but in transgressing the old order we are not suggesting that those bishops and synods that choose to ordain qualified gay and lesbian individuals now represent a separate religious social order.

In a similar vein, Jesus was a prophetic critic within Judaism, not unique, which we have mentioned above and now illustrate both by Jeremiah and by the founder and first leader of Hasidism in Eastern Europe, the Ba'al Shem Tov (1700–1760, "master of the good name"). First, Jeremiah (3:16) makes the astounding assertion, "the ark of the covenant of the Lord…shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made." The ark, a portable shrine in the wilderness, signifying God's divine presence (Exod 25:10–15), which contained the two tablets of laws from Sinai (Deut 10:2, 5), which David brought to Jerusalem, signifying the unity of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (2 Sam 6), and which Solomon placed in the Holy of Holies in the new temple (1 Kings 8:4–7), *that ark* shall not be remembered! Even more surprising, "it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,' but 'as the Lord lives who brought out and led the…house of Israel out of the land of the north'…" (Jer 23:7–8) Israel will not speak of the exodus from Egypt, but rather of a new Exodus from Babylon! Jeremiah the prophet is encouraging significant change in how to celebrate and where to experience the presence of God. Our colleague at PLTS/GTU, Prof. Davidson, tells us that these verses in Jeremiah are probably from later redactors, but in a sense, that makes them even more remarkable. Not the original, creative prophet himself, but later scribes in Israel, the later institution, is making radical adjustments, changes.

The Ba'al Shem Tov repelled some other Jews by his activity as a miracle worker. There was a bitter struggle in Lithuania, led by Elijah ben Solomon Zalman of Vilna, who opposed Hasidic "ecstasy, visions, and miracles, their dangerous lies and idolatrous worship." In the 1770s and 1780s there were bans (*harem*) against Hasidism. Hasids and their opponents denounced each other to authorities, which led to arrests.[20] Hasidism, now the most important form of religious Judaism in Europe, North America, and Israel, was bitterly opposed when first introduced.

Jeremiah, Jesus and the Ba'al Shem Tov illustrate the alternatives of order or transgression of order within Judaism. It is not anti-Jewish to observe that Jesus transgressed traditional order in Judea in the first century, no more than it is to observe that Jeremiah offended many in Israel in the sixth century BCE, and that the Ba'al Shem Tov transgressed traditional Jewish order in Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century, although unlike the other two, Jesus failed to persuade many other Jews that this new order was a good development.

20. "Israel ben Eliezer Ba'al Shem Tov," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 9 (1971), 1049–1048, and "Hasidism," *Encyclopedia Judaica* 7 (1971), 1290ff.

C. Theological/ethical consequences of Jesus' emphasis on creation: modification of the Greek political friendship ethic, a transformation that leans into the future (Ted Peters)

Later Christian theologians realized that Jesus' form of multiethnicity implies a different political friendship ethic than the Greek Aristotle's. Here we depend on an Argentine theologian, Nancy Bedford,[21] and have space to emphasize only one point. Aristotle the Greek philosopher claimed (*Nic. Eth*. 8:8) that friendship exists only between individuals who are equal and similar. The ethic we have identified in Jesus' preaching and acts, especially with regard to ethnic boundary crossing as a disjunctive force in conceptualizing Judean ethnic boundaries, flies in the face of this necessity of similarity.

It is a call to take seriously the continuing process of creation and the place of eschatological consummation as continuous with the evolving and emerging transformations of natural and human history.

As a theological/ethical theme, this is not new and is addressed at various points in the tradition. The Latin Ambrose, for instance, later suggested (*De officiis ministrorum* 3.22.135)[22] the possibility of mutuality and friendship between individuals whose social location is very different, because both are friends of the same God, who manifested her love in the incarnation. Ted Peters helps us gain a distinctive foothold within this theological approach that hearkens back to the connection between ethics and creation theology we have found in Jesus' preaching and acts.

Peters, like the wisdom approach to Jesus' creation theology, encourages us to think about theology and the doctrine of creation epigenetically and not archonically. It is a call to take seriously the continuing process of creation and the place of eschatological consummation as continuous with the evolving and emerging transformations of natural and human history. Borrowing the term *prolepsis* from Wolfhart Pannenberg, Peters uses it to emphasize the ontological heft of the future, of anticipation, for understanding the meaning of the present and the past. This future, which he sometimes calls *venturum* or ethically the *Life of Beatitude*, breaks into our present life imbuing it with the anticipated meaning of the coming kingdom of God.[23]

21. Nancy Bedford, "La Amistad y la eferescencia teológica," chap. 10 in *La porfía de la resurrección: Essayos desde el feminismo teológico latinoamericano* (FTL 30; Buenos Aires: Kairós, 2008). She cites David Konstan, "Problems in the History of Christian Friendship," JECS 4 (1993), 87–113.

22. Bedford, "Amistad," 192–195.

23. See Ted Peters, *Anticipating Omega: Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 2006), 24–27, and Ted Peters, *God the World's Future—Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 2d ed. (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000), 319–321.

> We have observed above that new wholes transform past parts. Integration into new more comprehensive unities preserve while renewing what came before. This holistic complexification process is nonlinear. Adding a new whole changes an entire situation in a significant way. The possibility of transformative effect renders redemption possible. Now, suppose we apply this to eschatology and then to creation? God's eschatological redemption will so reconfigure all that had been past that it might as well be a new creation or, perhaps more accurately, the completion of the creation already begun. Does this mean that eschatological omega takes ontological priority over what happened at the beginning? I believe it does.[24]

While Peters has done a tremendous amount of work with regard to the implications that such a proleptic theology would have for the interaction of theology and natural science, especially with the diverse array of issues arising from evolution, stem cell research, and astrobiology,[25] there is also an undeniable realization of the ethical implications of his theological outlook. Perhaps this is most clear in his arguments for proleptic dignity. He argues that human dignity must stand at the center of our value system, but that we have forgotten its proleptic and relational features, instead reifying it as an inherent attribute of personhood. Peters urges us to remember that, phenomenologically speaking, dignity is first conferred and then claimed: we treat the other as valuable, which allows her to claim value for herself. Theologically, this conferral of dignity is ultimately rooted in God. God treats each of us with dignity, allowing us to treat others with that dignity first conferred upon us, something very akin to Ambrose as cited above.

We have to understand, though, that Peters takes us a decisive step further than Ambrose in this argument. Ambrose's theological revision of Aristotelian friendship ethics is essentially archonic. Peters' process of conferral is proleptic, and he contrasts it with inherent dignity insofar as his approach is eschatological.[26] The inherent dignity of individuals stems from the anticipation of God's saving activity: dignity is not archonically an innate part of our created being but a retroactively (or epigenetically innate) value realized through our anticipated unity with the divine life. Conferring dignity in our relations with others proleptically advents the hope for our future final dignity in relation to God.[27] By connecting human dignity to prolepsis, living out the value of human dignity is our way of participating in the transformation of our world into God's kingdom. Peters makes very explicit how the ways in which we ethically confer dignity have real ontological effect in terms of the kingdom of God. By systematically applying prolepsis as a principle to traditional theological loci, Peters is highlighting for our world today the connection between eschatology, creation theology, and ethics we have argued is modeled in Jesus' preaching and acts.

Notably, the ethical impetus here implied is no easy task. It involves entering into the contested space of forming ethnic identity. Moreover, in a Christian context it requires, as Bedford appropriately cautions, that we must enter into this space well aware of how power and/or prestige effect the formation of dignity or friendship, e.g., between pastor and parishioner, or between professor and student, or between those with or without computers. Bedford emphasizes the transformations, modifications, changes, and mixing (*mezclar*)[28] that can and do occur between

24. Peters, *Anticipating Omega*, 25.

25. See also "Hummingbirds Make Stars Possible" in this issue, page 312.

26. Peters, *Anticipating Omega*, 185.

27. Ibid., 178–187.

28. Bedford, "Amistad," 189–11, 196–197.

friends whose social locations differ. This is true, both of conversations between individual friends in different social locations, and of conversations between diverse ethnic groups with differing customs and values.

Such transformation, such "mixing," is not only individual, but also occurs between ethnic/cultural/religious groups.[29] One of the convincing theses of Wallace-Hadrill's extraordinary new book, *Rome's Cultural Revolution,* is that Greek and Roman cultures/societies intermingled in Italy for three centuries (the first two centuries BCE and the first CE). Colonization was not one-way.

> Gosden's idea of a 'middle ground', in which cultures stand in dialectic with one another, provides a way out. If we focus on the reciprocity of the process whereby the colonial power not only provides powerful new cultural models to the colonized, but in turn takes to itself cultural models from the colonized (enough to refer to the spread of tea and curry in colonial Britain, and the fashions of oriental art and religion), we can allow that Roman conquest of Greece led not to fusion but reciprocal exchange. The cultures do not fuse…, but enter into a vigorous and continuous process of dialogue with one another. Romans can 'hellenise' (speak Greek, imitate Greek culture), without becoming less Roman…. Reciprocally, the Greeks under Roman rule define their own identity more sharply by *paideia* even as they become Roman in other ways….[30]

This theoretical approach would surely be productive in interpreting the interaction of Jewish, Christian, and Roman cultures in the centuries before Constantine, or in understanding the dialogues between North American colonizing and Latin American colonized "Christian" cultures.[31]

Here we emphasize that Jesus' crossing the border into Samaria intensified a dialogue/dialectic between Jewish and Greco-Roman religion and culture that still continues.[32] Dialogue with different others, whether individual or religious/political, generates transformation, change, "mixing." Such change/mixing in political contexts often involves tragedy; nevertheless, in this dialogue both partners, each with their own past, constructed histories, lean into the future as they are transformed and transform others. Jesus taught and lived a dynamic form of Judaism that was colonized by Rome, not in the era of the earlier Greek imperial rule

29. For Greek opposition to and Roman support for ethnic "mixing,"—a generalization with exceptions—see David L. Balch, "Jesus as Founder of the Church in Luke-Acts," pp. 137–186 in *Contextualizing Acts: Lukan Narrative and Greco-Roman Discourse*, ed. Todd Penner and C. Vander Stichele (Atlanta: Scholars and Brill, 2003), 167–173.

30. Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, 23–24.

31. For official Lutheran and Reformed church documents protesting the political ethics of North America, which generate hunger, unemployment, homelessness, and death in South America, see René Krüger, ed., *Life in All Fullness: Latin American Protestant Churches Facing Neoliberal Globalization* (Buenos Aires: ISEDET, 2007). For biblical hermeneutics supporting these South American ecclesial statements that call for dialogue with North America, see Rubén Dri," Las Iglesias, el capitalismo y el ideario socialista," in *Teología de la Liberación y los Derechos Humanos: Por un nuevo cielo y un nuevo mundo*, ed. Arturo Blatezky (Buenos Aires: Movimiento Ecuménico por los Derechos Humanos, 2011), 263–279. For an Argentine Lutheran theological critique of globalization see Guillermo Hansen, *En las fisuras: esbozos luteranos para neustro tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida, 2010); Hansen is now a professor of theology at Luther Seminary.

32. See Luke T. Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University, 2009).

of Alexander and his successors. Jesus the Jewish wise prophet was in dialogue with others, including a Syrophoenician woman, and according to literary tradition (John 4), a Samaritan woman.

One critical point remains: to refuse such dialogue, to close our individual persons or our religious/economic/political cultures and communities off against diverse others would be to reject Jesus' initiative. In the past, when Lutheran theologians in Germany turned against Jews, our mothers in the faith, and legitimated the murder of six million in the Holocaust, that was both a heinous crime against human rights and also a sacrilegious offense by those who claimed the name of "Christian," who claimed to be followers of Jesus who crossed ethnic and religious boundaries into Samaria.[33] When Roman Catholic bishops in Argentina legitimated the military dictator Jorge Rafael Videla (1976–1983), as he "disappeared" 30,000 mostly young Argentine "Marxist" students, literally throwing a generation of Argentine youth into the Pacific Ocean in the Cold War between capitalists and "communists,"[34] that was a crime against human rights and a heinous sacrilege against the Creator God who revealed herself in Jesus, the Jew of Nazareth, who engaged in dialogue with religious and ethnic others, with Samaritans. In the present, when North American churches close themselves off against dialogue with Latin American churches and culture, that isolation is also counter to Jesus' own interethnic dialogue between Judeans and Samaritans. Moreover, just as Jesus' interethnic dialogue was steeped in protological and eschatological commitments, we must, as with Peters, realize the proleptic ramifications of closing ourselves to diverse others: as we cease to confer dignity in refusing interethnic dialogue, we stymie the adventing of the kingdom of God.[35]

33. See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2008); S. Heschel, "Historiography of Anti-semitism versus Anti-Judaism: A Response to Robert Morgan," JSNT 33.3 (2011), 257–279. A few protested publicly, e.g., Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

34. Rubén Dri, *La hegemonía de los cruzados: La iglesia católica y la dictadura militar* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2011). Carlos Mugica (1930–1974), a well-known priest, protested, and in the same era in El Salvador, so did Bishop Oscar Romero (1977–1980); both were martyred. See Nancy E. Bedford, *Jesus Christus und das gekreuzigte Volk: Christologie der Nachfolge und des Martyriums bei Jon Sobrino* (CRM 15; Aachen: Augustinus, 1995). Perhaps the most courageous protest in Buenos Aires was by Rabbi Marshall Meyer.

35. David Balch thanks Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary for a sabbatical and Texas Christian University for an emeritus grant that supported writing his portion of this essay. David thanks his hosts at ISEDET in Buenos Aires, especially Rector José David Rodriguez and René Krüger, Professor of New Testament.

Will God Save the World or Not? Prolepsis, Open Theism, and the World's Future

Carol R. Jacobson

Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Graduate Theological Union

Anticipating omega

As Søren Kierkegaard astutely observed, "life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."[1] Not only in life, but also in Christian eschatology, his insight holds true. Not unlike Kierkegaard, Ted Peters employs what he calls a "retroactive ontology"[2] when it comes to thinking theologically about the future. At the center of this retroactive ontology is the assertion that who we are today, as well as who we have been, are both "determined by, and defined by, our future."[3] In other words, we can only understand our past existence, or our existence today if we look backward at it from the perspective of God's promised future. Thus, Peters says, "God creates from the future, not the past,"[4] and moreover, "the first thing God did for the cosmos [at its creation] was to give it a future."[5]

This retroactive ontological relationship between God and the world should not be understood as slavish or deterministic however. Peters' retroactive ontology includes the possibility of genuine openness and novelty. "Contrary to common sense," he writes, "past causes do not hold the present moment [and so not the future either] in the grip of absolute determinism."[6] Rather,

> The first thing God did was provide nascent reality with an open future. Since then, God has continued this double relationship to the created order, negatively releasing the grip of the past while positively offering being and openness to a future of new possibilities.… God opens up an array of potentials that await actualization.[7]

God opens up an array of potentials that await actualization. God's gift of a future—given to the world at its creation—makes both contingency and freedom in present existence, and in the future, genuinely possible.

God's gift of a future to the created order functions in a twofold way according to Peters. Not only is it the ground of contingency

1. Søren Kierkegaard cited in *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers,* Vol. 1, A-E, Hong, Howard V. and Edna H. Hong, ed. & tr. (Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1967–1978). Throughout his collected journals and papers, Kierkegaard gives expression to this in several entries. See especially entries 1025 and 1030.

2. See Ted Peters, *Anticipating Omega: Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2006), 12ff.

3. Ibid., 12.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 13.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 13–14.

and freedom, but it also contains within it God's offer of a final future, an ultimate future, a fulfilling future. "At omega," Peters writes, "creation will be complete."[8] Thus, the creation of the cosmos is God's ongoing eschatological act—an ongoing act grounded in the future, not the past.

> This eschatological action by God will include the incorporation into the divine life of our cosmic reality. The creation will be absorbed into God, and God's presence will imbue the creation as a whole and in all its parts.… The entirety of past history will be taken up into eschatological eternity.… God's creative activity will attain its completion. God will be able to take that Sabbath rest described in Genesis 2:2.… That seventh day is tomorrow, the day that will conclude all of God's creative work. When it is redeemed, our world will be created.[9]

Elsewhere Peters says, when God's creative work is redeemed, it will at last be the new heaven and the new earth promised in Revelation 21:1.

To further underscore the ontological priority of the future, Peters advocates a way of thinking theologically that is proleptic—a theological method that emphasizes the "ontological weight of anticipation."[10] For Peters, the definitive example of prolepsis, which he defines as "an embodied anticipation,"[11] is the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, to think eschatologically in a proleptic way means to consider—among other things, of course—the ontological weight of the relationship between God's promised resurrection of the cosmos and its proleptic anticipation in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. "What happened to Jesus on the first Easter was a prolepsis of the new creation, an anticipation of the final resurrection that will include you and me."[12]

Constrained by love

At first glance, Peters' retroactive ontology and proleptic method appear compatible with central tenets of "open theism. "[13] Generally identified as "a version of historic free will theism which posits God as granting to human beings significant freedom to cooperate with or to resist the will of God for their lives,"[14] open theism unfolds a doctrine of creation with the understanding that

> God's goal is to make possible relationships of mutual love between God and creatures and therefore set up a dynamic give and take situation in which God can even be said to risk failure to the degree permitted by the overall plan.[15]

Open theism is "a relational and Trinitarian doctrine with an emphasis on God as personal and interactive."[16] It is considered "open" in the sense that there is more than one possible future for creation. That is, not everything that happens in creation is either

8. Ibid., 14.

9. Ibid., 18.

10. Ibid., 27. See also "Hummingbirds Make Stars Possible" in this issue, page 312.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Open theism (sometimes referred to as openview theism) is a theological school of thought generally thought to have arisen in 1994 by a group of respected evangelical scholars, led by Clark H. Pinnock, in a book titled *The Openness of God.* I am grateful to Pastor Wes Telyea for introducing me to this contemporary theological movement, and its eschatological perspectives.

14. Clark H. Pinnock, "Open Theism: An Answer to My Critics" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44:3 (Fall 2005), 237.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid. Peters appreciates the relational foundations of open theism. For example, see *Anticipating Omega*, 152.

ordained or pre-ordained by God at creation. In order to guarantee genuine openness in creation, God cannot possess exhaustive definite foreknowledge (EDF) with regard to the future. Open theists understand God as limiting God's own Self—giving up exhaustive definite foreknowledge for the sake of granting genuine freedom to the whole creation and to every individual.

Thus, God takes risks in creating a free cosmos and free creatures. The nature and seriousness of the risk becomes apparent when we consider that, according to open theists, in a genuinely free cosmos God gives up the power to coerce creatures for the sake of achieving divine purposes either in the present or in the future. Furthermore, to some degree, God cannot even know the future of the world in its totality.

> Openview theists deny that God can both grant individuals freedom and control its use. Rather, to the extent that God grants individual freedom, he gives up complete control over the decisions that are made. Consequently, openview theism denies a compatibilist view of freedom, endorsing instead libertarian freedom.[17]

Furthermore, to some degree, God cannot even know the future of the world in its totality.

> Our model affirms omniscience but denies exhaustive definite foreknowledge. It grants that God knows everything that can be known but holds that the future free actions of creatures, including even God's own future actions, are not yet actual and, therefore, cannot be known with complete certainty.[18]

While many may be receptive to open theism's commitment to genuine human freedom, the corollary assertion that God does not have exhaustive definite foreknowledge regarding the future has proven to be one of the most controversial and contested positions it holds.

According to open theists, God's Self-limiting with regard to knowledge of the future ensures that present and future human actions have real consequences for the future, and can affect both God's future and the world's. Most importantly, God does it for the sake of love.

> God surrenders power because he does not want to squelch the creature; God is moved by love to restrain the divine power, temporarily and voluntarily, out of respect for the integrity of creatures, even creatures whose activities fall short of God's purposes.[19]

God's surrender of freedom is for the sake of giving us true freedom. Additionally, God's Self-limiting safeguards the possibility of genuine novelty in the future. Real freedom means that the future of the world cannot be exhaustively known by anyone, not even by God.

Causation, coercion, and power

Like Peters, open theists affirm a triune God of love who created everything that exists. Again, like Peters, at the heart of open theism is the triune relationality of God; a perichoretic Trinity characterized by responsiveness, pathos, and risk-taking for the sake of love. Moreover, genuine openness and meaningful historical novelty are important in both approaches. When it comes to speaking

17. Michael Robinson, "Why Divine Foreknowledge," *Religious Studies* 36:3 (September 2000), 252.

18. Pinnock, *Dialog*, 240.

19. Pinnock**,** Clark H., "Constrained by Love," *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 34:2 (Summer 2007), 150.

specifically about the world's future, however, significant differences in their eschatological thinking clearly emerge.

To begin, Peters and open theists have different ontological emphases and divergent theological agendas. Open theism, with its ontology of freedom very much concerned with a future that cannot be known, adopts a forward facing temporal trajectory in its theological system. We could say that open theists give ontological priority to exercising freedom in the "life lived forwards." In so doing they simultaneously seek to avoid problems of divine coercion often implicit in ontologies that try to "understand backwards." As we have seen already, Peters prefers to employ a retroactive ontological approach. What does this difference matter to understanding the world's future and God's knowledge of it?

In order to answer this question, I suggest that we take notice of the different notions of causation operative in the two approaches. Seeking to preserve an understanding of the future of the world as a "whole," both approaches grapple to understand the nature of causation. Peters' retroactive ontology employs a downward understanding of causation, while open theism seems to make use of an upward one. Peters explains that "in upward causation the parts alter one another and the whole; in downward causation the whole alters the parts by incorporating their participation in the dynamics of the whole."[20] That is, upward causation prioritizes the parts that can and do change the resultant "whole;" whereas downward causation prioritizes the "whole," which changes and incorporates its parts into the ongoing realization of itself. In contrast to open theism where a free future "whole" will be the sum of its present and past free "parts," Peters prefers to "think of God acting on the whole of creation and, thereby, reorienting and redefining all of the parts within."[21]

As we have observed, open theism emphasizes the ways in which the whole creation presently existing [and realities and persons yet to exist] change one other and the future in ways that nobody—not even God—can know exhaustively. Hence, open theism's rejection of God's exhaustive definitive foreknowledge we examined earlier. However, the downward causation employed by Peters' retroactive ontology emphasizes the "whole"—the promised future that God realizes at omega—which has transfigured and continues to transfigure the present and the future into the realization of its own fulfillment. Retroactive ontology's downward analysis of causation allows us to speak eschatologically about freedom [both present and future] from within a larger framework—God's final future, given to the whole cosmos at its creation. "All of God's current works are parts of a single, comprehensive act of creating the world."[22]

> Real freedom means that the future of the world cannot be exhaustively known by anyone, not even by God.

In addition, open theism's understanding of causation employs a quantitative

20. Peters, *Anticipating Omega,* 15.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

analysis when it comes to thinking about the relationship between divine power and human freedom. For open theists, God's power plus creation's freedom cannot exceed a total of 100 percent. Thus if God is more powerful, the creation must be somehow less free. Open theism's rejection of exhaustive definite foreknowledge is necessitated by this kind of quantitative analysis, since,

> total knowledge of the future would imply a fixity of events. Nothing in the future would need to be decided. It also would imply that human freedom is an illusion, that we make no difference and are not responsible.[23]

In order to provide for the creation's genuine freedom, open theism insists upon a limitation of God's own freedom—divinely self-imposed for the sake of love.

The problem with this approach, Peters says, is that "…it presumes a fixed pie of power, according to which God must take a smaller slice in order for the world to get a larger slice." He continues,

> In contrast to this view, I believe it is the exercise of God's power that empowers the world. God exercises this power duratively, faithfully maintaining the world in existence while granting partial release from the mechanistic grip of the past nexus of efficient causation. It is the exercise of God's power upon the world that makes contingency in nature and freedom for humanity possible.[24]

Here we find Peters employing a durative rather than a quantitative analysis of the relationship between divine power and human freedom. In this way of thinking, it is God's power and freedom that make genuine human and natural freedom possible in the first place, rather than somehow limiting it or rendering it merely illusory.

Yet, if God's future is indeed the world's future; and further, if God has already given this future to the whole cosmos; then in what sense does God's act of power make human beings free? If the whole creation is moving toward God's future, how can it be said that it is genuinely free? According to Peters, the answer to this question begins with the recognition that "…we will not become who God intends us to be until we ourselves share in the resurrection at omega."[25] Once raised, Peters continues, "we will look back over our biographies and over the evolutionary biography of the entire human race and understand who we are in our totality."[26] At the present time, according to Peters, we exist in-between God's first creative act and that final creative act at omega. We who are alive now are living on the road toward omega. We are still becoming, free to become more and more what God created us to be. Our actions matter and our evolution toward becoming more and more human is not illusory. How can Peters suggest that this is the case? By looking to the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the revelation of God's future redemption of the entire cosmos.

Proleptic particularity

While open theism and retroactive ontology both emphasize the centrality of the future in their systematic theology, we can now begin to understand why Peters' approach offers a more cogent framework for thinking eschatologically. Like open theism, his approach rejects divine coercion and historical determinism, but does not deny the power

23. Clark H. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 123.

24. Peters, *Anticipating Omega,* 21–22.

25. Ibid., 22–23

26. Ibid.

and promise of God to both know and accomplish the future given to the whole creation at its beginning. Peters' retroactive ontology recognizes both the importance of understanding our future by looking backward from God's future, and the importance of living forward into that future proleptically. In addition, once we begin to think both retroactively and proleptically about the world's future, we not only escape the trap of determinism; but we also avoid empty relativism, which cannot claim any lasting significance for history, experience or the present moment.[27] As we have seen, Peters suggests that God is saving the world by granting it a future and simultaneously bringing that future into present existence more and more by empowering human freedom, not by overriding it. But at least one more important thing must be emphasized about Peters' understanding of God's creative and redeeming act of creation. God gives the world a particular kind of future—one that has already been proleptically anticipated within time and history.

Recall that retroactive ontology gives theological weight to anticipation in its system. It looks for anticipations of God's future in time and history and expects to find them there. For Peters, Jesus of Nazareth, incarnate, crucified, and risen is the paradigmatic anticipation and revelation of God's future in time, space, and history. Jesus Christ truly is, in Tertullian's words, "the hinge of salvation"[28] and the true revelation of what being human will truly become at omega. Jesus the Christ shows forth God's future for all humanity ahead of omega in his own flesh and bones.

> When Jesus Christ—whom the New Testament describes as the true image of God, the *eikon tou theou* or *imago dei*—rose from the dead on Easter, this introduced resurrection into the definition of what a human being is.[29]

So, ever since Easter morning, and precisely because of the resurrection of Jesus, the nature of what it means to be truly human has been, and is continuing to be, transfigured. Resurrection has indeed been introduced into the definition of being human. That is why Peters goes on to say that "the future new reality has arrived ahead of time, so to speak, in the singular event of Easter. What was true for Jesus on the first Easter will become true for all of physical reality at the advent of the eschaton."[30] In this way, Peters' retroactive ontology both grounds and safeguards newness and innovation simultaneously; not as the result of free choices by free agents, but rather as a result of God's own anticipation of the future's fulfillment ahead of time in history. "Anticipation of omega [in Jesus Christ] incarnates the future ahead of time. Our life of hope is based upon God's promise to provide eschatological confirmation of what we now anticipate."[31] God's promise for all creation is revealed in Jesus' resurrection, and "…in the Lord's resurrection God has shown that he has taken the earth to himself forever."[32] God's gift of an ultimate future at the creation of the cosmos, when understood as both retroactive and proleptically potent, assures the eternal significance of present and future actions, assures and does not threaten them.

> Not only does Jesus' resurrection encourage us to make a "forward glance" and

27. See also "Hummingbirds Make Stars Possible" in this issue, page 312.

28. "*Caro cardo salutis*"—"The flesh is the hinge of salvation." Cited by Karl Rahner in "A Faith That Loves The Earth," *Everyday Faith* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 83.

29. Peters, *Anticipating Omega*, 22.

30. Ibid., 41.

31. Ibid., 199.

32. Karl Rahner, "A Faith That Loves The Earth," *Everyday Faith* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 82-83.

> ask about our ultimate destiny, both individual and corporate (familiar to us from Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 15), but to make the "backward glance" as well, and ask this: what kind of body is it that can have the capacity to accept and sustain the eschatological transformation experienced by Christ?[33]

However, as we know well, our bodies are not presently capable of resurrection from the dead. So, what exactly will resurrected life look like, not only for ourselves but for the whole creation?[34] Peters reminds us that "according to present laws of physics, resurrected life is impossible."[35] Thus, in order to have the God-given future realized in history, it seems the very laws of nature will have to be transformed.[36] Just how this will occur, we do not know. That it will occur, we believe because of the resurrection of Jesus on the first Easter morning. Jesus Christ, incarnated, crucified, and risen grounds eschatological hope in the midst of space and history.

Open theism has a much more difficult time finding a ground for eschatological hope. As Richard Rice observes,

> for God to will something…does not make its occurrence inevitable. Factors can arise that hinder or prevent its realization. Consequently, God may reformulate his plans, or alter his intentions, in response to developments.[37]

For Peters, however, "the end is proleptically present and operative beforehand, rehearsing the qualities of the eschatological kingdom—peace, love, joy, freedom, equality, unity—in the course of history's forward movement."[38] In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Triune God has promised that a new heaven and a new earth, where resurrection awaits us all, is at hand. This, Peters says, "…provides the source of our vision of a transformed future" and calls us "to live in hope today out of the power of tomorrow's reality."[39] However, God's ultimate future—the one given to the whole cosmos at its creation—depends upon ongoing action on God's part, what Peters calls "an ultimate transformation that only God can deliver."[40] I began this essay by asking "Will God save the world, or not?" For open theism, I think, the answer must be "perhaps." For Peters, however, the answer is an enthusiastic "Yes!" Indeed, the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus teach us this above all else—Easter is not a past event, but rather the beginning of God's ongoing revelation of the world's ultimate future. Will God save the world? Of course! God has already promised the world a redeemed future. In the meantime, Peters says, "our ethical mandate is to live in hope today out of the power of tomorrow's reality."[41] When we do, "we participate proleptically in the eschatological consummation yet to come in its fullness."[42]

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33. Anthony J. Godzieba, "Stay with us …" (Lk 24:29)—"Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20): Incarnation, Eschatology, and Theology's Sweet Predicament," *Theological Studies 67* (2006): 788.

34. For a discussion of Peters' understanding of proleptic ethics, see "Jesus' Creation Theology and Multiethnic Practice" in this issue.

35. Peters, *Anticipating Omega,* 41.

36. For a discussion of transforming natural laws, see Russell in this issue, page 279.

37. Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, by Clark Pinnock et al., (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 26.

38. Carl E. Braaten, *Eschatology and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 121.

39. Peters, *Anticipating Omega,* 200.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

The Suffering Reality of the Oppressed in *God—The World's Future* and its Implications for Dalit Theology

Moses Penumaka

Director, Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM), Assistant Professor of Contextual Theology, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Graduate Theological Union

Where freedom freely strolls in fields yielding
not to the rule of hardened heart,
Prefers to be poor to being a tongue-less tool,
Where people love orphans more than their
own children,
Kindly tell me where it is: I want to meet
those brothers.

Joshua Gurrum in *Gabbilum*

Theodore Frank Peters is a systematic and philosophical theologian, a scientist, teacher, pastor, mentor, and most of all a "simple human being" with honesty and integrity in the church, and the academy. Peters' theology is centered in God's grace and hope revealed through Christ's suffering, death, cross, and resurrection. Peters maintains the integrity of the various theological, philosophical, and scientific disciplines with which he facilitates a serious and systematic conversation. As a systematic and philosophical theologian, he is deeply committed to Christian doctrines. As a scientist, he is passionate about scientific imagination and exploration. Peters taught theology, research methodology, and skills of being and becoming excellent teachers. I am one of the many students who had the privilege to work with him and I consider it a great honor for me to be one of the contributors for this *festschrift*. Ted Peters' theology and science projects might seem "wacky" for some, but for the professionals, they are filled with wit, humor, deep theological and scientific insights, and creative imagination. For example, *The Evolution of Terrestrial and Extraterrestrial Life: Where in the World is God?* is a perennial theological and existential question Peters attempted to address from an evolutionary, theological perspective at the Seventh Annual Goshen Conference on Religion and Science. In one of the lectures he said:

> Beginning with the cross one might ask: can what we have learned about God's love and grace through divine revelation in the cross apply to our expanding knowledge of nature's evolutionary history? Because the story of Jesus is the story of God's incarnation entailing the taking up of the human experience of injustice and suffering into divine life, would it follow that in nature God identifies with the victims of unfitness? Would it follow from Jesus' Easter resurrection that we have reason to believe the future will be different from the past, that eschatologically the lion will lie down with the lamb? Yes.

Of course, Peters affirmatively says *yes*. The question "how" always remains hypothetical until the voices from the margins, the voices of the victims, the women, the *dalits*, the aboriginals, the homeless, "the victims of the unfitness" share their experience. This paper attempts to address the question "how" from a *dalit* theological perspective.

Inappropriateness of orthodoxy

Liberation and contextual theologies emerged as a response to the inappropriateness of the dominant religious orthodoxy and lacuna created and perpetuated by orthopraxis. Liberation theologians reflected on praxis, resistance, spirituality, mysticism, contemplation, and so on in the light of the Scriptures and the struggles in their contexts. Personal struggles, stories, and experiences of being *dalits*, women, crucified, wounded, oppressed, poor, victims, and marginalized became the loci and impetus for liberation theology. Two most important aspects that liberation theology addresses are *the poor and the praxis*. As a rare and outstanding poet, emerging from the oppressed *dalit* (meaning "oppressed, broken, or marginalized") social background, Joshua Gurram developed a radical social and theological critique of dominant Hinduism in Andhra Pradesh, India. Gurram's pioneering contextual and dalit theology challenged orthodoxy in Andhra Pradesh, one of the states in India, and called for re-thinking orthopraxis, political activism, and social liberation. Dalit theology transcends the pitfall of drawing the dualistic line between bipolar categories such as God vs. world, rich vs. poor, oppressor vs. oppressed, and exploiter vs. exploited. Rather dalit theology places the suffering reality and the liberating experience of the untouchables, the poor, the oppressed, the exploited, the victims, the wounded and the crucified in the "center" of theology.

A detailed analysis of the nature and history of religions reveal that religious experience is dependent on the human condition and the relation of that condition to the situation that surrounds. Mircea Eliade explains that religious human beings can live only in an open world and desire to be at a center where there is the possibility of communicating or relating with gods. The human being's dwelling is a microcosm, as is his/her body too. Indian religious thought made good use of the traditional homology, house-cosmos-human body. The body, like the cosmos, is a "situation," a system, of conditioning influences that the individual assumes.

Thomas Thangaraj describes Hinduism as "Geo-piety" and "Bio-piety." "Geo-piety" according to Thangaraj means that Hinduism can be defined by its geographical location rather than by a founder, or a set of doctrines or creeds. Hinduism is defined by its location and its piety based on the location. Of course, advaitins may challenge this characterization on the basis of naming of Ultimate reality as Brahman, the non-dualistic Reality transcends time and space. The non-dualistic view of Ultimate reality and the perception of "world" as *maya* would be simply a relativization of the local. While this is true in theory, in practice many Hindus are attached to geography. This is reflected in the way housing is planned in villages. The demolition of Masque in Ayodhya in 1992 by Hindu extremists and the subsequent religious clashes in Mumbai (Bombay) are another example. "Bio-piety," Thangaraj describes as *Santanadharma* (eternal order) of Hinduism (i.e., the caste system based on the biological history of an individual); it is also known as *Varnashramadharama,* the caste system based on the caste (color) and profession determined by birth. The caste system is believed to be the eternal order for human flourishment. It emerged from creator *Brahma*. From the head of *brahma* came the *Brahmins* or the priestly caste, from the shoulders came *Kshatriyas* or the worrier caste, from the bosom came the *Vaishyas* or the trader caste and from the feet, S*hudra,* came the artisan and crafts castes. The native Indians are kept outside of the caste system and treated as polluted and untouchables.

The British called them *Panchamas,* the fifth caste or outcaste. The outcastes do not belong to the body of Brahma. They do not fit

into the house-cosmos-body homology. They are outside the system. In current parlance, these untouchables are termed as *dalits*. The caste system is an unjust, atrocious, and unequal categorization giving certain privileges to few people based on the caste by birth. The system denies even basic privileges to lower castes. The outcastes are completely disowned but total servitude and surrender is demanded of them. Joshua Gurram grew up in the Indian society when there were severe caste restrictions, total dehumanization, and discrimination. Sadly, the same situation or environment exists even today. A social, cultural, and theological analysis will help understand the exploitation and challenge for repentance and transformation.

Origins of Christianity in India

The origins of Christianity in India can be traced to the arrival of St. Thomas in the first century CE. The Marthoma Christians claim the background of this tradition. During the sixteenth century, Jesuits Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili, with their approach of enculturation (evangelization respecting and using the local culture), arrived and were able to convert some caste Hindus. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Protestant missionaries from Europe and America came to India with the gospel of Jesus Christ. These missionaries attempted to bring the gospel to the entire nation. Philosophically, Hinduism is tolerant and respectful to any other religious traditions. However, Christianity, which condemned social and cultural injustice, was not well received.

Even though the missionaries tried to preach the gospel to everyone in India, starting with the Brahmins, it was the dalits who converted in large numbers, leading to mass movements. The dalits could find meaning in the suffering of Christ, which was similar to their own suffering. They embraced Christ as a new social identity and human dignity. They could recognize a God who identifies with the dalits, suffers with the dehumanized, and liberates the oppressed. Gurram affirmed the faith and identity of dalits, powerfully expressing his thoughts through Telugu poetry, which he used as a hermeneutical tool. Gurram developed a unique, radical, social, religious and cultural critique.

India reclaimed its independence from the British rule through non-violence and *Satyagraha* led by the Mahatma Gandhi. The Indian masses in large numbers responded to the call of Gandhi with their dreams and hope for a free India. In the formation of *Swaraj*, which means self-rule, the masses who participated in the freedom fight, who went to prisons, were beaten up by the battalions, and left behind, while the Indian National Congress struggled to find a suitable model that would bring justice to all people. The first option was of Bankim: to carry on with the high standard material culture of the West, consisting of science, technology, and passion for progress. Gandhi proposed to break with the Western model of civilization based on the division of labor and the centralized modern state. Gandhi's ideal for Hindu *swaraj,* as a true *swaraj,* was political, economic, and moral independence, based on far-reaching decentralization. Gandhi's ideal of *Ramarajya* was to shift from the urban market to village-based production and rule (*Kutiraparisrama* and *Grameena Panchayathi*). But Nehru sought a sovereign national state free from the West and dependency on its model with the possibility to develop a socialist state. Ambedkar, the only strong voice for the masses, feared the reinforcement of caste structure through political decentralization. Therefore, he was a strong critique for political decentralization. He supported a modern state based upon modern Western models and ensured that many of its principles were incorporated

into the Indian constitution.

The Indian constitution designed by Ambedkar was adopted on January 26, 1948. In the constitution, Article 17 abolishes "untouchability." Unfortunately, the constitution does not contain an article or a directive principle regarding the abolishing of the caste system. Dr. Ambedkar's draft for Article 17 says that, "any privilege or disability arising out of rank, birth, person, family, religion or religious usage and custom is abolished." However, it was not accepted by the parliament. G. Shah concludes: "the constitution envisages building an egalitarian society within the capitalist framework without uprooting the caste system. Such closed-ness and insensitivity to the issues of injustice and discrimination show that the dalits were left to their own fate, even in post-modern India.

The poor become the good news; the poor become the bearers of salvation.

The problem of untouchability

Untouchability in India is not just the problem of dalits. The Indian caste system perpetuates inequality. Sadly, there is a great reluctance among non-dalit movements to be inclusive and make the struggle against practices of untouchability part of their agenda. Gabriela Dietrich states that they fail to see the urgency of this problem for dalits. In addition, they hesitate because taking it up may place too much of a burden on their organization. Any struggle for a new and just society in which there is equality, has to confront untouchability as a major obstacle. "It is an atrocious form of exclusivist and segregation which prevents true solidarity and sows the seeds of bitterness and confrontation which the vested interests will be using for their divide and rule policies." Therefore, untouchability remains an issue addressed on superficial levels. Gurram struggled in India under the severe caste discrimination of his times.

"Preferential option for the poor" became central to liberation theology raising many examples of radical dualism such as the poor and the rich, or the oppressed and the oppressors. The possibility and viability of the church taking a stand for liberation raises two important questions: a) With which group does the church identify? And, does not taking sides with one group mean being against the other? The second question is valid only if the ultimate goal of liberation is forgotten. b) If a new humanity is desired, then all people must be moved to a new position; therefore not only are the oppressed liberated from their obvious oppression, but oppressors are also liberated from their more subtle, though no less real, oppression. Liberation theology placed the poor in the center not the privileged side. The poor become the good news; the poor become the bearers of salvation. The poor and the crucified remind us that liberation is complete only when there is no separation of rich and poor or oppressors and oppressed. Jon Sobrino says:

> There can be no civilization on the basis of unreality, of what we have called Docetism. Reality offers us redemption from unreality, and the poor offer us redemption from social and ecclesial Docetism. To put it more modestly, they invite us to come close to them, to be real.

Therefore, in coming close to the reality, the reality of suffering and being crucified,

we experience God. Our partisanship with the poor and the suffering liberates us. The point of departure for dalit theology is the suffering reality of the dalits. For the experience of struggles of dalits become central to God, loci to theological discourse, and also become the signs for liberation experience. Reality can never be unreal for dalits.

Daridranarayana of Joshua Kavi Gurram

Joshua Gurram known as "*navayuga kavi cakravarti*" (emperor of modern poetry) was one of the great Telugu poets of the twentieth century. Gurram wrote many Kannda Kaavyaalu (one of the Telugu poetry based on a particular meter) with a profound sense of social consciousness and theological critique. Gurram was born in a dalit Christian family. He found meaning, identity, and inspiration from the gospel of Jesus Christ. He developed a theological and social critique of the dominant Hinduism by using poetic literature, which is considered as the personification of *Sarasvathi*, goddess of wisdom and knowledge. Gurram's social and theological critique is unique and radical. Through his powerful poetic literature, Gurram critiqued the social oppression and cultural bondage of "*daridranarayanudu*" the one wedded to suffering and misery, the untouchable in the Indian society.

Biographical sketch and works

Joshua Gurram (1895-1971) was born in Vinukonda, a remote village in the countryside in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh, South India. Veerayya, his father, was a convert to Christianity from a *Jadav*, a shepherd community. Lingamamba, his mother, was a dalit girl from the mission hostel. From his childhood, Gurram affirmed his identity as a human being with self respect, identity, and human dignity. Unfortunately he was a victim destined, along with millions of dalits, to suffer humiliation and discrimination. Gurram resisted humiliation and used poetic literature as a hermeneutical tool.

Gurram became a well-known poet with rare distinction among leading poets of his time. Though he was awarded titles as *Kavi Samrat* (emperor of poetry), *Padma Shri* (one who has wedded with the goddess of wisdom, *Saraswathi), Kavi kokila* (cuckoo of poetry), *Kavitha Visaratha*, *Kavidiggaja, Mathura Srinadha,* and *Visvakavi Samrat*, he was deliberately humiliated many times by the so-called upper caste poets. People used to admire his oratory and poetic talent but when they learned about his social background they would abandon him and even humiliate him. So Gurram's scholarship became a difficult talent to bear. However, he found Telugu poetic literature to be a tool to resist oppression and to raise consciousness among both the oppressive high caste Hindus and the dalit victims.

Gurram's choice of Telugu poetry was initially unwelcomed by the Christian converts from Hinduism who also found the dominant Hindu religious belief excluding them from the social privileges and denying them of their self-identity and human dignity. Gurram's fellow Christians later realized his passion for liberation and his powerful critique against the dominant Hinduism. In Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, the Central Literary Academy awarded him for his writing about the life of Jesus Christ. He served as an elected civil servant, a member to the State Assembly. The Andhra University, one of the premier educational institutions, confirmed the *Kalaprapurna* (Scholar of Arts) title for him. Joshua Kavi Gurram died on July 24, 1971.

Gabbilum: The bat

Gurram wrote thirty volumes of creative, critical, and challenging poetry. Among his works, *Gabbilum,* which means "bat" is an outstanding piece. Gurram was inspired

by the epic Kalidas's "*meghasandesham*." In *meghasandesham* a lover sends his message of love to his lover through a cloud. In *Gabbilum,* Gurram uses a bat as a powerful representative symbol of dalits, to bring to light the pain and agony of dalits to Siva. In Hindu temples of India, bats live in the *sanctum sanctorum*, the holy of the holies—the *Gharbhagudi*—hanging upside down. Dalits are denied entry to the temples in India. But the bat, which is a nocturnal bird, goes into the most sacred place. When it is hanging upside down, close to the ears of Siva, Gurram has the hero of his poetry tell the plight of the dalits.

Gabbilum is an epic poem, a revolutionary masterpiece with high aesthetics, and a searing attack on untouchability. *Gabbilum,* the bat, has the characteristics of a bird—because it flies—as well as a mammal—because it has hair and suckles its young. Since it is nocturnal, when the bat comes out during the day, it is treated with hostility by other birds and mammals. It is isolated as an outcaste by other birds, similar to the discrimination of dalits by the upper caste people. It is considered neither a bird nor a mammal, but instead is a lonely creature and a bad omen in India. The so-called "untouchables" or dalits are considered neither human beings nor even creatures but rather total infidels and invalid ones in the society. Gurram chooses a bat as a most suitable, appropriate, and powerfully representative symbol of dalits to dialogue with Lord Siva in the temple and inform him of the pain and agony which the untouchables go through because of the caste system. Gurram sees the bat as the only one who could understand his own experience of being humiliated, dehumanized, and distorted.

In the poem, Gurram describes the beauty of the land, the pride of the nation, the contribution the untouchables make in serving the nation, and the plight they receive in exchange:

> In this fatted, arrogant world,
>
> Who are friends and relatives to the poor?
>
> Except, worms and creatures of anthills?
>
> or
>
> Who will talk to the low, except
>
> A bird or a bat or a rat

Here Gurram is expressing the social discrimination and the feeling of being lonely in a land of millions of people. Gurram goes on to explain the pain and agony of the outcaste sons of *Arundhati* (a dalit woman whom a *Brahmin* married) as follows:

> Even if his life was doomed, his caste degraded
>
> Destined to poverty and lowly labor by cruel fate
>
> He gladly covers the feet of Bharat's (India's) people with sandals
>
> The land is indebted to him, the poor cobbler! Indeed.
>
> Without his hand's labor
>
> Crops hesitate to ripen
>
> By his sweat he folds the land
>
> But himself, he has little to eat.
>
> Yet, the heavenly Ganges refuses
>
> To wash away the dirt heaped on his head
>
> Snakes fed on milk and ants on sugar
>
> In this blessed land of Karma
>
> But the Goddess of Justice is startled
>
> By the poor cobbler's despised presence
>
> He has iron fetters from mother's arms
>
> His blood is drained by the land
>
> The four-hooded (four castes) Hindu nagaraja (king cobra) hisses aloud
>
> Touched by his smell carried by the breeze

And One day,

Having waved farewell to the setting sun

He sat down to eat his meager meal of gruel

At the end of a long day's back-breaking toil

And stretched on a cot, resting his weary limbs

It was then a bat flew into the hut, a small black, furry ball with a face and nose. Fluttering across his hut, it struck the flame of the castor-oil lamp and put it out, spreading darkness of the night. Instead of getting angry at the bat for blowing out the lamp, listening to the thuds and bumps of the shuttling bat, the son of *Arundathi's* thoughts began racing to remind him about the darkness in the lives of his fellow dalits, their shame and misery, hunger and pain, their lack of homes and friends, their unremitting hardship and unrewarding labor. Seeing a friend in the bat, he warmly welcomes it, saying:

Welcome Queen of Bats, residing in sacred shrines,

Enjoying honor we lowly people can not have,

Convey our greetings to your kinfolk too

Meditating head down in the awnings of temple towers

He then breaks out explaining his tale of woe with tears rolling down his cheeks, and pleads with the bat to represent his life-story to Shiva. The poem goes on to say that unlike Gurram, the untouchable, who is denied access to the *dharshan*—presence—of gods and silenced by the law of karma, the bat can get close to the ears of Lord Shiva when it goes to rest hanging upside down in the *gharbagudi* in the holy sanctuary. He asks the bat to find out why the gods take revenge on him and his fellow dalits. He warns the bat to be careful to narrate his story to Shiva only when the *Poojaris* (priests) are out, for if the priests hear her they will cast her out also for having visited the forbidden house of an outcaste, and thus deny her the privileges of eating the *prasad*—food offered to gods.

Regarding the plight of the untouchables, he goes on to say that it is a heartless society in which thousands of rupees are spent on marrying of the idols; fresh milk is fed to idols but not to the poor and destitute. He profusely thanks the bat for daring to visit him. He exhorts the bat to be courageous when representing his story to Siva because:

Justice has never been a coward

Truth cannot be put to death

There is no need of fear for

A Creature to speak to the Creator

Gurram takes courage to resist the social situation, so he justifies his self-authentication to send a message directly to God, crossing over all sanctions and barriers. Gurram gives call to the fellow dalits not to be afraid to claim their rights.

In the concluding part, with his commitment and yearning for human dignity, equality, justice, and unity of all people across caste and creed, toward one human family, Gurram visualizes liberation as a journey, a destination, and a dwelling place.

O, hermit bat, kindly tell me whether you saw a place

Where the poor do not meet to envy a rich man's face,

Where knowledge grows against the foolish customs of society

Where the child of art grows to youth ignoring caste decrees

Where freedom freely strolls in fields yielding not to the rule

Of hardened heart, prefers to be poor to being a tongue-less tool,

Where people love orphans more than their own children

Kindly tell me where it is: I want to meet those brothers

The place where mother tongue is honored well in lore,

Where mutts, religions rival not as in days of yore,

Where voices of saintly poets sound without fear

Where parents do not teach hatred to their children dear

Where footprints of venomous hypocrites appear not to the eye,

Such a palace, be it a bat's abode, is happy under the sky.

Gurram's agony of suffering of the *Daridranarayana*, his vision for a renewed society with freedom, justice, human dignity and also a religious harmony is powerfully expressed in the above poem and all his writings.

Joshua Gurram's theological methodology

Gurram's poetry as a literary composition conveys the sufferings and hopes, dilemmas and dreams of dalits and their struggles for a new and renewed society. In Gurram's perceptions, one can see the efforts to relate faith to dalit reality (one of brokenness, oppression, and alienation) and catch glimpses of spirituality in struggle, transcendence in suffering, aspirations and hopes for freedom—all of which constitute the roots of dalit liberation in the early twentieth century.

Gurram's dalit consciousness was shaped by his own dalit experience of shame and suffering. Instead of surrendering to such an oppressive system, he rebelled at being discriminated against in the name of caste. Gurram's poetry was filled with a social content that shook the complacency and insensitivity of classical Telugu literary traditions that exclusively extolled the art, aesthetic, and transcendentalism of the dominant high caste poets. Gurram's poetry became a challenging, inspiring, and thought-provoking dalit literature because he presented dalit life from a dalit point of view with dalit insights that formulated a vision of dalit liberation. Speaking to his daughter, Hemalatha Lavanam, about his life and work, Gurram said, "I have learned many lessons in life, under two gurus: poverty and caste-creed discrimination. The first taught me patience and the second taught me to protest against remaining a bonded slave. I decided to break myself free from the shackles of poverty and caste. I took up my sword to fight them. My sword was my poetry. My hatred is not against society, but I hate its life-patterns." Gurram used poetry as the tool to analyze and critique dominant Hindu ideology.

The following is an example of Gurram's expression in poetry. One day, during his childhood, a few upper-caste people drew back with haste on seeing him, which made him so furious that he hit four of them and ran away to his mother to complain. He narrates this event and his mother's response in the following verses:

Crying I told her of the incident,

Hugging me to her breast and kissing me

She said, 'Son, this is an awful country,

But don't complain of caste discrimination;

You'll lose your food, as a Panchama

You have no claim to human rights on your life.

'These gods here won't grant their favors

They will not accept a Panchama's worship

The Lord Jesus Christ alone is your refuge

Adore him, he'll be merciful.'

The power of this poem is felt more in Telugu than the above translation (with due respect to the translator). Gurram's talent to describe the social problems and injustice are powerfully articulated with imagery, symbolism, and scholarship in Telugu literature. Through the symbolic characters and Telugu poetic literature, Gurram analyzes the social reality of caste oppression and demands justice, human dignity, and identity for all people. Gurram challenges Hindu social values and restriction for the dalits and demands that justice be restored to everyone. His theology is based on an interfaith dialogue and critique that is inspired by Jesus Christ, who embraces the untouchables, leads them to the temple, challenges the oppressive structures and who ultimately suffers in the same way the dalits suffer. His theological methodology, therefore, is unique and can be described as a contextual, liberationist, and dialogical method.

Summary and critique

Gurram used Telugu poetic literature as aesthetics to highlight the injustice, oppression, and marginalization done to fellow human beings by the dominant religious system. Gurram's critique of Hinduism and his imagery of a nocturnal bird, the bat, as a representative to God to save him from his sufferings have deep theological insights. Gurram picked the bat and Lord Shiva, though he is aware of many other deities in the Indian context. He picked the bat, which lives in the holiest of the holies in the central temple, because dalits, who are seen as polluted and untouchable, are restricted from entering a Hindu temple. So first, he picks a representative who can understand his state of suffering. Second, Gurram sends the report of his plight and the plight of fellow dalits to Shiva, the god of destruction. Shiva is also an *arthanareeshvara* (half male and half female), and Shiva is *Neelakahanta,* whose throat is bluish because he swallowed the poison and saved the world. Through these symbolic characters Gurram analyzes caste oppression and demands justice.

In the perspectives briefly discussed above, discrimination, suffering, pain, misery, poverty, and oppression are the experience of the activist as well as the people for whom they are advocating. In dalit perspective, the suffering reality is the actual reality and even the reality in which each of them finds the inner strength that gives them hope for liberation. In these perspectives, the suffering reality becomes liberating reality. In other words, their suffering becomes central to the Godhead, not detached or indifferent. Any system that ignores, denies or is unable to experience the suffering reality is therefore irrelevant and does not have any sotereological value. In a post-colonial approach, when we "remember the future" "a future that is open and a past that is unstable and changing" the suffering experience of the dalits and that experience which promises hope also is unstable and changing. When we look to God as the world's future, the suffering reality of God is remembered through the cross, and through the painful experience of the victims in the past. Theological and scientific conversations must take this experience and perspective seriously in order that the God of the future becomes the future of the oppressed.

Dialogue and Hospitality

David C. Ratke

Professor of Religious Studies, Lenoir-Rhyne University

The world is bigger than ever before; and the world is smaller than ever before. It is smaller because technology has made communication more immediate and available over larger distances than ever before in human history. It is possible to talk to nearly anybody nearly anywhere in the world at nearly any time. As I write this, I could check my smartphone or computer or other mobile device and see what the latest headlines are from all over the globe. In many cases, I can see live video from far-flung places like Afghanistan, China, Russia, the Middle East or Europe. The world is bigger, because this avalanche of information reminds me how small and insignificant I am.

That we experience the world as both bigger and smaller points to two important elements of postmodernism: holism[1] and pluralism. I intend here to consider pluralism, although holism lurks in the background as a kind of subtext to the idea of hospitality which I will get to shortly. For now, it is enough to notice that holism is a kind of parallel to this notion that the world is smaller. It is possible (if we want) to see the similarities that unite humans. Humans everywhere seek meaning and value. They seek opportunity and belonging. That humans the world over are similar is not quite the same as holism. However, it is a kind of parallel in that the whole is a way of making sense of the parts. Thinking about what unites humans is also a way of making sense of the parts, of making sense of all the differences between humans.

Pluralism is a feature of life in the twenty-first century. There is no shortage of literature that makes that point. Diana Eck made that case in 2001 with her study *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. Since then Stephen Prothero has accepted her basic conclusions and argued for more religious "literacy" in *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn't* in 2007. More recently and more germane to the pluralism argument, Prothero argued in *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World* against Huston Smith that all religions are not essentially the same.[2] Eboo Patel and the Interfaith Youth Core have developed a

1. This has been a nearly constant refrain of Ted Peters; see, for example, *Anticipating Omega: Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future (Religion Theology, and Natural Science)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 79, and 104–105, or *God—The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 17–18.

2. Huston Smith is only one of the people that Prothero names as a proponent of the idea that all religions are the same. He is perhaps the best-known representative for this idea which is central to *The World's Religions* first published in 1958 under the title of *The Religions of Man*. Prothero, as is clear from the title of this more recent book, thinks that religions are unique, distinctive, and strive after different things. Prothero was not the first to make this argument. S. Mark Heim made a similar and more sophisticated and nuanced argument in *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

kind of "ministry" founded on the notion of plurality.[3] Pluralism is here to stay.

Hospitality and the "other"

What does Christianity have to offer? The answer in a word is hospitality. Hospitality has been a feature of the Christian tradition from the very beginning. Perhaps even from before the beginning. When I was young, I learned about the story of the Tower of Babel and learned that it explained why there were so many languages and furthermore that the multiplicity of these languages was a curse placed on humans. More recently, I have come to see the account in Genesis 11 rather differently. The multiplicity of languages allows humans to say different things in many beautiful ways. The diversity of languages is a kind of blessing allowing us to appreciate the splendor of the variety of human expression. The Tower of Babel account pushes us to consider that God created different nations with different tongues. As such, if God created these different tongues might we not consider that difference and diversity is good and blessed, just as God is good and blessed? If this is the case, might we not then conclude that we ought to be open to others who are in some way different from us (whoever "us" might be)? Finally, does this not demand that we be hospitable to others? That we find ways to talk to one another and share with one another the richness and beauty of each other both individually and corporately?

The account of Abraham and Sarah receiving and welcoming strangers has been commented upon so often that I hardly need to remind us of that account. I will simply state here that whenever I hear this story (which is often, as it is part of the curriculum in a course I teach every semester), I find myself wondering what prompted Abraham and Sarah to welcome these interlopers in their neighborhood into their home. Might it not have been a conviction that they should open their home to strangers who might bless them even if in much more subtle ways than with a baby in their advanced years?

The story of Jonah is a story of a man called to reach out to a strange people. He ran away rather than talk to strangers. However, God sought him and Jonah was forced to meet some people he rather would not have talked to. God asked Jonah to speak to the Ninevites. Jonah did not want to and fled, but was compelled to do as God asked. When Jonah did and the Ninevites turned to God, Jonah was unhappy because God blessed that "conversation" (with the Ninevites) by having mercy on Ninevah. Jonah was angry with God because God was compassionate to the enemy of Israel. Among the conclusions we might draw from this story is that God wants us to speak in love to our enemies. No matter how far we flee and no matter how carefully we hide, God will not be deterred from compelling us to speak to our enemies and recognizing them as children of God worthy of love, mercy, and compassion.

While there are important lessons to draw from Jonah's story, it is also true that it has its limitations. First, Jonah did not willingly speak to the Ninevites. Second, it was not a true exchange of ideas. At least it wasn't in the sense of Jonah hearing about Ninevite religion and culture. Nonetheless, it does say something important about God's character and commitments. God told Jonah to go to the stranger. God hunted Jonah down to the ends of the earth so that the stranger would hear God's word. Finally, God changed his mind about the Ninevites and had mercy upon them. That is, God listened to the Ninevites and did not simply see them as another people to add to God's collection of faithful nations.

3. Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007); see also the Interfaith Youth Core website at www.ifyc.org.

A different kind of story is that of Ruth. Ruth was a foreigner in Israel who chose to stay with her mother-in-law even when it made much more sense to go back home. The opportunities for a good life for Ruth were better at home in Moab than they were for her in Israel. In Israel, she had very few rights as a woman without a husband and a foreigner. Nonetheless, she stayed in order to care for Naomi and provide her with companionship and love. The story ends happily with Ruth marrying a well-placed Israelite with wealth and status. However, the real point here is that a stranger, a woman of a different ethnicity (or nationality) and therefore a different religion, gave her "testimony." Ruth's love, compassion, and faithfulness to Naomi presented a kind of witness from a stranger to Israel's culture and religion. Ruth demonstrated that love, compassion, and faithfulness are not unique or limited to Israel.

In the New Testament, there is no shortage of stories that describe encounters with people of other faiths or ethnicity. There is the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) in which the Samaritan shows by his actions what love, compassion, and mercy are. There is the account of the Syrophoenician woman who stands up to Jesus and challenges him to heal her daughter by arguing that even Gentiles deserve a measure of God's blessing and healing (Mark 7:24–30). There is the account of the encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at a well in that land (John 4:1–26). Like the Syrophoenician woman, the Samaritan woman does not abide by the rules of engagement. Neither does Jesus for that matter. Jesus does most of the talking in this account. He tells the Samaritan woman that the Jews know better and that he is the source of never-ending water that forever will quench her thirst. The woman for her part listens and endeavors to represent her people and her religion well. The point here (and in the case of the Syrophoenician woman) is not so much that the woman wins (or loses) the argument, but rather that Jesus is talking to her. Jesus is talking to one who is not like him. How is she not like Jesus? First, she is a woman (and not a man). Second, she is a sinner (How many husbands has she had?! And the man she's living with now isn't even her lawful husband!) and Jesus is without sin. Finally, she is a Samaritan (who has presumably rejected the covenant and thereby God) whereas Jesus is Jewish (and consequently is one of the chosen people). Their differences do not divide them. Their differences do not cause Jesus to run away in fear of strangers. Indeed he embraces these strangers (even if hesitantly sometimes).[4]

The best example of outreach, conversation, and dialogue with strangers is the Acts of the Apostles. It is from beginning to end, from Pentecost to Paul's ministry in Rome, an account of Christians reaching out to others and often hearing them and encountering those strangers on their own terms even while presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ. The account of the first Pentecost in Acts 2 could be read as a commissioning and blessing of the church to reach out and truly meet others unlike us. The list of nationalities present at the first assembly reads like a United Nations roll call of the first century: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Jews, Phrygians, Pamphylians, Egyptians, Libyans, Romans, Cretans, and Arabs. Is there anybody missing? Acts is often understood (rightly) to be an account of the expansion of the church and of the church's proclamation of the gospel in those first years. However, it is not a proclamation that is unaware or disinterested in the lives, the culture, and convictions of its hearers.

The story of Peter and Cornelius is among the most compelling stories on this theme in Acts. Cornelius really has nothing

4. See also "Jesus' Creation Theology" in this issue, page 179.

going for him. He is an officer in the Roman army which occupies Palestine. He must have been despised as a representative of a hated occupier. Nonetheless, Luke recounts, Cornelius "was a devout man who feared God…; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:2, also v. 22). The center of this account is Peter's vision in which he was told, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" (v. 15). The Spirit, Luke tells us, made the meaning of this puzzling statement clear to Peter when he met Cornelius: "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles" (Acts 10:45). Christians are called, like Peter, to welcome the "other" and know them. One thing that is striking in this passage is that nothing is said about Cornelius having to make himself into something he is not. Cornelius is not asked or told to give up his Roman identity. Indeed, Luke seems to suggest that his identity has been made clean. It is not longer profane.

The account of the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 confirms this. Luke reports that there were some who were gathered that insisted that the Gentiles become Jewish: "It is necessary for them [the Gentiles] to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5, also v. 1). Peter disagreed. He said that God has given them the Holy Spirit, cleansed their hearts, and "made no distinction between them and us" (Acts 15:9). In fact, the conversion of the Gentiles (presumably of their hearts and not their ethnicity) "brought great joy" (Acts 15:3). People who are not like us are not to be feared or avoided. In fact, people who are not like us but have the Spirit are to be celebrated because they have the Spirit.

One of the important narrative strands in the Bible is that the people of God are becoming ever larger. God's chosen people, at the very beginning, are two people. They are an old man and his wife (Abraham and Sarah) who are well past child-bearing age. Even at the end of Genesis, God's chosen people cannot number more than a few dozen: Jacob and Rachel and their twelve sons, along with their wives and children. In Exodus, hospitality and inclusion—of a sort—are extended to sojourners, aliens, and others who live in the midst of the Israelites. In the New Testament, Paul and Peter challenge the church to open the doors to everybody who "confesses that Jesus is Lord" and have presumably received the Holy Spirit. All are included. All are to be welcomed. The church is radically inclusive and radically relational.

A relational God

One reason perhaps that the church is inclusive and relational is because God is inclusive and relational. This is a, if not the, primary meaning or significance of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is, as Ted Peters likes to say, not a problem of arithmetic.[5] How can 1 + 1 + 1 = 1? This kind of question misses the point. The point is that the Trinity is a way of talking about the relational character of God.

The examination of the Bible passages above should already alert us that God seeks relationships with all humans—and arguably all creatures—in the world. This is the economic Trinity. This is God in the world, the Trinitarian God active in the world. The term "economic" here has to do with its Greek root: "oikos" or "household." The world is God's "house." As such, God is sovereign of and cares for the world. The clearest and most succinct expression of this economic Trinity is the Apostles' Creed.

The first article of the creed confesses that God is the "creator of heaven and earth." This article establishes the sovereignty or authority of God. At the same time, it establishes a relationship to the world. The

5. Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 17–18; see also Peters, *God—The World's Future*, 99.

first person of the Trinity is relational.

The second article of the creed confesses that Jesus has "ascended into heaven" and judges the "living and the dead." The divinity of Jesus or at least the authority of Jesus is hereby asserted. Less apparent is that Jesus cares. And yet, this article reminds us that Jesus was "born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, [and] was crucified, died, and was buried." That Jesus was born and suffered reminds us that he was human. It is reasonable to suppose that Jesus became human in order to be like us. God became human so as to better understand and identify with us. Did God need to do that? Probably not. However perhaps we need to be reminded that God cares about us and creation, and that God understands and identifies with us.

Finally, the third article does not explicitly say anything about the activity of God the Spirit. However, the church, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting are all mentioned in the same breath. This suggests that God the Spirit is somehow connected to these earthly realities. The force of the Creed is to establish the authority and arguably the divinity of the three persons of the godhead, but also to establish the relationship between the three persons of the godhead and the world. God creates, rules over, redeems, sustains, and sanctifies the world.

A relational doctrine of the Trinity

The Apostles' Creed does not say much about the relationship between each of the three persons of the Trinity. How is the Father related to the Son? To the Holy Spirit? And how is the Spirit related to Jesus the Christ? This is the subject of the teaching of the immanent Trinity. Christians have usually declared that the three persons of the Trinity are in relationship with one another. More recently, some theologians have become preoccupied with how three persons can be one God. This matter, as I have already mentioned, is the wrong question. What does the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity tell us about God? This is the proper question.

One thing that we already know is that God is relational. Scripture is clear about this, as I have already demonstrated. That this is so is apparent from the Trinity itself. Whatever we mean by "persons" when speaking about the Trinity, it is clear that at the heart of the Trinity we are talking about relationships. William Placher notes that if we begin our thinking about the Trinity by asking if the one God is three persons, it's difficult to get to that reality of community and relationality. However, this "is not the logic of Trinitarian thought. Rather, Christians begin with three, and the doctrine of the Trinity is the explanation of their oneness."[6] Christopher Morse makes a similar point in a statement evocative of Peters' comment that we ought to leave arithmetic out of it: "the oneness of God is not to be thought of as a quantitative numerical unit but as a relational unity."[7] So far, the key words are relational, unity, and persons.

What does "person" mean in this context? This is not as straightforward as we might think. If we think of "person" in the same sense that you are/I am a person, this doesn't quite seem to be what is intended. After all, since the Enlightenment we have an inclination to think that each of us is a more or less autonomous and isolated individual.[8]

6. William C. Placher, *The Triune God: An Essay in Postliberal Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 136, also pp. 119–121.

7. Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*, 2nd ed. (New York: Continuum, 2009), 136.

8. Placher, *The Triune God*, 129; also Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 203.

This image has two difficulties. The first is that it almost necessarily leads to a kind of tritheism. The second is that this image of an aloof entity is at odds with the active, engaged, and involved God that Christianity asserts. Indeed, one might argue that the entire witness of Scripture is to say that God is involved in the history of Israel and the church and all of creation. This Trinity business seems to be a complicated affair. When we say that there are three persons in the Trinity, what exactly is meant by "person" in this context?

Placher, following Aquinas, suggests that whatever we might say about "person," it is inextricably tied with "relation." In fact, "persons *are* relations."[9] His point is affirmed by Elizabeth Johnson (and others) before him. Johnson says, "as the outcome of theological reflection on the Christian experience of relationship to God, [the Trinity] is a symbol that indirectly points to God's relationality, at first with reference to the world and then with reference to God's own mystery."[10] Catherine Mowry LaCugna is even more emphatic:

> The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately… a teaching not about the abstract nature of God, nor about God in isolation from everything other than God, but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other. Trinitarian theology could be described as par excellence a theology of relationship, which explores the mysteries of love, relationship, personhood and communion within the framework of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ and the activity of the Spirit.[11]

A good number of theologians agree that an important feature of the doctrine of the Trinity is that it embeds relationality in the very being of God.

The argument I have been pushing toward is that God is inherently relational. Scripture witnesses to the relational nature of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is an expression of that scripture witness to God's relational nature.

If we are to take seriously the notion in Gen 1:26–27 that humans are created in the image of God, I think it is reasonable to assume that we are relational because God is relational. I think that it is also reasonable to conclude that if God has taken pains to push Israel and the people of God to reach out to others in mutual dialogue and be "mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Rom 1:12). This history of the people of God has been one where they continually have been compelled to expand their own self-identity to include others, whoever those "others" might be. It is not simply a matter of expanding our self-identity. Central to this endeavor has been the encounter or the conversation. It is not entirely an accident that Christ is the "Word." Conversation and dialogue are not possible without words. That Christ is the Word suggests that it is in Christ that God "talks" to us who are "other" to God. In like manner, we might use our words (and actions) to talk to those who are "other" to us, and, like us, "other" to God. Scripture is an account of, if you will, God's hospitality. God does not have to communicate with us, but God does. God does not have to share the work of creation with us, but God does. God does not have to share the hope of a future of justice and peace, but God does. Hospitality and relationality are, I think, essentially the same thing. More than that, hospitality and relationality are not just about sharing ourselves and our gifts with others, but also receiving others and their gifts.

9. Placher, *The Triune God*, 143.

10. Johnson, *She Who Is*, 204–205, also p. 216.

11. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 1.

Hummingbirds Make Stars Possible: Exploring and Celebrating Ted's "Retroactive Ontology"

Robert John Russell

Ian G. Barbour Professor of Theology and Science in Residence, Graduate Theological Union, Founder and Director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences

I am very grateful to the organizers of this publication for inviting me to contribute an essay, even if it is far too brief and schematic, which reflects, even only in part, my immense gratitude to Ted Peters. Ted and I have interacted for nearly three decades, both verbally, in writing, through Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS) programs and conferences and in the numerous courses that we co-taught. Through it all, I have learned a tremendous amount about theology from this seasoned and immensely reasonable scholar. I have reveled in his unique interaction between theology and science in such areas as theistic evolution, stem cell research, and Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence/astrobiology, and I have gained a glistening perspective and a keen sense of wisdom about what is truly important in theology from him. For this and many more things, I owe Ted an immense sense of gratitude and joy.

Here, within the confines of a short essay, I wish to lift up and examine one of Ted Peters' most important concepts as a form of praise to him. In a complex, dense and scintillating discussion, Peters tells us about this remarkable concept, "retroactive ontology," in his splendid anthology, *Anticipating Omega*[1]. According to Peters,

> Our final future will retroactively transform who we are today. It will determine who we had been as we anticipated who we would become. I would like to call this line of thinking *retroactive ontology*. The fundamental insight is that our being is determined by, and defined by, our future. The transformed reality promised by God is the ground for all our reality that anticipates it… The meaning and even being of the past is contingent on its future. God's omega redefines—actually defines—all that has gone before. Who we are now is dependent on who we will be at omega.[2]

Here we find several interwoven claims both in this paragraph and in its surrounding text. I will highlight them before focusing on one in this paper.

First, the "future" Peters has in mind is really two distinct futures, the proximate and the ultimate future, and both are effective in the present. The crucial point is that they "are not separated into a short time and a long time. Rather, both are almost present, almost but not quite fully here now. Both are as close to us as is the next moment."[3] Next is the fundamental importance of this double future. According to Peters, God's creation of

1. Ted Peters, *Anticipating Omega: Science, Faith, and Our Ultimate Future* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). See also "Will God Save the World or Not?" in this issue, page 290.

2. Ibid., 12.

3. Ibid., 14.

the present moment is to give it a future. "To be is to have a future… (T)he way God gives being is to give a future…. God is moment to moment giving to all of reality its future."[4] Third, God has what Peters calls a "double relationship to the created order," one that is both positive and negative. God's positive relation to time and the created order is that God upholds and supports all that is as its ground of being. Without God's positive relation to the created order, all that is would simply cease to be. God's negative relation to time is that "by giving (it) a new future God releases the present from the grip of the past….Past causes do not hold the present moment in the grip of absolute determinism.[5] The present moment is open to change, open to what is new." Finally, Peters recognizes that while past causes may inform the present moment, "God opens up an array of potentials (in the present) that await actualization (in the future). The way the creatures within the world behave determines which potentials become actualized."[6]

In light of this rich array of insights and directions for conversation, I want to focus on Peters' central notion of "retroactive ontology." By this term Peters means God's causality from the immediate future on the present. I will separate this out from Peters' notion of "prolepsis,"[7] the manifestation and appearance in history (at the original Easter) of the eschatological Risen Lord of the New Creation. Prolepsis deserves its own distinctive discussion at a later time.

Let the reader note: For the purposes of this paper I will make the perhaps unexpected assumption, given one reading of my previous work, that the natural world is "open" at many, if not all, levels of complexity such as from quarks to brain states.[8] The problem is that, for the professional field of theology and science, one must restrict oneself to interpreting well-proven theories in science, not speculating on what one hopes may be true to the world as such. Only quantum mechanics gives us the opportunity to interpret the world in such an open and indeterministic character[9].

4. Ibid., 13.

5. Ibid. Below I will suggest that the case needed to support Peters' claim is harder if nature is deterministic at all levels, and I will suggest that, in fact, nature is indeterministic at most, if not all, levels.

6. Ibid., 13–14. Here determining factors come from the behavior of creatures rather than entirely from the underlying physical causes, suggesting again that the physical world is indeterministic.

7. For a discussion of "prolepsis," see "Will God Save the World or Not?" in this issue, page 290.

8. I write "unexpected" because many who have commented on my writings have assumed that since my writings tend to deal with quantum mechanics when it comes to the "open" character of nature (i.e., its ontological indeterminacy) I only believe that nature is open at the subatomic level. This of course is a false assumption, as I have suggested several times in writing. I happen to believe, theologically, that nature is open at many, perhaps all, levels, to non-interventionist divine action. However the field of theology and science must rely on proven theories in science if it is to interpret them philosophically (do they portray nature as open or closed?) and then use this interpretation for a theology of divine action. Here it is problematic to claim that other sciences besides quantum mechanics (and perhaps those involved in the mind-brain problem) portray the world as ontologically indeterministic. Hence the "unexpectedness" of my present assumption. In short, I am relying here more on my belief in the openness of nature on many, perhaps all, levels of complexity than on its track record in the sciences of the macroscopic world.

9. My arguments against the claims for such ontological openness by John Polkinghorne (referring to chaos theory) and Arthur Peacocke (referring to the "universe-as-a-whole") are well known. See for example, Robert John Russell, *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega: The Creative Mutual Interaction of Theology and Science* (Fortress Press, 2008), Chapters 4–5.

Nevertheless, I will here make the bold leap of faith and assume that the world is open to divine action at every level of complexity (whether or not the *current* sciences of these levels warrants such an assumption[10]). I think that this assumption is required if we are to appreciate and extend Peters' position in a creative way. Conversely, it might be much harder to do so if the world were one of Newtonian mechanism—which it is clearly not.

With this in mind, I would like to compare what can be called the "ordinary open ontology" of nature to Peters' view of retroactive ontology. According to the ordinary view of an open ontology, the present, time t, contains a set of future possibilities, time t+T, and nature and/or God actualizes one of them to make a specific future real. For example, according to this ontology, some stars such as our sun contain futures in which hummingbirds are possible given the right evolutionary conditions on the right planet, etc., and nature and/or God actualizes that future, thus creating hummingbirds in the future out of the possibilities of the present. A standard example of this approach is theistic evolution in which God works "in, with and under" natural processes, to use Arthur Peacocke's beautiful phrase, to bring about biological complexity and ultimately sentient life from the past inorganic world.

Now we can see the truly distinctive claim Peters makes about nature and divine action. According to his "retroactive ontology," since hummingbirds are real now at time t+T, stars of a certain kind must have been possible in the past at a time t, namely those such as our sun and its predecessor star in which the future of our sun, and the far future of its predecessor star, contains hummingbirds. So time t+T when hummingbirds are real requires that at a time t stars such as our sun and its predecessor must have been real because they have within their future possibilities the reality of hummingbirds. So the reality of hummingbirds requires that certain kinds of stars existed in the past.

We can put this in a simplified grammar. Suppose state A is the present state at time t (e.g., stars) and state B is the future state at time t+T (e.g., stars plus planets and hummingbirds). Then:

state A at time t in the present = the actual present + its multiple potential futures including state B at time t+T

state B at time t+T in the future = the actual future chosen or realized from among the multiple potential futures of state A at time t

With this in place, we can compare the ordinary ontology we typically assume with Peters' idea of retroactive ontology.

Ordinary ontology: t leads to t+T from the possibilities of t,

A precedes B

Retroactive ontology: t+T leads to t in which t+T is possible,

B precedes A

This is truly a revolutionary concept!

Another way to describe the relation between ordinary and retroactive ontology is this: From the ordinary perspective, today there are many possible futures; tomorrow there is only one, so God narrows the range of possibilities in the present as it leads to the future. From the retroactive perspective, there is only one tomorrow that God wants, so God

10. The word "current" is meant to acknowledge John Polkinghorne's visionary agenda that, if we believe God and humans act without intervention in the world, the world must be indeterministic even at the macroscopic level. Thus, in turn, we should search for new theories of the science of chaos in which indeterminism would be favored over current theories which are obviously deterministic. He refers to such new theories as "holistic chaos." See John Polkinghorne, *Faith of a Physicist* (Augsburg Fortress, 1996), Chapters 1 and 4.

ensures that the possibility that that tomorrow is at least one of several possibilities today, which include that future state, tomorrow, in order that it becomes the actual future.

Now let us spell this out in more detail. From Peters' perspective on retroactive ontology, God both sustains ("protects") the entire history of nature in being and releases the determining factors of the past, opening the past to many new future possibilities. As before, this requires two assumptions.[11] The first, already noted above, is that natural causality (i.e., the efficient causal factors in nature which physics describes) are predispositional, not deterministic. By predispositional, I mean more than the kind of "mere chance" which signals our epistemic ignorance of what are in fact real underlying deterministic causes. I mean instead genuine ontological indeterminism at many, perhaps all, levels of complexity. Note: whether science supports this is a question for ongoing research.[12] The second is novel: I want to combine such indeterministic efficient causality (the past affects the present) with Peters' retroactive causality (the future affects the present). Here then causality works in both directions in time.

With this, we arrive at a model of retroactive causality in its full bloom. Following Peters, it includes four ideas:

1. God *eliminates* some predispositional factors in the present that might, working together, have completely shaped the future from the present set of possible futures.
2. God *leaves* in place some predispositional factors that tend to shape the future, which God desires from the present set of possible futures.[13]
3. God *creates* new predispositional factors in the present that shape the future to be different from the present and lead to the future, which God desires.
4. God does all three of these from "the immediate future."

It is the fourth idea in conjunction with the first three which, in my opinion, most sharply distinguishes Peters' view from others working on this problem, and to which we most clearly owe Peters a debt of gratitude.

I will end this brief essay by pointing to new areas in research physics, which one might explore if one started from Peters' view as described above. This would primarily include an assessment of formulations in physics in which causality in nature works both from the future and from the past, the so-called "time symmetric" formulations of physics. Although it might seem unlikely, we actually find such formulations for both classical electromagnetism and quantum mechanics.[14] These provide evidence for the fertility of the idea of retroactive ontology, and in turn a fitting tribute to Ted Peters' lifelong work on this topic.

11. Actually, this scheme might work in a deterministic world such as the Newtonian mechanistic one but it would rely on an interventionist theory of divine agency. For related details, see my *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega*, Chapters 4–5.

12. See the Vatican Observatory/CTNS series on "scientific perspectives on divine action," summaries of which are available at: www.ctns.org/books.html.

13. The first two lines of thinking are vaguely reminiscent of Whitehead, who includes not allowing all the effect of the causes of the past to affect the future (cf. Whitehead's "negative prehension") and allowing those causes of the past which do partially affect the future (cf. his "positive prehension").

14. The reader might find Chapter 6 of my current publication helpful: *Time in Eternity: Pannenberg, Physics and Cosmology in Creative Mutual Interaction* (University of Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

Apples and the Apocalypse

Jane E. Strohl

Professor of Reformation History and Theology; First Lutheran, Los Angeles/Southwest California Synod Chair in Reformation Theology and History, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Graduate Theological Union

Several years ago, I was part of a three-person panel doing an entrance interview for a candidate for ordained ministry. When asked about his call, the candidate told us that he felt compelled to carry the news of judgment to people and make them mindful of the end of the world, which was bearing down upon us all. He was thankful, he said, that none of his relationships with women had ever worked out, because now he would not have to agonize over the fate of spouse and children. The man knew these were hard words for people to hear, especially for those with families, but they could not be ignored any longer. The world went its foolish, sinful way as if God were indifferent. He feared it was too late, but nonetheless he must try to bring people to repentance. One of the members of the committee asked the man where the gospel of God's freely given grace to sinners fit into his theology. He confirmed that good news ardently but did not seem concerned about integrating it with his apocalyptic convictions. The committee was in shock. We sent him off for a cup of coffee and deliberated. As troubling as we found his focus on the end times and the judgment of God, we had to admit that it had biblical warrant as well as confessional support.

In all of the synoptic Gospels Jesus forewarns his hearers of the cosmic disaster destined to befall the earth, a cataclysm he expects them to endure in their lifetime (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

> Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if any one says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "Look, there he is!" do not believe it. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show sign and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand.
>
> But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darken, and the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the ends of heaven (Mark 13:18–27, RSV).

Article XVII of the Augsburg Confession echoes this expectation of a majestic and for some, horrific end.

> They also teach that at the consummation of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will bring to life all the dead. He will give eternal life and endless joy to the righteous and elect, but he will condemn the ungodly and the devils to endless torment (Latin text).

Article XVII of the Apology is quite brief:

> The opponents accept article seventeen without qualification. In it we confess that Christ will appear at the consummation of the world and will raise up all the dead, giving eternal life and eternal joys to the godly but condemning the ungodly to endless torment with the devil.

For a younger generation of believers, theologians and pastors, this doctrine, readily accepted by both sides in the religious debates at the Diet of Augsburg, is often very problematic. The theo-logic of the evangelical gospel points to universalism. After all, when every human being is *simul justus et peccator*, how could God weed out the ungodly from the godly? Moreover, if first and foremost the God of our Lord Jesus Christ is gracious, why would God want to do such a thing? When the concept of eschatology enters the theological conversation, it will usually be as realized eschatology. How is the power of the resurrection active in us today? How is the Spirit guiding us into the ways of justice and peace? This is what matters here and now. The Spirit may well be driving us to the eschaton also, but what is a Christian to do about that? It is a bit like the posture of northern Californians. The "big one," the earthquake that will rupture gas lines and create a conflagration, put seismic retrofitting to the ultimate test and undoubtedly be an agent of death, could come anytime (soon, according to seismologists, is getting sooner now that we have entered a new century). The most you can do is stockpile supplies in your garage. Then you go on with a non-earthquake centered life, hoping you will remember periodically to replace the items with an expiration date in your emergency collection.

"If I knew the world were going to end tomorrow, I would go out and plant an apple tree today." Although never verified in his works, this saying has long been attributed to Luther. If it is not genuine Luther, it is *echt lutherisch*. It reflects his confident, down-to-earth sense of discipleship. It is God's will that we live our lives in the world and for the world. Everyone carries multiple vocations—in the workplace, in the family, in the community. Some days the best you can do is put one foot in front of another. Other times the mundane becomes transcendent. For Luther, anticipating the heavenly kingdom to come with some sort of warm-up practice on earth is unnecessary. As he tartly observes, there is no need to design one's own crosses to bear— such as the monastic requirements of poverty, chastity and obedience—when one can count on life to bring more than enough such heuristic devices along the way. Moreover, the experience of redemption manifests itself in the seemingly inglorious, in the ability of the mother, the teacher, the restaurant manager, or the assembly line worker to reach beyond their own self-love and love their neighbors with true generosity. It is in the planting of apple trees—visiting the sick, staving off foreclosures, protecting abused animals, cleaning polluted waters—that the kingdom of God is made known here and now.

Luther argues that the real challenge is living *in* the world without becoming *of* it, not one-upping the world from the outset by withdrawing into a realm of allegedly superior righteousness. After all, how was your neighbor well served by your vow of chastity, especially when it had been extorted from you at an age when you simply did not know yourself well enough to make such a commitment? What merit was there for anyone if you sat in your monastery knowing that though circumstances insured that you would keep that vow in deed, in your heart you broke it daily? This situation was, for Luther, one of the signs of the impending end. Something was fatally amiss when the church, the self-proclaimed body of Christ, became the instrument of violating consciences and did so with indifference. Here is the heart of Luther's intense apocalyptic expectation. The pope shamelessly revealed

himself as the antichrist, the church was his whore, and the gospel, the Spirit's legitimate offspring, hadn't a prayer.

It was at ground level, a kind of Occupy Movement of the faith, that the battle had to be waged. Luther called for faithful pastors to preach and teach; he was convinced that the Word would do it all. He summoned the faithful to step up to the plate and confess the true faith both by the way they worshipped and by the way they lived lives of unexceptional discipleship. God and the angels look down from heaven, see a father changing a diaper, and laugh with delight because they know he does this unappetizing task in faith. In later years, that father faithfully attends science fairs and band concerts. He stands outside Target to get signatures on petitions supporting school bonds and opposing the closure of the local hospital. A whole community of children becomes his concern. And the angels keep laughing. Luther's doctrine of vocation has been an extraordinary gift to the church in its ability to dignify difficult, sometimes tedious tasks without romanticizing them. Toilet training your offspring, tending to a mentally addled relative, sorting out a difficult marriage, coping with a narcissistic boss—these are not such stuff as dreams are made of, but they are the stuff of Christian discipleship. We do not get to pick our relatives; we do not get to pick our neighbors either. By the grace of Christ, we learn to serve them as they need to be served and to be at peace with it. One could argue that this rigorous schooling in the discipline of generosity is the very presence of Christ's kingdom among us. That is the "apple tree" side of Luther. We are not called to look over our shoulder to make sure that we have secured God's favor. We are not called to look ahead, wondering if we are definitely in God's "keeper" category to be saved for eternity. We are called to keep our noses to the ground of the world that we know and to live our lives so that others may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

Yet there was another side to Luther's vision of the world as well. He did not always sit back contentedly to face the creation's future with an act of gardening. There is an urgency in his preaching when he talks about the imminent arrival of *den jungsten Tag* and a surging fury that will ultimately render the world and its affairs irrelevant. Indeed, he regularly exhorts his hearers to pray fervently for the arrival of the Last Day. For Christians it should be the object of eager, joyous anticipation, despite the misery it will bring to much of humankind. This is the moment when the prayers of one's lifetime are fulfilled: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." On the other side of the grave and judgment lie safety and rest. There need be no more daily trips to the drowning waters so that the old Adam may die and the new Adam may confidently emerge. There need be no more exhausting vigilance against the snares of the evil one and the insidiousness of sin. But for the Christian in this life the level of the danger of terrorism is code red every day. Luther shrewdly pointed out that temptation did not usually make a full frontal attack. If we were told flat out to commit adultery or murder, to steal from our neighbor, or tell God to kiss off, we would know exactly what and whom we were up against. We could just say no, turn our backs and get on with our discipleship. However, most of the time, we play the devil's fool. The entrance of original sin into the world sets the pattern.

In his "Lectures on Genesis" Luther portrays Eve as naïve and careless rather than corrupt and scheming. She wanders the garden, respecting the command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (It is interesting that the first liturgical act of our first ancestors consisted of a not-doing—do

not touch that tree!) Luther speculates that the serpent did not look like a serpent as we know them, but rather was appealing in appearance, perhaps something like a little puppy dog. How was Eve to know? She hadn't been around the block a time or two, because at that point in the history of our race there was no block, no accumulated wisdom to learn from. So she enters into conversation with her fellow creature, who poses questions that she answers thoughtfully. And then the wily animal slips her one, a kind of theological roofie, that seduces her. "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4–5 RSV). Eve ends up positioned over against God, standing in judgment of God's intentions. "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate…" (Gen 3:6 RSV). For Luther this is the beginning of the end. This first ding in the windshield quickly spreads to shatter the whole expanse of glass. Eve eats of the fruit; Adam eats of the fruit. They recognize their nakedness as something shameful, which may be the beginning of humanity's age-old suspicion of the flesh. They hide from God; they lie to God. They play the blame game, Adam going so far as to suggest that none of this would even have happened if God had not brought Eve into the picture.

There is the etiology of original sin—a moment of unwitting foolishness leads to an entrenched inability to fear, love, and trust God. Then follows a rapacious self-centeredness—*incurvaus in se*—that has no heart for the neighbor's need when its own advantage is at stake. Yet even in the midst of this tragedy, there are unmistakable seeds of hope. Although God had told Adam and Eve that they would die if they ate the fruit of the tree, God spares their lives. They can no longer remain in the garden; they cannot return to their state of vulnerable innocence. God metes out punishment, but it is important to note what God does not impose. Adam and Eve do not lose the companionship of each other. They are not forced to face the sadly altered future alone. Indeed, one finds here the root of Luther's extraordinary enthusiasm for marriage. The fact that it did not remain a sacrament in Lutheran churches in no way implied a diminishment of its status in Lutheran theology. Sacraments are God's gift to believers to seal before their very eyes and upon their mortal flesh the forgiveness of their sins and the promise of the life to come for Christ's sake. Marriage is not designed to do that. It originated before the fall, when God presented Eve to Adam, and the man recognized her as "bone of my bone." Marriage is part of the foundation of creation, the necessary precursor to God's desire that creatures be fruitful and multiply. It by no means pertains exclusively to Christians; people of all tribes and nations have some form of marriage, and it does not communicate the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake.

In his commentary on the fall story, Luther indulges in a little imaginative supposition. He finds it likely that Eve comforts the downcast Adam with a kind of glass half-full analysis of God's judgment upon them. Rather than lament the bitter loss they will suffer, she sees instead the surprising generosity of God toward the couple. She focuses on the issue of progeny. God has not taken from them the power to procreate. Indeed, God has promised that from their seed shall come the one who will avenge them by bruising the serpent's head. Here one sees the two rivers of Luther's eschatological thought rising from the same headwaters. There is the ongoing daily discipline of family life. Sustaining a marriage is never easy. Luther is keenly aware of the vulnerabilities afflicting husband and wife at the very heart of their relationship. Add to that the responsibility for children,

and the challenge of one's discipleship becomes clear. Communicating clearly and remaining faithful on the one hand, raising godly children and preparing them for useful vocations on the other—this is the work that Adam and Eve take up when they leave paradise. It has remained the divine charge given to humanity ever since. So the cultural patterns of mating and family life take shape, and no matter how imminent the end times may seem, communities still make provision for the education of the young and their appropriate, publicly recognized mating.

At the same time, it is this very coupling that brings to pass the salvation that triumphs over the old age of sinfulness and inaugurates the eternal kingdom of God. Contrary to their expectations, Adam and Eve did not bring the seed of redemption into the world, but they began the generations of life that would finally end in the birth of Jesus. It is for this reason that fertility is of such paramount concern throughout the patriarchal and matriarchal narratives. The issue is not that women must be able to drop babies in order to be included in God's saving work. Rather, it is a sign of the everyday nature of God's work among us that birthing babies, something that generally does come naturally, serves as the means of divine action. Sarah is not only the quiet helpmeet who modestly remains in the kitchen, preparing a meal for Abraham and his three mysterious guests. She is also the prophetess who reminds her tenderhearted husband that God's promise was given to Isaac, their son, the one she bore in her old age after suffering the contempt of Hagar and Abraham's illegitimate son Ishmael. She does not rest until her husband gets rid of the threat they pose.

The matriarchs fiercely defend the right to participate in bearing the line of sons, through which God fulfills the promise first made to Abraham. This is brazenly clear in the story of Tamar. She has the misfortune of being mated to Judah's firstborn, an impious miscreant whom God strikes dead. Judah then betroths her to his second son, the notorious Onan, who inflicts upon Tamar an act of heinous *coitus interruptus*. God strikes Onan down for having made a mockery of God's command to be fruitful and multiply. Luther also castigates the deceased for his appalling abuse of Tamar.[1] Playing fast and loose with a woman at the peak of her sexual desire is not good care of the neighbor.

The perpetuation of family life from generation to generation does not seem fraught with eschatological desperation. It is the most business-as-usual of human experiences. Its necessity remains—"Be fruitful and multiply" is a standing order—but its urgency fades. While Eve or Sarah may have thought the fulfillment of God's promise was as close as the maturation of her son, they both learn otherwise. The women of Israel do not give up. They continue faithfully bearing offspring, but in some way, the birth of a child is paradoxical. One is always hoping that this is the one who will save Israel, that is, bring in God's kingdom. At the same time, a child is welcomed as an agent of continuity, of the enduring of things as they are. Consequently, they need to be socialized, educated, and married off.

The apocalypse and the apple tree—for Luther they represent the two poles of the believer's life from the time of the fall through each successive chapter of God's story of salvation. Such a paradox cannot be resolved; it needs to be managed. Over time, the arc of movement favors one pole and then the other, moving back and forth as needed to re-establish the balance. The "now" and the "not yet," so essential to Paul's understanding of the gospel, are foundational for Luther's as well. The key doctrines of his theology—simultaneously saint and sinner, living in two kingdoms, knowing fully by the light of glory what is now ours only by

1. LW 7, 20-21.

the light of faith, the duality of God's word as law and gospel—generate tensions in the life of the believer that function as strategies for redemption but are not the goal. The internal conflicts of individual believers and faith communities cry out for release, which can come only with the passing of the old order and the establishment of the new. Then the Christian will no longer be saint and sinner but wholly saint. She will not hear the Word of God as law and gospel but solely as the joyous proclamation of God's love, for there will be no further need for the second use of the law that drives the sinner to repentance and opens him to mercy. God will reign directly, no longer requiring the cover of masks to act in the kingdom of the left hand. What has been seen through a glass darkly will become clear, even radiant, as the hidden God reveals Godself as unequivocally our champion, keeping faith with the Son and with us that not one whom the Father has given the Son will be lost.

The struggle to remain faithful in this life is fierce. Temptations great and small can cast us down at any moment. Moreover, the neighbors around us whom we are called to serve with unending generosity are often hard to be in the same room with, let alone lay down our lives for. At heart, human beings act like unholy narcissists, and such a person is not easy on one's own sanity. The life of the believer, the simultaneously saint and sinner, is unsustainable over the long haul. It is the life of a cat on a hot tin roof, lifting one paw after the other to avoid being burned and hoping in vain to jump down. Only God can provide the means of escape. No wonder the believer prays fervently, "Thy kingdom come," and now would be the perfect time.

Finally, there is the opaqueness of God's, and even Christ's, work in the world. There is so much in our experience that urges doubt, if not unbelief, upon us. From personal tragedy to cultural genocide to environmental cataclysm, it does not seem that God loves all that God has made after all. And yet, we are commanded to soldier on as if all matter of things will be well. One of the most striking traits of Luther's new Adam and Eve is their feistiness in prayer. On one hand, Luther urges the believer to cast the promise of God into the teeth of the tempter when he threatens and cajoles. "This word is true for me," I can say, "but not for you, so just get off my back." At the same time, Luther admonishes the Christian to get into God's face with this very same promise. It is as if by faith we now have a debt to call in. God cannot change God's mind because we can hold God to the promise. Now that God has by God's own doing become our God, we are in danger of giving our *incurvatus in se* nature a new lease on life, locking God into position in our warped field of vision.

The apocalyptic cast of Luther's thought is also rooted in his interpretation of the historical events of his day. According to the theology of the cross, it should not be possible to read the final judgments of God from the vicissitudes of history. However, for Luther the world had entered the last times, and the veil was lifting between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. Riddled with contempt for God and arrogant sinning, the world practically taunted God into inflicting punishment. The gospel had emerged with a clarity unparalleled since the time of the apostles. It revealed to Luther the brazen arrival of the antichrist in the abomination of the papal office. Any man who occupied the throne of St. Peter participated in its corruption, even if he were not himself corrupt. The pope was the architect of the overthrow of the gospel, putting a price on grace for the faithful that Christ had already paid. The church itself, the mother of the faithful, proved to be anything but. Moreover, the problem was not just the Roman Church. The list of betrayers kept growing. The false practice and teaching and the pastorally criminal intent of Rome, the *Schwaermer*, Zwingli, the Anabaptists, and the

Jews turned them into ultimate enemies. They made a mockery of the gospel; they refused to be corrected; they robbed countless souls of the true forgiveness and comfort given in Christ Jesus. To behave this way was for Luther the devil's work, and consequently he regarded them as the devil's agents. In some sense this made them both more and less than human—able to do eternal harm, no longer able to claim the true (evangelical) gospel as *pro me*, and deserving of no quarter from their opponents (as Luther's polemics make dramatically clear).

Unlike some of his contemporaries (and ours), Luther did not determine a specific date for the Lord's arrival and chastised those who did. Yet his expectation of the end as imminent and devastating for those who played fast and loose with the gospel was unequivocal. He did not live to see it, anymore than St. Paul did or we have. Such apocalyptic views are part of the very structure of Christianity and arise repeatedly. They are not so much a conclusion drawn from the present reality, as they are a lens brought to the interpretation of what one sees. Their failure to materialize does not discredit them but rather simply defers them. Luther's sixteenth-century vision of the approaching Last Day may be of historical interest to contemporary Lutherans, but our own eschatological projections will be peopled very differently.

Not long ago Ted Peters had prepared a survey that he made available to the seminary community. The subject was the possible arrival of aliens on our planet and the implications that would have for the Christian faith as we have defined it. I told my teenaged daughter about the questionnaire, and she was once again impressed by "Uncle Ted's" beat-of-a-different-drummer mind. She in turn told her erstwhile boyfriend, a young man who, for all I could tell, had never been touched by the possibilities of Christian faith, or any faith for that matter. He had recently made an award-winning film on zombies; other life or semi-life forms were his passion. The idea that the church would care about the possibility of extraterrestrial beings impressed him greatly. So much so that when I was scheduled to deliver the annual Luther lecture, he asked my daughter if he might go with her. Alas, hoping to encounter Ted Peters and a PowerPoint presentation on our possible neighbors in the galaxy, he got me instead, speaking at length on Luther's understanding of suffering and then preaching a sound sermon on justifying faith. He was polite but clearly mystified. Where was the guy who spoke his language?!

A number of us at the seminary joked about Ted's questionnaire and created some goofy additions. That, of course, is because it is more than our minds can, or want, to comprehend. The Lutheran Confessions (AC/Ap II) describe original sin as the inability to fear, love, and trust God, that is, to be so turned in on ourselves that we cannot see God or our neighbor apart from our own self-concern. The whole process of redemption is to free us from this bondage so that we can look up and really see our neighbors, not insofar as they are a useful reflection of us but as beloved creatures of God in their own right. Who better to capture our attention than an alien! Who better to free us from our relentless self-centeredness than a being literally outside of our own orbit? Who better to challenge our assumption that we are the apple of God's eye, that the one and only purpose of God's action in Jesus Christ is saving us from sin and death? It would be humbling and freeing. The end would come not with a cataclysm but with the arrival of unexpected company. The same challenge would be there—to let go of ourselves and live the life God is calling us to, to love as God loves. When the kingdom to come is grounded in hospitality, God's graciousness to us and our consequent openness to one another, it makes sense to plant an apple tree today.

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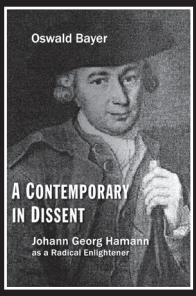

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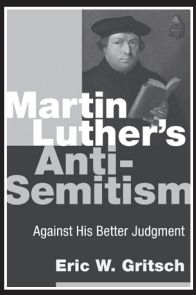

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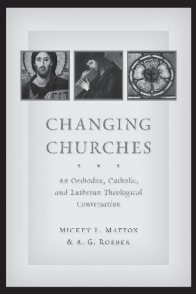

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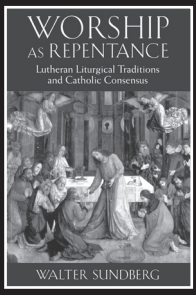

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Book Reviews

40-Day Journey with Julian of Norwich. Edited by Lisa E. Dahill. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-0-8066-8047-7. 109 pages. Paper. $12.99.

Augsburg Books' "40-Day" devotional series is based on the writings of historical and current authors. This volume offers resources for individuals but can also be used by a pair or small group of readers. The 40-day structure invites use during Lent, but it can be used at any time.

This volume is based on the writings of Julian of Norwich. The editor, Lisa E. Dahill, is on the Faculty of Trinity Lutheran Seminary. What does this medieval anchorite, beloved of Anglicans, have to offer Lutherans?

Julian was a mystic and lived an enclosed life; her concerns and language, however, were quite this-worldly. The editor moves from Julian's writings to social justice easily and naturally. Julian was, above all, a theologian of grace. She lived and taught "salvation by grace alone." Her theology of grace is so profound that it can challenge us. The editor sees to that, and she shows that Julian's writings invite us to go deeper and to be more open with God. Julian's own devout theology of the cross, however, receives less attention than some might wish.

Each 'day' follows a plan: a quotation from Julian of Norwich, apposite quotations from scripture, questions for the reader and suggestions for reflection, journaling, and prayer. The quotations from Julian are chosen well, and the juxtapositions of Julian and scripture are illuminating. The variety, number, and depth of the questions and suggestions make this book a rich resource. The reader may well choose to use just a portion of each day's offerings. On theological grounds alone, the Lutheran reader may find it a surprising and profound resource.

Victoria Brundage
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Between Relativism and Fundamentalism: Religious Resources for a Middle Position. Edited by Peter L. Berger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0-8020-6387-4. ix plus 209. $17.00.

This volume of essays, based on an international consultation sponsored by Boston University, needs to be read in tandem with *In Praise of Doubt: How to Have Convictions without Becoming a Fanatic*," written by Berger and Anton Zijderveld. This latter book offers a sustained argument for tolerance of religious and political diversity whereas the present book under consideration explores the basis for tolerance from Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Jews, and Mainline Protestants. In my judgment, the best essays are the two by Berger himself, the Introduction and "A Lutheran Approach." While mainline Protestant claims for tolerance are standard, it is fascinating to read defenses of tolerance by evangelicals such as James Davis Hunter, Craig M. Gay, and Os Guinness. Since each of these last three thinkers eschews strict absolutism in faith matters, it would seem that we see evangelicalism expanding its fundamental convictions.

Berger notes that while a relativist stance is popular among Americans, it is bad for civility because it precludes the moral condemnation of virtually anything at all. Its plausibility is a result of modernity, especially the fact that unlike most of history people now live in big cities, side by side with those from whom they significantly differ. Berger notes that modernity does not necessarily secularize us (make us less religious) but it does pluralize us. "Pluralism is a situation in which different ethnic or religious groups co-exist under conditions of civic peace and interact with each other socially." (4) In this dynamic, the church increasingly is seen as a voluntary association. Ironically, fundamentalism is a reaction against such pluralism and urbanization. "Fundamentalism is the attempt to restore or create anew a taken-for-granted body of beliefs and values." (7)

James Davison Hunter shares Berger's identification of relativism and fundamentalism as a conflicted couple who stay married. He notes that it is human nature to impose meaning on reality; however, plausibility structures

have been fragmented with the raise of technology and urbanization. For Hunter, both fundamentalism and relativism diminish our humanity and the current question is how will we work to increase decency and justice?

Craig Gay notes that certain sectarian moves in Christianity, such as Stanley Hauerwas' "Christian exclusivity" and Radical Orthodoxy's dismissal of anything "secular" fail to provide constructive political engagement (63). Gay affirms instead the work of Anglican theologian Oliver O'Donovan who identifies the church mission as positioned between such extreme stances of fundamentalism or relativism but, nevertheless, grounded in the confession of Jesus' resurrection.

Jewish author David Gordis urges us to retrieve ways within each of our religious traditions that can provide healing. Catholic author Ingeborg Gabriel affirms the cooperation between different groups instead of disintegration as the route by which to embrace pluralism. Berger affirms the Lutheran "two kingdom" approach to the relation between church and state as a path providing for greater tolerance in the public realm.

All in all, these are thoughtful essays on a timely topic, accessible to pastors and college-educated laypeople. This book is highly recommended.

Mark Mattes
Grand View University

Names, Not Just Numbers: Facing Global AIDS and World Hunger. By Donald E. Messer. Golden, Colo.: Speaker's Corner, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-1-5559-1633-6. 160 pages. Cloth. $17.95.

Each of Donald Messer's recent books on the HIV/AIDS crisis takes us deeper into the human realities. While statistics overwhelm, paralyze, and leave us indifferent, the author challenges us to take seriously the uniqueness of each child of God affected by this disease. While the number of deaths and new cases of infection are staggeringly high, efforts to intervene remain incommensurate to the task. To transform our hardness of heart, Messer paints brief portraits of individuals whose lives are affected. AIDS is a global disease that defies all stereotypes. HIV is a "terrorist" that threatens us all. Basic education about the cause of AIDS remains imperative to stem the spreading of HIV and to counteract fear. Promoting the use of condoms, even against religious prohibitions, is crucial to a successful strategy.

Women and young people have disproportionately high rates of infection. The number of those orphaned by the death of parents creates new social challenges. The rate of infection has become particularly alarming in Asia and among African-Americans, even as the pandemic in Africa continues to rage. Messer analyzes the close connections between hunger and fighting HIV/AIDS. "[H]ungry people lack finances to buy food, much less medicine, clean water, condoms, or sanitary supplies…. Nutritious food, along with safe water, can assist people in staying healthier longer and enjoying a better quality of life" (55–56). Priority must be given to linking hunger alleviation to medical treatment in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Model programs exist that can be reduplicated elsewhere. Particular attention needs to be given to the needs of women and children, if the infection patterns are to be interrupted.

When will the church of Jesus Christ raise its prophetic voice against its apparent "global attention deficit disorder" regarding this disease? How can society be moved from indifference to informed engagement?

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Prelude to Practical Theology: Variations on Theory and Practice. By Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008. ISBN-13: 978-0-6876-4729-3. Paper. $18.00.

Professor Stevenson-Moessner offers this rich, poetic composition as an introduction to the world of practical theology. Appealing to musical metaphors throughout the book, the author invites the reader to imagine the necessary contribution of a feet-on-the-ground theology to the whole of the theological enterprise. Schlei-

ermacher classically conceptualized the division of labor within the theological disciplines as threefold: philosophical, historical, and practical theology. Reclaiming the image of a tree, Stevenson-Moessner envisions philosophical theology (including systematics) as the root system, historical theology (including biblical exegesis and church history) as the trunk, and practical theology as the branches and leaves. This work aims to demonstrate the organic interplay among these parts and the vital contribution of practical theology to the whole.

Case studies provide the point of departure for theological reflection at the center of this book—the challenges facing a congregation in the resettlement of a refugee family, reflections on the experience of a young pastor leading a congregation to respond generously to the purported needs of a con artist, or the discovery of ministry done by a woman dying of cancer. Theology comes vividly to life in such practical and concrete dilemmas. Stevenson-Moessner draws particularly from postcolonial theory and feminist theology in reorienting power relations in the life of the church: what we see and fail to see, who we view as the primary actors or recipients of ministry.

This book helps to demonstrate how practical engagement in ministry feeds the entire theological undertaking. Practical theology is not only "informed by" the other theological disciplines but properly "stimulates" theological reflection in the other arenas. As expressed in a classical study of theological education, finally the purpose of practical theology is "to increase among [people] the love of God and neighbor" (13).

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Irenaeus: An Introduction. By Denis Minns. London: Continuum, 2010. ISBN-13 : 978-0-5670-3366-6. xiv and 177 pages. Paper. $29.95.

While the name "Irenaeus" (c. 130–200) might not be a daily discussion starter, the thinking of this remarkable bishop of Lyons has much relevance for theology and church life today. Denis Minns, the author, is a Dominican monk from Australia. His own interest in Irenaeus lies in evaluating him as a catholic thinker, indeed, the "first great Catholic theologian." He fought the heresy of Gnosticism which taught that the core of a person is divine and that one's salvation is based on getting in touch with this truth which permits one to return to the divine realm (21). Harold Bloom made an excellent case over twenty years ago that, in its many guises, the core of American religiosity is Gnostic. Hence, a critique of Gnosticism—even one from antiquity—garners interest. Likewise, we should acknowledge that the core identity of creedal Christianity is internally defined by a rejection of Gnosticism. One has no alternative, if the incarnation is true.

Minns helps simplify the complex mythology and doctrinal stances of ancient Gnosticism for the contemporary student. Irenaeus also rejected the teachings of Marcion for whom there was not one God, but two, a wrathful god of the Old Testament and a gracious god of the New. In response to Marcion and the Gnostics, Irenaeus affirmed that God alone contains everything and is contained by nothing; in other words, God provides the context of all created experience. The Gnostics believed that spiritual practices and correct belief about the true identity of the self could help us bridge the gap between matter and spirit. In contrast, for Irenaeus, there is an unbridgeable gap between the creator and the creature, and no common essence among creatures, let alone with God. Nevertheless, through the ministry of Jesus Christ and the agency of the Spirit, God lifts up creatures so that they can share in divine immortality and incorruptibility. Minns notes that Irenaeus' view of the Trinity is not nearly as developed as it would be in later thinkers, such as Athanasius or the Cappadocians. Indeed, for Irenaeus it is difficult to tell if the Father, Son, and Spirit were in fact distinct prior to the economy of salvation.

For Irenaeus, human destiny is to grow into perfection in gradual stages. Adam was not created perfect. Instead, God's intent for him was to grow into the likeness of God. Lacking perfection is the condition that permitted Adam and Eve to sin and thus bring death into the world. Adam sinned because he was immature. Attaining likeness to God, the outcome of

the human *telos*, then can be nothing other than a gift, since it is God in Christ who provides eternal life for sinful humans. Our beatitude will include a glorified body. There is no salvation apart from bodily salvation; hence, the body is not incidental to identity.

Minns does a superb job helping the non-patristic scholar tackle the complexities of Christian theology in the Roman world. This book will prove to be a fine resource for students and scholars alike.

Mark Mattes
Grand View University

Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission. Edited by Ogbu U. Kalu, Peter Vethanayagamony and Edmund Kee-Fook Chia. ISBN-13**:** 978-0-6642-3465-2. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010. xxv and 177 pages. Paper. $25.00.

Contemporary missiological thinking and praxis is faced with several challenges—those regarding terminology, motivations, methods, relationship to dialog, and relevance in a religiously plural world. It is to the credit of the editors that they have brought together a range of essays from a variety of Christian traditions that go beyond the merely stereotypical and predictably pedestrian reaffirmation of the need and necessity of mission to offer fresh ways of interrogating mission as the church and the academy confronts the shifting religious, cultural, and social landscapes of the twenty-first century.

The recently concluded centenary observance of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 offered the occasion for missiologists and theologians all over the world to reflect on the outcomes of this conference and also to suggest directions for missiological thinking and praxis in the twenty-first century. These include the reality that one hundred years after the original mission conference, a new approach in the uncertain present must take seriously the richness, variety, and range of global Christianity and include commitment to justice, peace, unity, and ecological sensitivity, not overlooking ground realities and the impact that globalization has on the vulnerable and the victims. The media and popular culture have worked in tandem to shape a particular version and vision of what being Christian is all about, and this is not always true to the claims of the gospel. An exploitative and cynical approach that treats people as consumers to whom the gospel can be marketed needs to be questioned and problematized. At the same time, attempts to present a homogenized version of Christianity, or a reductionist one-size-fits-all mentality, flies in the face of denominational diversity and variety, including Pentecostal expressions of Christianity, and the vitality of Christianity in unexpected places. Particular approaches that treated mission as a from-us-to-them, one-way Eurocentric way of doing things have to reckon with the implicit and often explicit racism inherent in continuing to look at mission as a business-as-usual way of doing things. All this calls for a renewed commitment to rereading the Bible, rediscovering neglected aspects of life in community, revalorizing the role of women, reclaiming our connectedness with nature, and reexamining the legacy of the traditions of the church. The editors are to be commended for bringing together this collection of essays that makes a solid contribution to the ongoing task of continuing the journey of faithful witness.

J. Jayakiran Sebastian
The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics and the Future. By Joerg Rieger. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0-8006-6459-6. xi and 191 pages. Paper. $20.00.

Rieger takes up the relation of religion and economics from the perspective of a "logic of downturn." This logic has two dimensions. First, there is the fact that capitalism does not benefit everyone. Second, there is the opportunity downturns create for new questions, broader horizons, and openings for alternative views. Progress, Rieger argues, depends upon situations of great pressure like traumatic moments, economic collapse, and repressed desires. Indeed, the surplus from which resistance grows

is *generated* by contexts of repression; economic empire *creates* the conditions for a new thing.

Thus, Rieger spends much time arguing that capitalism fails to deliver on its promises. Along the way he unmasks the theological character of mainstream economics as it is either blind to or represses his fact. He is unrelenting in his dismissal of what he calls standard or mainline religion and theology for their complicity in this blindness and repression. Rieger consistently argues that the way forward depends upon religion, theology and economics spending some time in the world of downturn, reconnecting with the real needs of people, listening to the underside, to the working class and especially unions. Here Rieger is contextualizing for the North American economic situation, the well-known advocacy of the Latin American liberationists for solidarity with the marginalized. Indeed, the call for more attention to the working class is among the most compelling aspects of this book. To those who have never considered the faith claims that underwrite modern economic practice and theory, this book will come as a much-needed eye-opener.

This book, however, is not without some rough edges. First, the abstraction "mainline theology" is unconvincing. His dismissal of mainline theology is almost entirely devoid of supporting evidence and his caricature or neglect of other mainline theologians who have covered some of this same turf is not helpful. Second, Rieger tends to romanticize the working class and unions, ignoring the racial and political history of unions. Third, by attributing creative, generative power to repression and downturn Rieger has overplayed the logic of downturn, muddying the reality that *God* generates life not *through* repression and downturn but *in spite* of it. Lastly, God appears to have a marginal role in this work, serving only as an example and perhaps inspiration or motivation. Yet surely the hope of the downtrodden and marginalized does not rest on or our coming to realize "our complex location between other people and the divine Other," (162) but on the God who acts even now to raise up the lowly and bring down the mighty.

Daniel M. Bell Jr.
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Briefly Noted

Freeing the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Adventures of an Archaeology Outsider. By Hershel Shanks (Continuum, $27.95). Shanks was a lawyer when he launched *Biblical Archaeology Review* in 1975. Using flashy photography, crisply written articles, and unending controversy and self-promotion, he has built a subscription list of 150,000. In this autobiography, the octogenarian reports his battle to speed up publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, his $40,000 fine for breaking copyright law, and his advocacy for the authenticity of a pomegranate thought to come from Solomon's temple and an ossuary inscribed for James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus. He has pilloried "biblical minimalists" (despite being religiously agnostic) and mocked the long trial of an accused forger in Israel. Some scholarly organizations loathe him; many well-known archaeologists publish with him regularly. Truth in advertising: I have been a loyal subscriber since the first issue.

Ralph W. Klein

The Book of Hosea. By J. Andrew Dearman (Eerdmans, $45). While putting his primary emphasis on the final form of the text, Dearman recognizes that parts of Hosea may have originated at a time later than the prophet. His translation of the difficult Hebrew text and his careful and judicious commentary put this volume at the head of commentaries on Hosea. Ten appendices (e.g., Baal in Hosea, love, sexual infidelity) provide very important background data. On Hos 11:9 (my favorite Old Testament verse): The statement that Yahweh is the Holy One in Israel's midst reinforces that even in his holiness there is no permanent divorce, no final judgment upon the rebellious child, and no covenant curse that is irreversible from the divine side. This volume is part of The New International Commentary on the Old Testament.

Ralph W. Klein

Preaching Helps

Pentecost 19 (Proper 22)—Reign of Christ (Proper 29)

Head vs. Heart, Childhood vs. Adult Faith

This semester, a Baptist student in my preaching class read Scripture from the King James Version (KJV). I abandoned the KJV thirty years ago in seminary, when I learned that important manuscripts were discovered well after the KJV and that newer English translations were more "accurate." Yet, as I listened to my student read, while my head knew that other translations are technically more precise, King James spoke to my heart, connecting me back to my childhood and the stacks of vinyl records, sent to me from Talking Books for the Blind, on which Alexander Scuorby read the KJV. And my "childhood faith" was awakened and enlivened.

A few days ago, the group I was lunching with sang the Doxology as our table grace. Someone in the group then offered to teach us a version that employs more inclusive language to name God. I heard people in the group for whom traditional Trinitarian language brings heartache and even heartbreak express appreciation for the alternative. I cognitively agreed and found myself emotionally resisting. "Do we have to fuss even with the Doxology?" I found myself thinking. At some level my "childhood faith" felt threatened and my sense of stability shaken.

I notice a trend in some sermons these days is to omit Jesus. "Salvation," if we can call it that, is grounded in a Creator God who made us "good" and in "the divine image," and "loves you just the way you are." Part of the rationale for this message, I am advised, is hospitality. We do not want to offend people of other faiths, specifically our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. While I can intellectually wrap my mind around this, my heart longs to hear some unpacking of "Jesus died for your sins." When I preach in congregations, I frequently find that I am not alone as people describe my sermons as "old time preaching" or "preaching like we used to hear."

I am not complaining or even being "snarky," as my students say. I am observing the tension I experience between head and heart. I suspect that, in the three vignettes I have described, the tension cuts both ways. Someone might intellectually appreciate the beauty of the language of the King James Version, and be emotionally troubled by the places the translation is less accurate. One might know that the language of the creeds is not intended to name the gender of the divine, and still be pained by the ways that language evokes a patriarchal church. One might be totally committed to preaching Christ crucified as the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:23–24) and nevertheless feel embarrassed and ashamed by ways John 14:6—"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"—has been preached.

At this moment in my thinking, the most I can offer is my hunch that both preachers and hearers experience tension between head and heart. And even as we ask deep questions of life, faith, and meaning, we do not want our "childhood faith" shaken too badly, and certainly not destroyed. And I suspect that this tension will manifest itself in many, both preachers and hearers, when it comes to sermons for Thanksgiving and Christ the King.

Pastor Amy Allen, who contributes this set of Preaching Helps, observes that, nowadays, we know the first Thanksgiving didn't happen the way our third-grade plays taught us, fewer people come to the community Thanksgiving worship than we remember from that rosier past, and some congregations and communities have stopped celebrating this holiday altogether. Turning to Christ the King, Pastor Allen observes:

> We live in a day and age in which it has become politically incorrect to talk about the "kingship" of Christ. Such a term now brings with it all the baggage of patriarchal interpretations of the biblical text. More than that, it calls to mind the exploitation brought about by colonial powers, abuses of power at the hands of politicians, and perhaps every abuse of power—every moment when one human being has claimed or does claim dominion over another human being.

To both of these observances, she adds an important "However." For Thanksgiving: "However, even as the American civic religion shows its cracks and more preachers rightly seek to avoid platitudes that give simple lip service to the state, there remains reason to give thanks." For Christ the King: "However, it is because of such abuses of power at the hands of human beings that we as a church, while respectfully rethinking our vocabulary, cannot give up on the reigndom of Christ. For such abuses and abusers are the beasts defeated in Daniel's court of judgment (7:11)."

Perhaps the task is not to put away childhood faith but to employ it to embolden us. Perhaps that's what Jesus meant when he said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3).

Pastor Amy Allen is a Fellow in Theology and Practice at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, where she is working on her doctorate in New Testament and Early Christianity. Before beginning graduate work, she served as pastor of First Lutheran Church in Leechburg, Pennsylvania. She received her B.A. in Theology at Texas Lutheran University and M.Div. at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). She lives in Franklin, Tennessee, with her husband the Rev. Erik Allen, a fellow graduate of the LSTC who presently serves as Associate Pastor at the Lutheran Church of Saint Andrew, and their two young children, Rebecca and Joanna. Her passion is for the gospel and its proclamation in all forms of church life as she believes that we are called to be people of the gospel who are both immersed in and formed by the word of God as it comes to us in its many forms, both written and proclaimed.

The peace of Christ be with you!

Craig A. Satterlee, Editor, Preaching Helps
http://craigasatterlee.com

Pentecost 19 (Proper 22)
October 7, 2012

Genesis 2:18—24
Psalm 8
Hebrews 1:1–4; 2:5–12
Mark 10:2–16

The theme of creation runs through this week's readings. Genesis 2 is the most obvious account, but it is actually one of many creation stories included in the Hebrew Bible and even more in the New Testament—three of which make an appearance in our readings today.[1] Mark 10 loosely quotes from both Genesis 1 and 2. Psalm 8 wonders at the glory and dominion that God established for humankind. While each account narrates the events of creation slightly differently and draws from them different themes, they all at the same time extol a majestic and sovereign God who is responsible for it all (Psalm 8:1).

Genesis 1:27 reads: "So God created humankind (*adam*) in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." In Hebrew, the first pronoun is singular to match the singular *adam*, while the second pronoun shifts to plural at the end. The English translation smoothes this over by using "them" in both places. It is possible to make much of this grammatical shift, suggesting that the original human was both male and female—an androgyne similar to the beings described by Aristophanes' famous speech in Plato's *Symposium*. One could even go so far as to then speculate that God taking the woman from *adam's* rib in the Genesis 2 account does not describe the creation of woman from man, but rather the separation of human into male and female. However, it is just as easy to understand these differences within different grammatical systems. Hebrew pronouns assign gender according to grammatical agreement often irrespective of the gender of the beings to whom they refer. Moreover, God's collective people are commonly referred to in the singular throughout the Hebrew Bible. For the sake of the preacher, it is probably enough to be aware that *adam* can and has been used in the Hebrew Bible in the gender neutral sense of all humanity. Indeed, there is also a more specific term for man in Hebrew (*ish*) that is not used here, although it is employed frequently in the biblical text.

In any case, the question for the preacher in light of Jesus' pairing of the two creation accounts is often "What does this mean for the relationship between man and woman?" Throughout the rest of Mark's gospel and the whole New Testament, Jesus makes few if any more explicit commands than this so-called prohibition of divorce. So Christians, particularly those affected by divorce, struggle with what to make of this teaching. Meanwhile, at a different level, the preacher may struggle with a different pairing—that of this teaching on divorce with Jesus' welcoming of the children in the pericope for the day. What does one text have to do with the other?

Dealing with this latter question, however, provides a new perspective with which to return to the former. As tempting as it is to wonder about the relationship between men and women in the creation stories, this was not necessarily the question with which Jesus was concerned. It is difficult to find such explicit prohibitions of Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament because the relationship between human beings was not the primary one with which Jesus was concerned. Instead, Jesus maintains that the most important commandment is the love of God only then followed by the love of neighbor as oneself (Mark 12:29–31).

1. See also Isaiah 40–55, Psalms 19 and 104, Proverbs 8:27–29 among others.

Jesus' point in both teachings—that concerning marriage and that concerning children—has not to do with the relationship between human beings, but with the relationship between humans and God. *God,* not humans, joins spouses together (10:9). *God,* not humans, decides who is worthy of the Kingdom—who is worthy to approach (10:14). This is the sovereignty and dominion extolled by the psalmist in Psalm 8. This is the sovereignty with which God forms humanity (male and female) in Genesis 2. And so it is the sovereignty to which Jesus alludes in Mark 10.

However, for those concerned about the morality of their divorce, particularly in difficult situations, it may be helpful to read to the end of chapter 10 for a fuller understanding of how Jesus instructs believers to care for themselves (and by implication their spouse with whom they have become one flesh): "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut if off" (Mark 10:43a). The relationship between two human beings and even of one human being with him- or herself, as is made clear in Jesus' ranking of the commandments in Mark 12, is predicated on the primary relationship of each human being with God.

The good news of today's gospel lies in God's relationship with humanity, which is one of joining (10:6) and blessing (10:16). The call to action in light of Jesus' teaching is to welcome and love—indeed commit ourselves to the care of humankind. In light of today's psalm this call is extended to include a charge for humanity, and thus each one of us, to exercise the dominion that God has given us over the rest of creation in light of our abiding relationship with God. Indeed, the Hebrew reads, "You have caused them to rule" (*hamshilehu*), once again turning the focus on what God has done for us and calling for a dominion that is worthy of such gift. ALA

Pentecost 20 (Proper 23)
October 14, 2012

Amos 5:6–7, 10–15
Psalm 90:12–17
Hebrews 4:12–16
Mark 10:17–31

In true Lutheran fashion, today's readings lay bare the themes of law and grace.

Amos is concerned with the law. He critiques a society in which he sees those with power and status (less than 10 percent of the population) taking advantage of the vast majority without. While the levies and building projects are not technically illegal (they were probably sanctioned by the state) they violated Amos' more expansive concept of justice. Such social institutions, while ostensibly productive—state- controlled vineyards would likely have yielded increased production—contributed to maintaining and increasing the economic gap. While the wealthy got wealthier, villagers who were struggling to survive lost their ability for subsistence in the state-controlled economy and were "trampled" and "pushed aside" in the name of progress.

Consequently, when Amos appeals to justice (*mishpat*) in 5:7 he is not referring to the simple execution of the laws of the state. Such legal justice did not fulfill God's ideal plan for creation. Rather, Amos pairs *mishpat* with a higher concept of righteousness (*tzedakah*). In the Hebrew Bible there are more than ten terms meaning "law," including these two. *Mishpat* refers to legal ordinances or commands, while *tzedakah* goes further to entail the moral element. Some have equated *tzedakah* with charity—voluntary right action in contrast to that which is required by *mishpat*. But this might go too far in the other direction, since charity is often seen as an act of excess that goes above and beyond. In the Jewish conception, *tzedakah* is simply

a right action or decent living. *Tzedakah* is not legally required but neither is it superfluous—it is the way that God intends us to live, and means doing the right thing in our relationships with God and with others. The difference between *mishpat* and *tzedakah* is the difference between being a law-abiding citizen in the 1950s and joining Martin Luther King Jr. in the struggle for peace and equality for all of God's children. As some experienced in the civil rights movement, *tzedakah* can lead both the giver and the recipient to an experience of God's grace at work in the world.

With images of judgment and testing, the author of Hebrews is also concerned with justice. Hebrews is addressed to second-generation believers who were struggling to reconcile their religion with their culture. Christianity lacked many of the ancient identifiers of religion in a Greco-Roman society—it had no temple, no priests, no sacrifice, and some claimed it had no tradition either. In other words, it was a new religion with none of the trappings of religion, in a society where tradition was valued and religion was a way of life. For this reason, Christians were sometimes dubbed atheists and often had difficulty participating in community life.

When they realized that Christ's return would not happen overnight, Christians began to assimilate with the culture around them. However, in so doing, they sometimes went too far. The author of Hebrews reminds these Christians to whom they will ultimately render their account—not their neighbors, or contemporary politicians and judges, but before the throne of God whose word is "more piercing than a two-edged sword" (4:12). At the same time, the author reassures believers that God's judgment throne is ultimately a throne of grace (4:16). To help Christians navigate between the temptations to assimilate to culture or abandon it entirely, the author of Hebrews helps Christians to understand Christ's mission in continuity with their tradition. He reconnects the Christian faith with the ancient and generally respected tradition of Judaism, and draws connections between the Christ of the Christian faith and the cultic symbols of popular culture—the high priest, temple, etc.

In Jewish Scripture there are 613 commandments (*mitzvot*) that make up the *torah* (two more Hebrew words for "law"). *Mitzvot* are never considered individually, but always as a whole corpus—that which God has given in love to God's chosen and holy people in order to set them apart as holy. So it is no surprise that when Jesus is asked about what one must do to set oneself apart for eternal life with God he responds with *mitzvot*—"You know the commandments…" (Mark 10:19). Nor is it surprising that Jesus would quote from the Ten Commandments as a quick summary of the 613 *mitzvot* that all Jews were expected to keep. What is interesting is that Jesus initially quotes solely from the latter commandments, which Luther classifies as governing relationships with others.

Rather than asking the man whether or not he has kept the first commandments, concerning his relationship with God, Jesus reproaches him, insisting "No one is good but God alone" (10:18). He then commends the man to further action in the form of what might be considered extreme *tzedakah* combined with a turn toward God with the command to follow Jesus (10:21). However, again, we are not left with the piercing standards of divine judgment, but instead we reminded that, "for God all things are possible" (10:27).

In place of human standards of judgment and reputation, each of today's readings offers in its own way the more piercing and important standards of God. Yet, these standards are not law in the sense of obligations to be fulfilled. They are instead signs of

relationship. They are the ties that bind God to God's people and empower Christians to live in relationship both with God and with the world—to embody and experience grace. ALA

Pentecost 21 (Proper 24)
October 21, 2012

Isaiah 53:4–12
Psalm 91:9–16
Hebrews 5:1–10
Mark 10:35–45

Isaiah 53 is read twice in the church year—today and Good Friday. While most Jews understand it as describing the suffering of the entire people of Israel, Christians often understand this "Song of the Suffering Servant" to predict the suffering of Christ in the place of God's people. This language of sacrifice and atonement is further seen in Heb 5:7, which can be read as a description of Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–39) and finally in the gospel, which presents the third and final in a series of passion predictions begun in Mark 8:27 when Jesus turns his sights on Jerusalem.

The High Priest in Jewish tradition is responsible for offering a sacrifice for sins on the day of atonement (both his own sins and the sins of the people), as well as offering prayers and supplications at all times. In Hebrews, Jesus is described as performing all these functions; however, Jesus' sacrifice is different. Jesus sacrifices himself, and since he has no sins, his offering is for all of humanity. Jesus' sacrifice is also once and for all. According to Jewish tradition, the High Priest did not choose to glorify himself, nor was he glorified by public opinion. God chose Aaron as High Priest, and until the second century BCE, that priesthood was then passed on through heredity. God also chose Christ to be the High Priest. It is not a position sought, but rather one that is conferred. Nor is it the common experience of God's people, but again, the position of one who stands before God on behalf of the many.

The notion of Christ as a High Priest therefore sets his suffering apart from suffering as ordinary believers experience it. The readings do not instruct believers to do as Jesus did ("WWJD"), but rather indicate the redemption and salvation available to us on account of Jesus' intercessions. Instead of equating discipleship with a mere imitation of Jesus' example, Christ's sufferings invite us to ask the question, "What has Jesus done?" ("WHJD"), and to live in light of those actions.

The gospel reading for today gives a glimpse of what such a life might look like. In fact, Jesus explicitly tells James and John that discipleship is *not* about taking our place alongside of Jesus (in suffering or in glory), but rather it is about ministering to and with—*serving* Jesus. The verb that Mark uses in verse 45 is *diakoneo*, translated as "to serve," but it can also mean "to support," "to help," or "to minister." In fact, it is most frequently translated as "to minister" in Mark's gospel, with an emphasis on providing for the care and needs of another human being.

This is the task of discipleship that Jesus calls his followers to in Mark 10:43. Jesus is glorified and so he calls his disciples to glorify him and be made great by submitting to service—by caring for the needs and well-being of other human beings. Taken as a description of the collective experience of the entire people of Israel, as the whole people of God, Isaiah 53 imagines a time when this common human experience of pain and suffering will break forth into light. For those who bear one another's sins, for those who pour out themselves in service to one another, a great portion will be al-

lotted and God will divide a spoil with the strong (Isa 53:12). And so it is not all dark and gloom, there is light. There is hope.

And yet, taken together, today's readings cast a solemn tone that merges suffering and redemption, servitude and salvation. It is challenging to both respect the weightiness of these texts and the varied places from which our parishioners have come. There are many terrible experiences of suffering in our world—experiences that cannot and should not be glorified. Still, Hebrews tells us that Christ learned from, and by implication, was glorified by his suffering (5:8–10). Mark tells us that it is by Christ's terrible death that the many are ransomed—in the words of Isaiah, making many righteous and bearing their iniquities (53:11).

These readings offer an opportunity to consider one's theology of atonement. What does it mean that through Christ's death and resurrection we are saved? With Isaiah, will you preach Christ's atonement as coming through a juridical satisfaction of the debt of human sin and iniquity owed to God? With the author of Hebrews, will you preach atonement as coming through Christ's perfection on the cross, evoking through this ultimate display of God's love a transformation in believers? Or with Mark, will you preach atonement as Christ's ransom and redemption of humankind from bondage to death, the law, or the powers of evil?

The task of the preacher is not to reconcile these tensions, but rather to invite believers to live in them—to wrestle with them. We are a people who are both suffering and yet saved. We have seen the light and yet we live in darkness. We have experienced the redemption of Christ our great high priest, yet there is still ministry to be done. However you or those to whom you are preaching understand Christ's atoning sacrifice to work, one thing remains clear—it was real, it was painful, and it brings new light and new life to us all. ALA

Reformation
October 28, 2012

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19–28
John 8:31–36

When my daughter was two years old, she asked me what a slave was. I explained, as best I could, that a slave was someone who had to do everything someone else told them to do and that it was very bad. She thought about this for a moment, and then, with the innocence only a child can muster she asked, "Am I your slave?" I decided I clearly hadn't explained well enough about slavery.

Yet, in post-civil rights America, most people think we understand enough about the idea. We know that slavery involves human beings owning other human beings and that it is, indeed, very bad. Consequently, it is imperative to preach against any application of this text that in any way condones the ownership of one human being by another.

However, it is also important to note that the circumstances of slavery in Jesus' world were different than those in our more recent history. One could become a slave by capture, abandonment, debt, legal condemnation, or birth to a slave parent, and so slavery was common in the ancient world. Slaves served at all levels and in all manners of work. In many cases, slaves could be treated quite well, be trusted and respected by their slaveholder. Many slaves earned wages, and in contrast to the foreigner, were granted a place (however transient) in their slaveholder's house.

Although it remained a heinous abuse—slaves were still viewed as property—slavery largely was not seen as such. Moreover, the lines between slavery and freedom were blurred by conditions such as debt slavery in which any free person could become a

slave. If we are to enter John's world with the disciples, therefore, we must allow ourselves to suspend our cultural resistance to the idea of slavery and in particular to the idea that we might be slaves, and instead ask the question, "Whose slaves are we?"

The disciples resist this imagery (John 8:33), but the irony of this was unlikely to be lost on John's first audiences. After all, the children of Abraham with whom they identify are the same children of Jacob who traveled to Egypt and were made slaves. Moses and Aaron led their ancestors through the wilderness so that they—the disciples, all the Jews, and by extension believers today—are children of the exodus, children for whom the reality of slavery is very real and near. And yet they resist this, practicing a form of selective amnesia rather than think of themselves as slaves.

Today we continue to practice selective amnesia when we distance ourselves from our own history of slavery, dismissing it as "very bad," without acknowledging the continuing impact it still has on our culture and our economy today—a culture and economy that we participate in. We also practice selective amnesia when we celebrate Martin Luther and the Reformation without also acknowledging and preaching against the heinous atrocities that Luther condoned against those whom he believed took the reformation too far with the Peasant's Revolt, or the ways in which Luther's teachings were used in World War II to support atrocities committed against Jews.

This is all a part of us. If we want to celebrate the ways in which our church has remade itself in the past and to envision ways in which we might continue to remake ourselves in the present and into the future, we must not and cannot forget. We cannot forget the ways in which sin has drawn us from God—we have broken and continue to break God's covenant (Jer 31:32), we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Nor can we forget the glorious moments in which, by God's grace, we have risen above the power of sin.

Paul writes, we "are now justified by [God's] grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24). Jeremiah models this sort of inclusive remembering, remembering both the covenant that God made with our ancestors and the way in which they broke God's covenant (31:32) while at the same time promising a new covenant through which all people will come to know God and *God* (not us) will remember our iniquity no more (Jer 31:34).

In John, Jesus' teaching is not so much about what it means to be a slave; but rather, what it means to be "made free" (8:33). Jesus is concerned with how God's people will live into God's new covenant. But one covenant does not replace the other. Just because God promises to forget our sins does not mean that we can or should forget God's grace. In order to live in God's new covenant, in order to remake our lives and our congregations in God's image, we must remember. We must remember God's covenant and God's grace, which can only be known in the shadow of our human failings.

Slavery—the possession and exploitation of one human being by another—is reprehensible. But to live as *God's* slaves—human beings claimed and owned by a sovereign and gracious God—can be liberating. Since slaves had few if any legal rights in the first century, if slaves wanted to purchase their freedom, the law required that they use an intermediary. Freedom could be purchased by a private party (such as a friend or relative), a club or association, or by a pagan temple or Jewish synagogue in the name of a deity. It is in this context that Jesus promises that the Son makes us free from sin and it is out of this context that we must consider to whom we will be accountable—whose slaves we will be. ALA

All Saints
November 4, 2012

Isaiah 25:6–9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1–6
John 11:32–44

"Jesus began to weep," or, in the King James Version, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). As the shortest verse in the Bible, many remember it both for this distinction and for the emotion it evokes. There is something remarkably satisfying about a God who both "wipes every tear" from our eyes (Rev 21:4) and whose eyes themselves have borne tears.

John, of course, does not tell us why Jesus wept. It is possible to imagine either that Jesus' tears are tears of grief at his friend's death or that they are tears of anger as a result of unbelief. Those in the pews often prefer the former, while academic commentators prefer the latter. In support of their side, both rightly turn to verses 33 and 38 and link Jesus' tears to the emotional disturbance John describes. The Greek word in both verses (*embrimaomai*) connotes anger. However, we cannot know if Jesus' grief turns to anger (a classic stage in Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' model of grief) or if Jesus' tears are a reflection of the searing anger Jesus felt. Regardless of how one understands the subtleties of it there is a clear intensity of emotion in Jesus' response.

The Greek word for weeping (*dakruo*) that John uses here is different from the one used to describe Mary's weeping (*klaio*) in verse 33. While *klaio* is common, occurring 206 times in the combined testaments, six of which are in John,[2] *dakruo* is incredibly rare. This word appears four times total in the Old and New Testaments combined (here alone in the New Testament), with only an additional six in the apocrypha. Technically, both terms refer to the emission of tears and the act of crying. Both can and are translated "to weep." Because of its obscurity, however, there is an intensity to the way in which *dakruo* is used. This word represents not just a lament, but a violent lament—used, for example, in Greek translations to render the Hebrew term "roaring" of Job 3:24. Thus, while one might picture Mary stooped down to her knees, lost in an emotional fit of tears at the tomb of her brother, not so with Jesus.

Jesus' tears do not incapacitate him with grief, but rather move his whole body into fervent and definitive action. The tears that I imagine Jesus wept are not the kind we weep into our pillows at night, but rather the kind that flex our fists into tight balls and send our whole bodies shaking. Whether he was moved with sadness, anger, or both, Jesus was *moved* with emotion and that movement turned into action.

Some time ago I heard a rabbi speaking about the holocaust. Questioned about where he believed God was during this atrocity, he replied that God was in the same place that God always is when tragedy occurs—in the midst of it, crying. I like this image of a God who cries; I am moved by it. However, while a God who cries into a heavenly pillow in hopeless lament does not do anybody any good, our God who trembles and roars with the tears of heavenly lament, swallows up death (Isa 25:8) and makes all things new (Rev 25:5).

While it may be tempting to sentimentalize Jesus' tears into a grief that matches our own at the loss of loved ones, especially on this day of remembering, Jesus' tears are more than that. Likewise, while it may be tempting to make the doctrine of the resurrection triumphant and preach about the frustration that Jesus feels with those who do not understand, his

2. Interestingly, five of these six usages refer to Mary either at the tomb of her brother Lazarus or later at the tomb of Jesus himself (John 11:31, 33; 20:11, 13, 15).

tears are much more than that. Jesus' tears give voice to a deeply felt lament. They represent a lived experience of our God who chooses to dwell with us (Rev 21:3). And they move through the gospel narrative (and our lives) with a ripple so deeply felt, so powerful, that nothing and nobody will ever be the same. This movement of our God present with us, responding with a roaring lament to our own tears of grief is what empowers us to move out of our own paralyzing tears and grief and forward into the mission and ministry of Christ. This is the "new heaven and the new earth" that God has prepared, tangible among us today (Rev 21:1).

All Saints Day can be a difficult time for a preacher and for those in the pews, as together we remember the lives and witness of those in our parish who have passed away. It is a Sunday mixed with triumphant fanfare as we celebrate the saints triumphant ever present among us and an undercurrent of grief as we mourn their tangible absence. And yet, it is precisely this raw emotion that gives this Sunday the power to *move us* in ways that only the presence of Jesus can. It is the job of the preacher, therefore, to give voice to the command of Jesus in the gospel today: to unbind the emotion, lament and exuberance alike, and give the saints of the church permission to go where God is leading us to minister. AMA

Pentecost 24 (Proper 27)
November 11, 2012

1 Kings 17:8–16
Psalm 146
Hebrews 9:24–28
Mark 12:38–44

Do you have an "emergency fund"? Financial planners offer a range of different opinions on how much and how quickly one ought to save, but the consensus is that everyone should have some kind of an emergency fund—money set-aside "for a rainy day." The idea is to achieve financial security by forestalling any circumstance that could lead to a household spending "all that they have to live on." And yet, this is precisely what happens in two of the three readings today.

In 1 Kings, Elijah asks a widow to feed him from the last morsel of meal that she was intending to prepare for herself and her son. In Mark, Jesus observes a widow offering two small coins at the temple treasury, which he then reveals are "everything she had," and Jesus repeats (in case the significance was lost on the disciples the first time), "*everything* she had to live on" (12:44). These women are liquidating their emergency funds. They aren't just giving till it hurts; they are giving until there is literally nothing left.

Traditionally, preachers and commentators praise these women for their undying faith and sacrificial giving. They become examples of the posture believers should take before God, in opposition to the ostentatious but superficial example scribes who take the best seats in the synagogues (12:38–39). However, here a distinction must be made.

The widow in 1 Kings is in conversation with Elijah. In his prophetic role, Elijah assures her that she and her son will be provided for. Armed with this information and little other choice, since her emergency funds were already depleted, the woman then acts out of faith. Trusting in the promise God has given her, she shares her meal with Elijah. Significantly, Elijah does not praise her for her sacrificial giving, giving of all that one has was not mandated of anyone past that point, but the prophet, the woman, and the boy, three people in need were provided for in the particularities of their circumstances because they trusted God.

In contrast, the widow that Jesus observes in the temple has no insider information. She has not been in conversation with Jesus or any other priest or prophet. She has no reason to believe that the offering she gives will result in any change of circumstance for her or anyone else. Maybe her gift is one of faithfulness, trusting in the provision of the Lord. But maybe it is one of compulsion, enforced by the scribes whom Jesus just accused of "devouring widows' houses" (Mark 10:40). Maybe like the widow in 1 Kings she has already reached her breaking point and even with the two coins she would have lacked enough to provide, or maybe not. We don't know. What is clear from the text is simply that these two coins are all she has to live on, and whether by compulsion or out of extreme religiosity she gives them up.

As preachers, what does it mean when we praise this act? When we put in the mouth of Jesus accolades for this poor woman and call extreme faithfulness an act that by all accounts within the text will lead to her certain death?

While some of the most powerful and meaningful gifts can and are given out of material poverty, there is a difference between this kind of sacrificial giving and literally giving up everything. A poignant counter-example to this widow's complete sacrifice can be found in tales such as Carmen Deedy's *14 Cows for America*. In this true story, Deedy relates how a materially poor tribe in Kenya demonstrates their spiritual wealth through an impressive gift of fourteen cows to America after hearing of the devastation wrought by destruction of the twin towers. In an economy in which these cows form an important link in their subsistence agriculture, this gift was a sacrifice to be sure—the tribe relied in part on these cows for their living. However, at the same time, these were not their only cows. The tribe's sacrifice did not jeopardize their survival and if it had, I suspect, Deedy would need to tell a very different story—one in which rather than life and healing rising up out of ashes, America and Kenya together would have experienced shared grief at what could only be classified as a further tragedy.

So, too, for the widow in Mark's gospel—there is nothing but tragedy to be gained by the loss of her life. Jesus says of this woman that she has given more and proportionately this is true. But this is where the gospel leaves off and so as preachers we have the power and responsibility of deciding what sort of moral spin we put on this text. Will we use it as a lesson in sacrificial giving, to strengthen our stewardship campaigns? Will we preach a Jesus who praises the suicide or exploitation of a widow? Or will we preach against such readings of the text, hearing instead Jesus' words of critique to those who would devour widows' houses and remembering that the necessary sacrifice has already been made?

In the words of the Hebrews, Christ "has appeared once and for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself" (9:26). Unlike the priestly sacrifices that need to be offered year after year, Jesus' sacrifice was complete once for all. Jesus gave *himself*—all that he had—so that the widow, so that believers, so that *we* could have life. AMA

Pentecost 25 (Proper 28)
November 18, 2012

Daniel 12:1–3
Psalm 16
Hebrews 10:11–14[15–18]19–25
Mark 13:1–8

This year National Geographic premiered a new reality TV show entitled, *Doomsday Preppers*. The show follows people who believe that the world is coming to an

end and assesses their preparations. In my lifetime there have been more "doomsday" predictions than I can count. Some have garnered more attention than others, but all make the claim that they have "read the signs" and call us to prepare accordingly. This is what the disciples in today's reading want—they want to know the signs so they can prepare (13:4).

In the nineteenth century, John Darby wove together scripture passages in the belief that he could uncover signs. Even after his first prediction failed, his revised theory attracted new adherents and continues today. But while Darby may be one of the best-known examples, many preachers both before and after him have done the same. Even Martin Luther thought the pope the anti-Christ who was to precede the great Day of the Lord.

Often today's reading from Daniel is cited as part of the evidence in such schemas. This text, together with Isa 26:19, mark the first clear references to individual resurrection in the biblical witness. However, the resurrection Daniel points to is not universal—it is reserved for "the wise" and "those who lead many to righteousness" (12:3). The point is not what happens to people after they die, but rather that God is in control of both life and death.

The second half of the book of Daniel is classified as apocalyptic literature, akin to the book of Revelation. It contains several other-worldly angelic discourses, which can be taken to point to the end times. However, John Collins sees this discourse (beginning in chapter 10) as "a thinly veiled account of the history of the Hellenistic era, which is set in the context of a heavenly battle between angelic 'princes.'"[3] In this context, the author of Daniel is making it clear that it is not human despots who control the fate of human beings, but rather, God alone.

Unlike the disciples who want to know how *they* can be prepared for the Day of the Lord, the author of Daniel is less concerned with his own preparations or what sort of reckoning is in store for him in the future as he is with how God responds to the events of the present and the past. And for Daniel, God's response is and will be one of protection and deliverance. Indeed, it is such deliverance, in a different context, which gives the author of Hebrews reason to approach God's throne with confidence (10:19).

The hosts of *Doomsday Preppers* purport to assess the preparations of their weekly guests and offer suggestions for how they might improve their preparations for the end of the world as they have anticipated it. The only preparation that anyone needs for "Doomsday" (which in itself is an inappropriate name), according to the author of Hebrews, has already been perfected with the blood of Christ. Therefore, he calls upon believers to approach the throne of God "with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water" (10:22).

Parts of Hebrews have been identified with a baptismal liturgy or sermon delivered to catechumens as they prepared for baptism. Whatever the case of the original meaning, however, these verses at the end of chapter 10 offer rich imagery for calling to mind our own memories of our baptism. If your congregation observes a baptismal remembrance rite, there may be a connection to be made between this tangible sprinkling at the beginning of worship and the act of approaching Christ throughout the rest of the liturgy. In what ways do our baptisms empower us to stand before God?

And perhaps more significantly, when we stand before our God of justice and power, in what ways does God empower us through our baptisms to stand before one another? In Chapter 13 the author of

3. John J. Collins, "Daniel," in *ABD II* (32).

Hebrews goes into extensive parenesis about many different aspects of community life. In 10:24–25 he focuses more generally on the manner in which community life ought to be lived. Such encounter and mutual encouragement are the preparations commended to Christians for "the Day" of the Lord's coming (Heb 10:25).

Apocalyptic literature can be scary or intimidating. Many in our congregations avoid reading it either because they think they cannot understand or they are afraid of what they think they understand. Today's readings have their elements of doom and gloom, but it is not "Doomsday" that they are concerned about. Instead, the biblical witness for all its confusion and uncertainty about when that day will come points unambiguously to a great Day of the Lord in which God's power and justice will be seen.

The authors of these three readings offer different pictures of what that Day will look like—pictures that in some cases cannot and should not be reconciled. But throughout they maintain a common confidence (to use the words of Hebrews) in the Lord who sits enthroned above it all. As disciples of Christ we are called to live in this confidence. We need not become "alarmed" (Mark 13:7) waiting for signs or prepping for doomsday if we remain confident that the God in whom we were baptized is and always will be in control. AMA

Thanksgiving
November 22, 2012

Joel 2:21–27
Psalm 126
1 Timothy 2:1–7
Matthew 6:25–33

Thanksgiving is a time to count our blessings. It is fitting that this celebration of abundance occurs annually in the United States where most citizens (even the 99 percent) number among the wealthiest in the world. Although the political motives for declaring this holiday may vary and its observance has taken different shape over the years, observing the penultimate (or ultimate) Thursday in November to be a day of praise and thanksgiving remains an important and appropriate expression of gratitude.

This is the sort of gratitude the Israelites extend when they joyfully remember, "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with psalms of joy" (Psalm 126:2). However, such abundance does not and cannot last. And so, although exegetes are unsure exactly when to date this psalm, it is clear that whenever it was written, this initial experience of bliss has passed—if it ever was truly there.

A brief review of the Pentateuch shows that the Israelites' experience upon entering the promised land was hardly as singularly joyful as the beginning of Psalm 126 makes it seem—there remained struggles and skirmishes long after Israel entered the promised land. This is part of why it's difficult to date the psalm and the period to which it refers. Scholars insist that no historical period could have been *that good*! Yet, a rosy remembrance doesn't preclude a reference to a real past. Think, for example, of "the good old days" we all remember in the church, when the pews were full, the Sunday school was teeming, and no weeds grew on the lawn. It is easy to look back on the past through rose-colored glasses and to rejoice and be thankful for the bounty God provided *then*.

In fact, not only are such one-sided remembrances natural, but in times of strife and turmoil, they can be both unifying and life-giving. To remember the bounty of the past—no matter how accurate such memories may or may not

be provides a common foundation and source of solace. Indeed, in the midst of the Civil War with family pitted against family and the death and destruction of successive battles riddling the country, it is natural that Abraham Lincoln would have looked back to the "better" days, reflecting through rose-colored glasses on the founding of the American colonies. This, I think, is the experience of the psalmist who remembers mouths filled with laughter as well. Such praise and thanksgiving provides buoyancy—it lifts the spirits and unites the faithful.

But nowadays we know better. We know all of the conflicting politics involved in how and why the Civil War was really fought. We know that we still do not have a perfectly united and perfectly equal union. We even know, thanks to books such as James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (2007), that the first Thanksgiving itself didn't happen the way our third-grade plays taught us. Maybe this is why fewer people come to the community Thanksgiving worship than we remember from that rosier past. Maybe it is why some congregations and communities have stopped celebrating this holiday altogether. However, even as the American civic religion shows its cracks and more preachers rightly seek to avoid platitudes that give simple lip service to the state, there remains reason to give thanks.

It is indeed "right and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise" our liturgy tells us.[4] But how and for what purpose do we direct such thanks to God? Too often our prayers of thanksgiving for the abundance of the past end with the plea of today's psalm: "Restore our fortunes, O Lord!" (Psalm 126:4a). We remember and talk about the days when the church was full and the grass was greener because we *want* God to bring back those good old days. Our prayer is too often, "Thanks God for what you did for me yesterday, but could you please give me ____ for tomorrow…?"

Yet, in today's readings we hear the authors time and again express a different kind of thanks. Rather than looking backward to the "good old days," the authors of Matthew and Joel look forward to and give thanks for the blessings yet to come. In their expressions of thanks, these authors show confidence in God's blessings as yet unrealized—or at least not fully so. "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied," Joel prophesies (2:26). Jesus, in Matthew's gospel, implores, "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (6:33). And in the epistle, Paul urges Timothy to engage in "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings…so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim 2:2–3).

Undoubtedly, we have been blessed—both in our country and in our congregations—with bounty both material and spiritual beyond imagination. On this day, as our nation gives thanks for these blessings both of past and present, what would it look like for our congregations to join in the long line of witness before us in giving thanks also, and perhaps most of all, for God's future? What's more, what would it look like to offer this thanks, not for the purpose of further wealth and bounty, but rather, "for *everyone*" so that *together* we might lead "quiet and peaceable" lives? AMA

4. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Leaders Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, 2006).

Reign of Christ (Proper 29)
November 25, 2012

Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14
Psalm 93
Revelation 1:4b–8
John 18:33–37

Today's Hebrew Bible reading again comes from Daniel; however, now it is accompanied by the New Testament apocalypse, Revelation (*apocalupsis*)—the book from which the genre name comes. The noun *apocalupsis* derives from the verb meaning "to uncover" or "to reveal" and, not surprising, the role of an apocalyptic literature is to uncover and make known. Consequently, despite the elaborate imagery the goal of this literature is not to confuse and for their original audiences their messages were likely relatively clear.

Employing angelic discourses and other-worldly conflict, which were common literary motifs of their times, both Daniel and Revelation masterfully tell the tale of God's interaction with humanity in their own time and place. For the author of Daniel, this involved the defeat of Greek overlords and the restoration of God's people Israel. For the author of Revelation, this involved the defeat of Rome and the triumphant reign of Christ.

These are two different stories, written for two different audiences, about two different events. It may be tempting for the preacher to gloss over this fact and merge these apocalypses with the gospel in order to paint a seamless account of the enthronement of Christ. However, when one settles for this surface level connection between throne rooms it does injustice both to the texts and to the assembly gathered to hear them.

We live in a day and age in which it has become politically incorrect to talk about the "kingship" of Christ. Such a term now brings with it all the baggage of patriarchal interpretations of the biblical text. More than that, it calls to mind the exploitation brought about by colonial powers, abuses of power at the hands of politicians, and perhaps every abuse of power—every moment when one human being has claimed or does claim dominion over another human being. These are, indeed, experiences of tragedy and sin.

However, it is because of such abuses of power at the hands of human beings that we as a church, while respectfully rethinking our vocabulary, cannot give up on the reigndom of Christ. For such abuses and abusers are the beasts defeated in Daniel's court of judgment (7:11). In Daniel's time they represented the particular abuses of a particular time and place, just as the man coming in clouds likely represented the archangel Michael. However, today, many Christians see in this being, to whom all dominion has been given, the same Christ who is "the faithful witness…the ruler of the kings" in Rev 1:4. For the preacher, however, these representations need not be mutually—one may simply be more appropriate for a particular group of people in a particular time and place. Likewise, the fact that the beasts of Daniel meant one thing for one group of people does not preclude them from taking on the character of our own beasts—our own experiences of chaos, loss of control, and abuse of power. And, while they may live, Daniel proclaims to us the abiding good news that their dominion has been taken away (7:12).

So too in Revelation John uncovers for us, not just a prediction of the end of the world, but most significantly, the power and love of God in Christ Jesus. Standing before the throne of God, John proclaims "glory and dominion forever and ever" to "him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood" (1:6). God

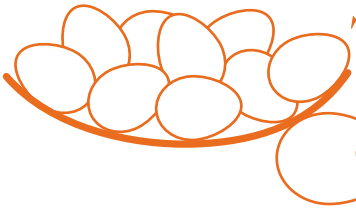
has dominion. God is in control. All that is evil, all that can threaten or oppress us, has lost its power at the feet of God. Sin, and thus judgment, is washed away by the blood of Christ. This is what it looks like to live in the reign of God.

It is an amazing and powerful image—one that people could rally around. Indeed, this idea of reigndom, of God's perfect justice and sovereignty lived out on earth is precisely what the disciples were willing to rally behind. It is why in John's gospel Peter wields a sword and cuts off Malchus' ear (18:10). But Jesus insists his "kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). And such insistence is why he submits to arrest and heals Malchus' ear. But why? If Jesus truly is "the ruler of the kings of earth" (1:5) the natural question is why doesn't he act like it? Why doesn't he establish his kingdom on earth?

One answer, of course, is that he will eventually. This is what leads to predictions about the end times. Another answer is quite simply that Jesus' kingdom is in heaven and we will eventually get there. These are both good answers—solid answers. But I'd like to suggest a third: in his living, in his dying, Jesus reveals to us not a distant kingdom in a far off place and time (or at least not only that), but also a different kingdom. Jesus' kingdom does not belong in a judgment room. It is not won with swords or armies or gavels. Instead, these readings invite us to imagine the contexts in which—the real live times and places and people in all of their particularities in which Christ's reign is alive and well. They point us to the ones who "testify to the truth" (John 18:37), the ones who "serve" the almighty (Dan 7:14), to those who live empowered as freed children of God—the Sovereign of the universe (Rev 1:5), who live lives "in all godliness and dignity." What might it look like for preachers to give thanks in *this* way?

"On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread and *gave thanks*…"[5] Take another look at your altar—at our Lord's table—perhaps this sort of now and not yet thanks, the godly thanks to which Paul directs the young minister in his letter is already among us. We simply need to give it voice. AMA

5. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006), 65.



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1100 East 55th Street
Chicago, IL 60615

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