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SURPRISE PACKAGE III

Lutheran Confessional Heritage and Key Issues in Theology Today

Carl E. Braaten

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Oh, rest beside the weary road And hear the angels sing!

The author of "It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" must have known a lot of folks in mid-life crisis: overworked (life's crushing load); overwhelmed (forms bending low); involved in uphill battles (along the climbing way); hurting and depressed (painful steps, slow). We hope that the essays, poems, and songs in this issue may echo the angel's song, enabling you to be so glad *this* Christmas eve and to recall how deep, how broad and high his love really is.

Frank C. Senn begins by telling us how seasons like Advent and Epiphany got started and how December 25 became Christmas. Do you know how the Advent wreath, the Christmas tree, and the Nativity Scene joined the stream of tradition? Should Advent be a time of joy or of penitence? How should we respond to the secularization of Advent and Christmas? What is the Feast of Fools and the Feast of the Ass? When's the time for fun in church? for chancel drama? for rites of blessing? These questions and more are answered — historically and practically.

Robert W. Bertram has been a regular feature of our December surprise packages. This year he gives us a systematician's analysis of John 1. His diagnosis argues for Jesus to be granted absolute priority; anything short of that leaves us lightless and lifeless, or even worse, disinherited. Try these prognoses on for size: Christ's glory is the depth to which he came to be for us grace and truth; so passive a thing as faith is nothing less than our participating in the life of God; he whose giving is prior to our receiving allows us to reciprocate on throne-like crosses.

What are the metaphors we use to understand God? Father/Mother? Shepherd? King? Benefactor? This unhousehold word has been one of the major discoveries of **Frederick W. Danker's** research. In a recent book, and now in *Currents,* he shows us that the message about Jesus was often framed in ancient bureaucratese (chancery prose). Inscriptions recorded honor and praise of a public benefactor for kindnesses bestowed by him on a province or city.

Luke's gospel tells of God's good decree, the product of his "good will," when he assured all humanity of amnesty and pardon for their crimes against *the* Benefactor. The angels would have us, the weary, be similarly beneficent.

Jesus had a human mother, who was, in **Jessica Crist's** words, "an unconsulted accessory to an outrageous scheme." "Celebrating Mary's pregnancy," again in the words of Pastor Crist, "acknowledges the totality of the incarnation, its grounding in the concrete." Human Mary was the mother of God! That cannot be quantified or systematized, but only celebrated. For thoses parked beside the tired and dusty road, that has a rumor of angels.

Mary's Magnificat was the subject of a dialogue sermon I heard a year ago, delivered by **Patrick Hansel** and **Alison Leitzel.** In a joint Lutheran service, these two seminarians did more than embody the impending Lutheran union and the equality of male and female. They asked the kinds of questions and they showed the type of preaching that make the church hopeful about its new generation of pastors. If one asks the right questions, one can thereby proclaim as much as Gabriel, Raphael, Michael, and the rest, who made up the whole heavenly band.

We need to learn more from others about how they celebrate Christmas. Our Arab sisters and brothers, according to **Norman A. Horner**, try to highlight the divine nature of the child Jesus in their Christmas liturgy so that his divinity is not compromised. Yet the old debates about the date of Christmas stand in the way of a unified, positive witness to Moslems. Perhaps once more this year, in troubled Beirut, a shopkeeper will hang a Christmas wreath in his window, and we who only hear about it, as well as those who actually see it, will have hope, however hopeless our particular no-man's-land may be.

There are advantages to being single — and problems too. **Anne Nuechterlein** calls on the church to stress humanness (and not just

the family) and to tell every single person that she or he is significant and whole. In our society Christmas can be an especially painful time for singles. Four suggestions point the way to a new sensitivity and an inclusive community.

David H. Stohlman provides a new look at the hymns in Luke 1-2: the Magnificat, the Benedictus, and the Nunc Dimittis. These hymns for the New Age, rich with allusions to the Old Testament, provide eschatological excitement also for the worshiper today. Their good news, however, is an invitation and a command to join God in comforting the oppressed and warning the oppressor. Sometimes the weary only hear the angels when *we* sing.

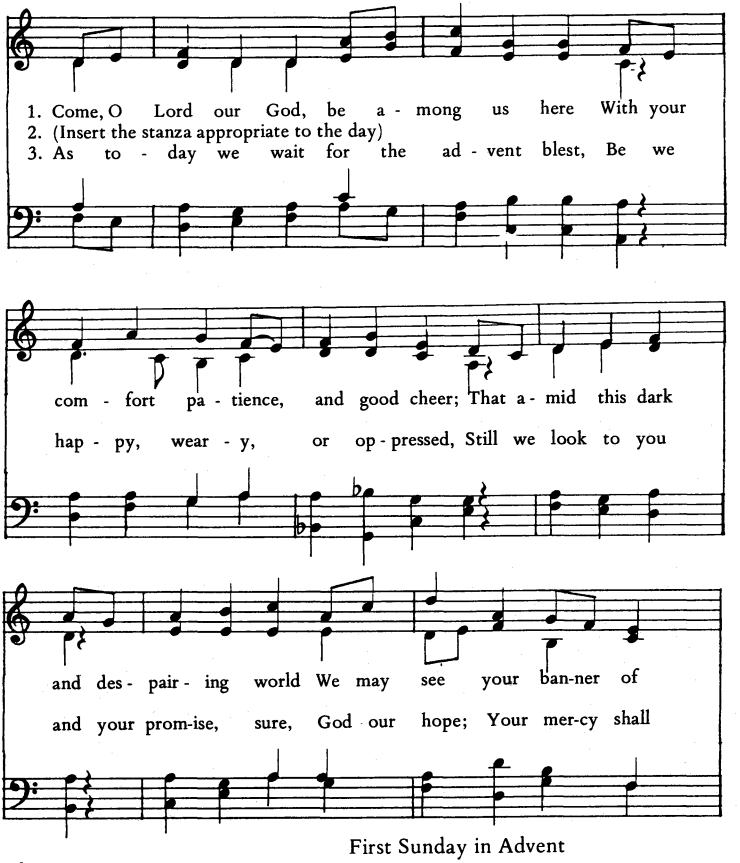
Scattered throughout this issue — where my assistant left them as she decorated the layout with scissors and glue — are the songs and poems written by *Currents* subscribers so that we could have our third annual surprise package. This year's honor roll includes **David H. Benke, James H. Drury, Robert Buckley Farlee, Susan Kay Folks, Jan Gallagher, Frank D. Janzow,** and **Maynard E. Stokka.** This harvest of Advent-Christmas-Epiphany insight is sign and promise that someday soon, aye very soon, the whole world will give back the song which now only angels sing.

Resting, roadside,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

COME, O LORD OUR GOD

Robert Buckley Farlee



First Sunday in Advent

4 Stir your power, Lord; quickly come to save
As we drift, so helpless, toward the grave.
For in you we trust; by your strength alone
Can we beat the forces of evil down.

Second Sunday in Advent

5 Stir our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way
For the advent of your Son, we pray.
To our Savior turn we for strength and light
As we make our way through this troubled night.

Third Sunday in Advent

6 Hear our prayers, O Lord, Make your purpose clear;
Open now our hearts, your will to hear.
That with all our lives we may speak your praise
Till the promised coming crowns all our days.

Fourth Sunday in Advent

7 Stir your power, Lord, that we may be freed
From our sin, to celebrate indeed
That you come for us. We will joyful be,
And will serve you now and eternally.

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The Christmas Cycle: Historical Origins, Traditional Practices, and Contemporary Possibilities

Frank C. Senn

Pastor, Christ the Mediator Lutheran Church, Chicago, Illinois

The church year developed as a framework for the church's eucharistic worship on Sundays, festivals, days of devotion, and commemorations.[1] There is no time in the church year which has a richer or more popular array of customs than the "Christmas cycle." By "Christmas cycle" we include the preparatory season of Advent, now set at four Sundays, and the twelve days of Christmas beginning on December 25 and culminating on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany.[2] In this essay we will explore the origins of this cycle, and consider what those historical developments suggest for a contemporary interpretation of the aspects of the Christmas cycle, and then hold up a number of traditional customs associated with Advent-Christmas-Epiphany which may be suggestive for contemporary liturgical and para-liturgical practice.

Origins of the Christmas Cycle

The liturgical feast of Christ's manifestation (Epiphany) originated in Egypt during the third century, which makes it one of the oldest Christian annual festivals. The idea comes from the term *Epiphaneia,* which in the Graeco-Roman world designated an official visit by a king or emperor to some city of his realm. Pagan peoples believed that the gods also "appeared" on earth in human form (theophany). The date January 6 was chosen for this celebration because that was the day of the winter solstice in Egypt, which was twelve days behind the Roman or Julian calendar. It seemed an appropriate day on which to herald the appearance of the Light of the world.

Because of Western commercial relations with the East, the Feast of the Epiphany was imported in Spain and Gaul at about the same time as the December 25 Feast of the Nativity was developing in the Roman liturgy: i.e., the middle of the fourth century. The ideal of Christmas in Rome was also associated with the winter solstice. However, it also provided Christians with a way of competing with the pagan feast of the *dies natalis Solis Invicti* ("Birthday of the Invincible Sun"), which the Emperor Marcus Aurelius had

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[1] The daily prayer offices never developed completely in conformity with the church year. The psalms and lessons of the liturgy of the hours follow either the principle of the ancient cathedral office, in which case they are related to the time of the day the office is recited, or the principle of the monastic office, in which case the psalms and lessons are recited and read continuously with no regard for the time of the day or the season of the year.

[2] In the revision of the church year calendar and lectionary in the Roman Catholic *Ordo Lectionum Missae* (1969), which served as the archetype for a number of Protestant revisions, there is really no Epiphany season as such because the readings for the eucharistic liturgy follow a *lectio continua* pattern for the Epistle and Gospel, beginning on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany (or Second Sunday *per annum* in the Roman Lectionary).

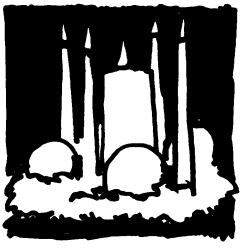
proclaimed as the state cult in 274. This state cult was more than a way of saluting the sun as the protector of the Roman Empire; it was the acknowledgement of the one universal godhead, which was known under a thousand different names. This pagan cult still wielded a great deal of influence in the fourth century as an opposition to Christianity (which had been recognized as a legal cult by the Emperor Constantine in the Edict of Milan in 313). It is not surprising that Latin Christians hailed Christ as the *Sol salutis, sol justitiae* ("Sun of salvation, sun of justice"). Ambrose of Milan put it boldly: *Hic sol novus noster.*[3]

Since the Roman Christmas spread to Western Europe at the same time as the Eastern Epiphany, the liturgical objective of the Epiphany underwent some changes. In the Western Church, Epiphany had as its content the adoration of the Magi. In the East, however, the visit of the Magi was celebrated together with the nativity of Christ on December 25, and Epiphany became the second great day for public baptism. Appropriately, the *theophaneia* commemorated on January 6 was the Baptism of our Lord. In the revised calendars in use in various Western Churches since the changes instituted by the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council, the Sunday after the Epiphany is now designated as the Baptism of our Lord. Since "Twelfth Night" is no longer a major celebration in actual practice in American parishes, the relationship between Epiphany and baptism may receive a stronger emphasis.[4]

The idea of the celebration of Christ's baptism as a manifestation of his divinity may have originated among the gnostics.[5] The Eastern Church regarded baptism as the Christian's birth to supernatural life. Hence, the term "illumine" (*photizesthai*) was used more frequently by the Greek fathers than the term "washing" (*baptizesthai*). Gregory of Nyssa, preaching on the feast of the Epiphany with its commemoration of the Lord's Baptism, called it "the holy light of the manifestations" (*hagia phota ton Epiphaneion*).[6]

The churches in Spain and Gaul also practiced solemn public baptism on the Epiphany, and therefore needed a period of preparation of the catechumens similar to Lent. This is the meaning of the fast proclaimed by Bishop Perpetuus of Tours in 490, which was to begin on November 11, the feast of St. Martin of Tours. This preparatory period, called *Quadragesima Sancti Martini* (popularly known as "St. Martin's Lent"), is the origin of the season of Advent, which was thus a period of about six weeks before Christmas in Gaul.[7] (It had to begin that early because the catechumens and the faithful would obviously suspend their fast during the twelve feast-days of Christmas.) This fast gave Advent a penitential character in Gaul and Spain and later in Germany.

In contrast, there was in Rome a joyous few weeks of preparation for



Christmas, as indicated by some Advent sermons of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604).[8] Since the Roman Church baptized only at the vigils of Easter and Pentecost, there was no need for a penitential season preliminary to Epiphany. As late as the twelfth century, the Roman liturgical books show the use of festive colors (white or gold), the *Gloria in excelsis* in the Mass, the *Te Deum* in the Office for Advent.[9] By the middle of the same century, however, Franco-Germanic influence was being felt in Rome and the penitential characteristics of the Gallican Advent invaded Roman practice, resulting in the use of penitential colors (black or purple) and the suppression of weddings and organ music.[10]

On the other hand, these changes affected the surface of things only. The Scripture readings for the four-week season which emerged in the fusion of the Roman and Gallican Advents combined the themes of eschatological judgment with joyous anticipation of the coming of Christ. This is evident in the new three year Sunday lectionary. Thus, on the first Sunday in Advent the Gospels are from the "synoptic apocalypse" (A: Matt. 24:37-44; B: Mark 13:33-37; C: Luke 21:25-36); the second Sunday introduces the mission of John the Baptist (A: Matt. 3:1-12; B: Mark 1:1-8; C: Luke 3:1-6); the third Sunday puts John in his place in relation to Jesus (A: Matt. 11:2-11; B: John 1:6-8, 19-28; C: Luke 3:7-18); and the fourth Sunday might be called the "Sunday of the Annunciation" (A: Matt. 1:18-25; B: Luke 1:26-38; C: Luke 1:39-45,-49, or -55). The emphases move from eschatological judgment to the proclamation of the Kingdom to the historical nativity of the Christ.

Lutherans have taken the lead in recent years in pushing for blue, "the color of hope," as a proper liturgical color for Advent (replacing violet and thus play-

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[3] See Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 147-8.

[4] Note the suggestion for designating the Epiphany or the Sunday following as one of the four baptismal festivals in *Contemporary Worship-7: Holy Baptism* (Augsburg, LCA Board of Publications, and Concordia, 1974), 10. This suggestion is repeated in Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy: Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), 170.

[5] Henri Leclercq, "Epiphanie," *Dictionnaire d'Archelogie chretienne et de Liturgie* [DACL] (Paris, 1924-53), 5.1:197ff.

[6] Oratio 39; *Patrologia Graeca* [PG], ed. by J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857-66), 36: 335.

[7] See F. Cabrol, "Advent," DACL 1.2:3223ff. See also Frank C. Senn, "The Meaning of Advent: Implications for Preaching," *Concordia Theological Monthly* XLII, 10 (1971), 653-9.

[8] *Hom in Evang.* 1, 6, 7, 29; *Patrologia Latina* [PL], ed. by J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1844-55), 76:1078ff.

[9] Jungmann, "Advent und Voradvent," *Zeitschrift fur katholische Theologie* 61 (1937), 369ff.

[10] *Ibid.*, 373ff

ing down the penitential character of the season).[11] Lutherans have also provided proper eucharistic prefaces for Advent, first (as far as I have been able to determine) in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) and then in the *Service Book and Hymnal* (1958). The Roman rite historically provided no Advent preface; the Trinity preface was used throughout the Sundays of Advent. The *SBH* preface has now been adapted for use in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) and both the new Roman Sacramentary and the new *Book of Common Prayer* (1977) of the Episcopal Church provided Advent prefaces. The *BCP* preface seems to capture as well as any of these new prefaces the sense of eschatological judgment and joyous anticipation which characterizes Advent:

> Because you sent your beloved Son to redeem us from sin and death, and to make us heirs in him of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may without shame or fear rejoice to behold his appearing.[12]

Customs of Advent

It seems that Lutherans have long had an interest in Advent. (Is it a survival of Gallican piety among us?) The most popular custom of Advent, the Advent wreath, originated among the Lutherans in Saxony in the sixteenth century. This may have been a transformation of the pre-Christian custom of burning lights and fires during the month of Yule (December).[13] The Advent wreath, made of evergreen boughs, and suspended from the ceiling or placed on a table, with four candles representing the four-week "countdown" to Christmas, is now lighted in churches after the reading of the Old Testament prophecy, although it was originally a home devotion.[14]

The Christmas Tree also originated in Germany (the Upper Rhineland) in the sixteenth century, and may also be a survival of pre-Christian yuletide customs. The Yule Tree may be one of the antecedents of the Christmas Tree. This was an evergreen tree kept alive in the house during the winter months. Decorations, of course, would be alien to its symbolism. But from the eleventh century on the Paradise Tree was used in churches in connection with the mystery play about Paradise. This was a fir tree on which apples were hung. By the end of the Middle Ages the Paradise play was no longer performed in churches, but people kept the tree in their homes. Unofficially, December 24 was borrowed from the Eastern Churches as the feast day of Saints Adam and Eve. The Christmas Tree, therefore, would seem to be a merger of the Yule Tree and the Paradise Tree concepts, and can be discussed under the customs of Advent because it was put up before Christmas. What was added on Christmas Eve was the Christmas Light (later on lots of lights) symbolizing Christ the Light of the world. A



more recent development has been the hanging of chrismons on the tree (Christian symbols made with beads strung together) in addition to or in place of the ornaments which are a survival of the apples and fruit on the Paradise Tree.

Just as the Christmas Tree might be put up toward the last week in Advent (although the lights should not be turned on until Christmas Eve), so the Christmas Crib or nativity scene might be made ready during Advent. The Christmas Crib, according to legend, was credited to St. Francis of Assisi. The custom has been to start assembling the manger, the straw, the animals, and other elements before Christmas. The figures of the Holy Family are added on Christmas Eve, those of the shepherds on Christmas morning, and those of the Magi on Twelfth Night.

Still other customs originating from Germany are Advent calendars and the Advent play known as the *Herbergsuchen* ("Search for an Inn").[15] A similar custom is the Spanish *Posado* ("The Inn"), which ends with the *Piñata* for the children. These customs stress the sense of joyful anticipation of the Advent season.

There is also the custom of writing letters to Jesus with requests for Christmas gifts. St. Nicholas actually served as the representative of Jesus, delivering his gifts when he made his rounds on the night of December 5. The secularized counterpart are letters to Santa Claus, who makes his visit on Christmas Eve itself. The consequences of the secularization of St. Nicholas are worth considering. The Santa Claus who emerged in Puritan America because of Calvinist antipathy toward saints and bishops is none other than the old Nordic god, Thor, who was the pre-Christian Yule-god. Thor was a genial, white-bearded fellow with a reddish complexion who rode across the frozen wastes of the Northland in a chariot pulled by two goats (Cracker and Gnasher) in order to fight the giants of snow and ice.[16] There may be some benefit in revitalizing the legend of St. Nicholas, which at least had the virtue of exemplifying Christian values.

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[11] See *Contemporary Worship-6: The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary* (Augsburg, LCA Board of Publications, and Concordia, 1973), 7.

[12] *The Book of Common Prayer . . . According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (The Church Hymnal Corporation and The Seabury Press, 1977), 378.

[13] See J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion* (New York, 1927), 638.

[14] See the material provided in Frank C. Senn, "Advent, Christmas and Epiphany: Devotions for the Family," published in both *Living Liturgy* (September 1980) and *Learning With* 8/9 (November 1980), 16-17.

[15] See Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1952), 54ff., for background material on these various Advent and Christmas customs.

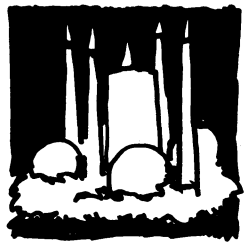
[16] See H. A. Grueber, *Myths of Northern Lands*, I (New York, 1895), 61ff.

These customs indicate that pre-Christmas merrymaking has never been entirely curbed in the interest of maintaining a more austere Gallican Advent. What one might say is that with secularization in the modern West many preparatory customs of Advent, such as gift-buying and partying, have gotten out of hand. In reaction, the stance taken by many church leaders toward these secular pre-Christmas activities might be described in terms of H. Richard Niebuhr's typology of "Christ against culture."[17] One would obviously not want to capitulate to these neopagan activities by opting for the model of the "Christ of culture." Nor is it possible, given the waning influence of the church on society, to opt for "Christ above culture." The liability of "Christ and culture in paradox" is that it allows Christians to affirm secular culture while not affecting any change in it. So the only other alternative to a countercultural stance every December might be Niebuhr's typology of "Christ the transformer of culture." This model rests on a positive approach to the world as the arena of redemption, while yet admitting its need for redemption. The liturgical equivalent of this model is baptism. The reason for a positive appraisal of pre-Christmas activities is that the coming of Christ is reason for merrymaking as well as for vigilance.[18] Christians can be encouraged to participate in these activities in order to exemplify the example of moderation, and thereby witness to the fact that it is possible to get ready for the holidays without getting burned out before the great day comes. After all, one does need some strength left for the real celebration. The use of the great "O-antiphons" with the canticles (*LBW*, p. 175) from December 17-23 in home devotions and in church might help to remind us all, during the last hectic week before Christmas, of our need for prudence, redemption, deliverance, rescue, enlightenment, and salvation.[19] In the words of the hymn based on these O-antiphons, which sums up the spirit of Advent:

Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to you,
O Israel. *(LBW #34)*

Customs of Christmas

The *Festum Nativitatis Domini Nostri Jesus Christi* (Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ) has traditionally been celebrated with a midnight vigil Mass (the origin of the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service), a Mass at dawn on Christmas Day, and a Mass at mid-morning. According to the contents of the Gospels read at these Masses they came to be popularly called the Mass of the Angels, the Mass of the Shepherd, and the Mass of the Divine Word. Parishes might at least provide the Midnight Mass (Isa.



9:2-7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11-14, Luke 2:1-20) and a Christmas Day Mass (using as readings Isa. 52:7-10, Psalm 97 or 98, Hebrews 1:1-9, John 1:1-14). It should be noted that the three sets of readings provided in *LBW* (p. 14) are not for the three years of the lectionary, but for the three Masses of Christmas. It should not need to be said, but unfortunately must be, that there is no Christ-Mass without the Eucharist. Furthermore, there is no more concrete application of the Incarnation than the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ. Candlelight and carols provide a nice atmosphere for the Midnight Eucharist, but a poor substitute for it.[20]

It is interesting that the feast of the Incarnation should have been the inspiration for so many carols. Unlike hymns, which tend to be solemn, carols are playful, simple, and popular. The word "carol" comes from the Greek *choraulein,* suggesting a dance accompanied by flute (from *choros*, "dance," and *aulein*, "to play the flute"). Most of the medieval carols were originally dance tunes, and it is not surprising that the first Christmas carols seem to have originated among the Franciscans in thirteenth century Italy. In the late Middle Ages carols were danced by altar boys in the chancel on Christmas and other feast days, accompanied by song and percussive instruments.[21]

There has been a great interest in recent years in reviving the dance in the church. So it is worth noting how playful with the liturgy our medieval forebears could be. Perhaps the most famous evidence of this was the Feast of Fools (*Festum Fatuorum*), which originated as

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[17] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951). On the liturgical application of Niebuhr's five typologies see Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 380ff.

[18] One of the few unfortunate changes in the new church year calendar and lectionary, in my opinion, is the loss of the Gospel parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) on the last Sunday after Pentecost (a survival of the old Gallican Advent) to the Feast of Christ the King, which has muted the sounding of the eschatological trumpet.

[19] These O-Antiphons are intended for use in the Prayer Offices, but they might replace the Kyrie in the Communion Service. For a musical setting see *Morning Praise and Evensong*, ed. by William G. Storey, David Wright, and Frank Quinn (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Press, 1973), 122-3. The *Gloria in excelsis* should be omitted during Advent. But in its place, so as not to make Advent as stark as Lent when no canticle is sung in the entrance rite, the following might be considered: First Sunday, "Savior of the Nations, Come" (*LBW #28);* Second Sunday, *Benedictus (LBW,* pp. 134-6 or #2); Third Sunday, "Climb to the Top of the Highest Mountain," (*LBW #7*); Fourth Sunday, *Magnificat (LBW,* pp. 147-48 or #6).

[20] See the suggestion for combining the Midnight Eucharist and the Candlelight Service in Frank C. Senn, *The Pastor As Worship Leader* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 130.

[21] See L. Gougard, "Dances populaires dans l'eglises," DACL 4.1:251ff.

an attempt to keep the clergy from the revels and masquerades during Christmas Week.[22] In the eleventh century special feast days for the various ranks of clergy came into the calendar: St. Stephan's for the deacons (Dec. 26), St. John's for the priests (Dec. 27), Holy Innocents for the choir boys (Dec. 28), and New Year's Day for the sub-deacons. What happened was that the clergy imported into these observances the very tomfoolery from which these feasts were designed to keep them. A boy-bishop or a "bishop of fools" was chosen and dressed in pontifical regalia and resided over the Divine Office in the choir during Christmas Week, with many jokes and pranks being played on him and by him on others. As early as 1199 Archbishop Odo de Sully of Paris tried to restrict the abuses of these clergy feasts. It took until 1748 for the Feast of Fools to be suppressed completely in the encyclical, *Super Bacchanalibus*, of Pope Benedict XIV. With it went the more harmless Feast of the Ass (*Festum Asinarium*), with its pageant about donkeys. A hymn which survives from these para-liturgical revelries is *Orientis partibus*:

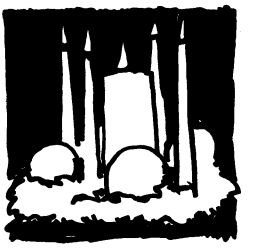
From Oriental country came
A lordly ass of highest fame
So beautiful, so strong and trim,
No burden was too great for him.
Hail, Sir Donkey, hail.

It would be impossible to duplicate such piety today in our more sophisticated culture. But these historical practices would suggest that Christmas Week is a time for fun in church. This might minimally suggest Christmas Week is a good time for the church school pageant and Christmas party. The youth of the parish might participate in the Morning Service and lead Vespers.

Customs of Epiphany

We have already seen the confluence of the themes of the adoration of the Magi and the baptism of Jesus on the feast of the Epiphany. The miracle of Cana (John 2:1-11) was another theme mentioned already in 431 by Bishop Paulinus of Nola.[23] There was also a trend in the East to see Epiphany as the feast of the Final Manifestation of Christ in glory.[24] It was the fulfillment of the Advent hope: "Behold, the Lord will come, and all his saints with him; and on that day there shall be a great light. Alleluia." But certainly the themes of the adoration of the Magi and the baptism of Jesus have been most influential in the development of Epiphany customs.

In many European countries Epiphany became the feast of the Three Kings. The Magi were magicians or wise men from Persia and/or Arabia who, by the sixth century, had been given the title of "kings" (based on the biblical prophecies of Psalm 71:10 and Isaiah 60:3-6). The gospel does not tell us how many Magi there were, and early paintings and mosaics vary the number from two to



twelve. But tradition finally settled on three and they were even given names by the Venerable Bede in his *Collectanea et Flores* (who also informs us that Melchior was an old man with a white beard who offered gold to his king, Caspar was a young man with a ruddy complexion who offered incense in homage to divinity, and Balthasar was a black man who offered the myrrh that prefigured the death of the Son of Man).[25]

Out of the fanciful legends surrounding the Magi there developed a number of mystery plays, including the "Office of the Star." These legends have continued to inspire works of art such as O Henry's *The Gift of the Magi,* Henry Van Dyke's *The Story of the Other Wise Man*, T. S. Eliot's poem "Journey of the Magi," and Juan-Carlo Menotti's opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors.* This suggests that Epiphany might be an occasion for chancel drama in place of the sermon, along with the singing of carols about the wise men and the star, a grand offertory procession of the faithful, and (after the service) the burning of the greens in a great bonfire outside of the church building.

Rites of blessing are also associated with this feast because of the theme of baptism. In the Eastern Churches, the solemn blessing of the font has been extended to the blessing of nearby rivers. A rite for the blessing of water was introduced in the Latin Church in the fifteenth century. The Roman Ritual also provides a rite for blessing the homes of the faithful. Worshippers could be sent home with pieces of chalk to write on the doorframe the initials of the legendary names of the Magi and the year, all connected by crosses, as follows: 19 + C + M + B + 82. As one of the members of the family does this, the rest recite the *Magnificat* and then the head of the household prays:

> Bless, O Lord, almighty God, this house, that therein be found good health, chastity, the power of spiritual victory, humility, goodness and meekness, the plenitude of the Law, and thanksgiving to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: and may this blessing remain on the house and on its inhabitants. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.[26]

In such concrete ways can the glory of the Lord's appearing be gotten into earthly homes, where it must be gotten, if there is to be any real reciprocity between liturgy and life. Everyday life in our society and culture will inevitably be brought to the liturgy by the worshipper; but the relationship will be incomplete unless liturgy is also brought into everyday life, where it can exert its transformative power.

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[22] See E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, II (Oxford, 1925), 274ff.

[23] PL 61:649.

[24] Thus John Chrysostom, *De Baptismo Christi*, 1; PG 49: 365.

[25] PL 94: 541

[26] Quoted in Weiser, p. 149.

Stringing Popcorn

December twenty-third.

Stringing popcorn for still-cold tree
stands shedding needles on stable and manger.
Needle and thread:
Eternal ephemeral caring
for what ends
thrown out
(suet on branches for birds).

Little wooden lady, no more kneeling to adore!
At once begins the caring.
Needle and thread:
Stringing a man's life
though it ends
(hands to branches nailed,
feet, blood, head hanging)
thrown out.

Westwood, New Jersey **Jan Gallagher**

A Christmas Crossing, John 1:1-18

Robert W. Bertram
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Diagnosis

If the Gospel of John is a vast "cosmic trial" — as Theo Preis put it, and Paul Ricoeur after him — then I would think the first eighteen verses function not only as prologue to the main feature but more as opening testimony to the jury by an attorney for the defense or by one of the defense's key witnesses, namely, the evangelist. In that case you and I, the readers, are, willingly or not, the jury, held accountable for returning a juridical verdict.

The One whose case we now have to adjudge as critics is a young Jewish male who has long since died but who claimed to have been "in the beginning with God," indeed to be God. Our verdict of him, one way or the other, reflects our judgment on God, as of course everything we do does. "The absolute itself is on trial. . . . The trial is unavoidable. . . . Only a trial can decide between Yahweh and 'idols of nothing.' " (Ricoeur) Yet in this Johannine trial the God-claim is so starkly different that any conventional judgments we have about God are sure to be at odds with this Jesus-as-God.

What remains the same, though, whether we rule for Jesus-as-God or some other god, is that our respective verdicts are themselves on trial, and we with them. Our critical responsibility in life not only is unavoidable, it is fateful. Especially in the case at hand, the Defendant not only is appealing for us to vindicate him but also claims authority to decide our fate accordingly. If the question to us is, "What is your judgment of him," our answer affects not only him but also ourselves and our world. So then, also for our sakes, What *is* our decision about him? The Court waits, though not forever.

Initial Diagnosis: Reversed Priorities

The evangelist testifies not only for Jesus but also against the opposition, also against us when we side with the opposition — as we chronically do. As the Johannine precedent shows, opposition to Jesus need not be head-on. It may actually appear as acceptance of him, at least as accommodating him, except for one subtle reservation: Jesus is not accorded absolute priority over other biblical authorities whom God has sent. Please understand, the opponents may hasten to assure us, that need not entail a demotion of Jesus. He may still enjoy the same lofty brand of authority which God's other spokespersons (John the Baptist, Moses) have enjoyed and which is the authority of scripture itself, the authority of God's "law" (1:17). His is the authority of being absolutely right, so that to the extent that we agree with it we are likewise right. Isn't that what made Jesus authoritative?

Surely, the opposition reasons, Jesus cannot claim to be unprecedented, an

utter original. Not only were Moses and John the Baptist his predecessors, they were his teachers. He came after them, and more than that, he had to build upon them. Deny that and you deny that he was a historical human being. Worse yet, if it is not their scriptural tradition which he continues, then you make him out to represent another god than theirs. And what other legitimate god could there be, the opponents demand, than the One whose scripture is our norm, whose every Word is our command? Isn't that what entitles us, and surely Jesus, to be God's family?

In rebutting the opposition, the evangelist does not deny (how could he?) that Jesus came later than his predecessors. On the contrary, the historical sequence from biblical precursors to a subsequent Jesus is now turned into a deft argument precisely for Jesus' superiority, by recasting the predecessors in the role of Jesus' advance-men, his foregoing "witnesses." Moreover, their "testimony" pointed forward to him in such a way as to deflect attention from themselves, implying that their own tradition of divine law was only preliminary and subordinate. Nor does the evangelist dispute the traditionalist assumption here that more-ancient implies more-authoritative. In fact, he capitalizes on that assumption by citing the one case where previous does mean preeminent, where chronological entails ontological priority: The Word who in Jesus "*became* flesh" already "*was* in the beginning," hence is dependent on no one but his Father and is himself depended upon by everyone else who came later.

In other words, the evangelist makes a point of accepting the opponents' talk about precedent — who came first? — and turns their talk diametrically against them. Yes, he grants, the Mosaic precedent of the law does indeed speak for God, so does John the Baptist, so of course do the scriptures. But for us to assimilate Jesus to their kind of authority when they themselves used that authority to point away from themselves and to "bear witness" to Jesus who as "the Word" predated them all, is for us to incur their accusation. And accusation is a function they are authorized to perform. "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father," says the Johannine Jesus, "it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me." (5:45, 46) "You search the scriptures," Jesus tells them, ". . . and it is they that bear witness to me." (5:39) John the Baptist bore witness to him and cried, ". . . He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me." (1:15; 6-8; 19-36)

To subsume Jesus under the lesser authority of scripture and its law and prophets — to rank him simply within the history of God's self-revelation, even if at the climax of that history — is to lose not only Jesus, the prior One, but



these lesser priorities as well. They then function in the "trial" not as our supporters but as our accusers, and all quite publicly — as publicly as any good biblical preaching of the law. "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law." (7:19) The trouble with legalists is not that, in downgrading the originality of Jesus, they are now left with only the law. They no longer have even the law — how could they manage it? — but instead are preoccupied with petty human legalities of manageable size, sabbaths and circumcisions, bylaws. "That is not from Moses," Jesus warns them, "but merely from the fathers." (7:22) There is no bribing the authorities of scripture into supporting us by flattering them into first place. They know better and are uncorruptible. Overrating the biblical authorities alienates them all.

Advanced Diagnosis: Lightless, Lifeless

It is bad enough that in this trial the biblical authorities whom we mistake for Jesus' paradigms and norms have to incriminate us for doing so. Besides, as the Defense now adds, in our looking to these authorities instead of the Light to which they testify, we stand to lose that Light and, losing it, lose Life itself. Again it is we the jury, not just the evangelist's historic opponents who are being warned, though now more ominously than before. At first, all that seemed to be at stake was our credibility within the biblical tradition, a condition which we might conceivably salvage by means of some change of attitude or belief. Now the stakes are raised to Light and Life, conditions not nearly as much within our control.

To lump Jesus with God's other revealers, no matter what superlatives we may still reserve for him, is to miss his — indeed, the Creator's own — unique "glory." (1:14) The metaphor is more than optical, cognitive. It is, like the sun in photosynthesis, biological. Not to be brightened by Jesus-as-God is to be ultimately lifeless, yet without knowing so. John the Baptist (or whatever equivalent authority we prefer) "was not that Light, only a witness to that Light." (1:8) But the Light to whom he bore witness brought "Life, and the Light was the Life of humankind" (1:4), "the true Light which enlightens every human being." (1:9) Without that Light no one is truly humanly alive but is rather with the "darkness" (1:5) where nothing grows or survives.

This Johannine rhetoric is so extreme it is lulling, unreal. But then our sense of unreality may itself be a symptom of the "darkness." Doesn't it seem overdrawn to brand this commonsensical, normal attitude of ours toward Jesus as mortal "darkness," when all we mean to be doing really is to associate Jesus with the rest of God's other accredited revealers, as the greatest and last of them at that?

That is shunning the Light? *That* is denying the Creator's Light? and life itself? Surely the evangelist must be overstating himself, probably just turning up the volume for effect.

Or is it rather that our numbness to this impassioned Christology only proves how thick the "darkness" is? So much so that even those on the jury like ourselves, who officially sympathize with the Defendant, find his evangelist's warnings alarmist. If even we, Christ's partisans, find the Johannine rhetoric too shrill, then that might well confirm how advanced is the darkness against which the attorney inveighs.

How else would we expect to experience darkness? As consciously, detectably dark? Surely not, for if the dark were recognizable, if our well intended normalizing of Jesus were as strange to us as felt darkness, we would not need to be warned against its false feel of plausibility. Those who are most in the dark do not know that they are, and cannot know apart from some alternative experience of light. Indeed, classifying Jesus within the genus of all other God-revealers seems like anything but darkness; it seems like enlightenment.

For the evangelist to indict Jesus' domesticators as "darkness" is, of course, a value judgment which presupposes that he speaks from a vantage of light. If he does, as you and I also believe he does, then those who do not share his position can hardly be expected to perceive their own viewpoint as benighted. Yet the fact is they *cannot* see it that way, and that is a fact to which they would agree. Now might not that very fact be used to give them pause? For could it be that the reason why they cannot see their "enlightenment" as dark is that they are constitutionally and environmentally disabled from doing so? That much possibility they might still be able to envision, as a possibility. And that much might be sobering.

Maybe. But only maybe. Meanwhile, the fact that the evangelist's warnings of Christological "darkness" leave intelligent, sensitive people quite unmoved may well substantiate how involuntary their darkness is, how superhuman and systemic. But why speak of "their" and "them"? By now it is we whom the evangelist is warning against loss of Life, and we who in our lifelessness and dullness are tempted to find his warnings unenlightened, thus corroborating his fears of a demonic hoodwink.

Final Diagnosis: Disinherited

Comes now that abject depth of the opponents' problem (and ours?) which takes it far beneath any human ability to retrieve. To refuse to recognize Jesus as the Father's unique and "only" Son means not *being* recognized as the Father's other sons and daughters. To disown Jesus-as-God is to be disowned by Jesus' God. It is to lose all rights (1:12) to God, and losing those rights is not only a matter of *our* having waived



them, as if by a new act of choice we could reassert them. That effective we are not. Our waiving "the right to become children of God," by waiving Christ's right to us as "his own," is in turn concurred in by the Creator, reluctantly but decisively. He insists that we should have our way. That effective we are. It is our problem, yes, but especially so because God is a reciprocal part of the problem, conceding his loss of his creatures. To whom? Elsewhere Jesus speaks of "the ruler of this world." (12:31; 14:30; 16:11)

Is there any theme in the whole biblical message which for us today is as embarassing (and as suppressed) as this one, which makes the divine Parent so responsive to the historical decisions of his sinful children that he finalizes, makes official even their disowning of him and his Son. Not only have we no feel for this theme of godly disinheritance, we have almost no images for conceptualizing it, or even for acknowledging that the theme is there in the New Testament. That bankruptcy in modern theological imagination may be the fulfillment of a Johannine prediction, that our own John the Baptists have become for us incomprehensible.

How ironic that in the same generation when the biblical notion of divine disinheritance seems so nonsensical there is enormous nostalgia for our "roots," a tribalist yearning to recapture racial and national origins, to retrace bloodlines and cultural heredity and to go flocking after leaders in church and state who promise to take us back whence we came. Not that it is unreasonable, especially after a "now" generation which had minimized its past, to recall the depth dimension of the human family. But the blindness of the current nostalgia, its sheer uncriticalness, betrays an illusion. Our ethnic and cultural descent is somehow assumed to assure us the hereditary right to feel at home in the Creator's world. Not so.

To that illusion the Johannine rebuke comes as a shock, all the more because its biologism is so explicit. The Life which comes with the Light is not only like photosynthesis. It is also genetic Life, bearing offspring, spawning God's new breed, with all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining. But that "right to become the children of God" comes by being "born *not* out of human stock or the urge of the flesh or human planning." (1:13)

Initial Prognosis: Flesh as Glory

So radical a diagnosis necessitates an equally radical prognosis. The truth is, we could venture such a seismic Johannine reading of the problem in the first place only because that already anticipated a comparably lavish solution. The problem, settling for a generic Jesus, is the mark not only of human legalism, not only of demonic deception, but of ultimate disenfranchisement. But then that only reenforces how ambitious a case

to the contrary the evangelist now enjoys making for the Defendant, Jesus. Because the problem at its worst lay beyond our control, that is where the solution takes up, beyond our control.

Jesus the Christ, it now turns out, is *our* Defendant, and he can expect no help from us, though it is we for whom he intervenes. He can expect only opposition, and not only from us. He mounts this apparently impossible defense of us "in the framework of a suit over rights." (Preis) The rights in question are his own rights, to be sure, but what makes them questionable is that they are his rights to us — to biblically discredited, demonically darkened, disinherited us. The suit he wages is over custody of a creation already under judgment. And the judgment is not only from Moses and John the Baptist and scripture. His unlikely wards whom he is out to repossess are "the flesh," "the world" which, though it "was made through him, . . . knew him not." (1:10) We might say he had his work cut out for him. Still, only because he did regain title to us as "his own" was our "right to become the children of God" his to "give" and ours to "receive." (1:12) No less transcendent a Christology befits so transcendent a human need.

The temptation is to distrust this good news of an outside transaction as being too good to be safe, too precariously out of our hands. The more cautious alternative is to suppose that the only significant challenge to Jesus' claim comes from human belief like ours. That way, it would be victory enough if Christ just succeeded in overcoming our doubt. As if he could regain custody of us by the mere act of our consent. Ah, but that misses all the fun, the "glory" (1:14) of the rescue he negotiates for us. That is the temptation of reactionary, revelationist Christologies. They underemploy Christ, they obviate him, by safely positing a God whose love of the world is not really contingent upon Jesus' historic intervention. Presumably that would be too risky. Instead the divine love is prefixed, with or without Jesus, and is so timelessly unalterable that it is not even possible for historical sinners to negate it really. That leaves the incarnate Word with little more to do than to "reveal" to us skeptics an absolute love which has all along been true anyway, adding only the human complement of our obedience to that truth. As God-revealers go, even Moses and John the Baptist allowed people more substantive options than that.

True, it is also essential to Christ's repossessing us that there should in turn be a subjective "receiving" on our part, a "beholding" by us, "that all might believe." Indeed, but that skirts the prior question. What was it about Jesus that we, his recipients, "received *him*"? Why just "*his* glory" that we beheld? Believe, of course, but why "in his name"? (1:12, 14, 7) It will not do to evade such critical questions by immediately fleeing to his supernatural



status as the Word who "was in the beginning with God." For us earthlings such a confession comes only as a conclusion, after the fact, not as evidence for the conclusion. The interrogation persists, What was so perceivable in this earthly Jesus that even we in the darkness could empirically see his "glory as of the only Son from the Father?" (1:14) Grant the (benign) fact that "no one has ever seen God." All the more reason to ask, What did Jesus do to compel the conclusion that he alone must be the Son who snuggles in the Father's lap?

The question assumes, no doubt audaciously, that this trial, for all its high-flown claims, does acknowledge rules of evidence. These are rules by which we the jurors are bound — "bound" is right — and so, therefore, is our Defendant. Else his case is not made. Nor is his God's. This forensic criterion is the transcendent, trans-subjective dimension in the trial. The Defendant submits to the Court's highest "law," which demands proof. In fact, he does so in such a self-risking way as to supersede that law (which only "was given through Moses") with his own breathtaking alternative, "grace and truth." (1:17)

Boldly Jesus takes on the old Hebrew legal requirement that there be testimony from two witnesses other than himself, and then goes it one better. (8:17,18) First, he offers to disavow his own testimony if that is not first of all attested by God. (5:30, 32) Talk about risky. For the second witness, he says, he could have cited John the Baptist but instead cites "these very works which I am doing." Yet even for these works, as for the claims he makes for himself, God ultimately must be responsible. (5:33-36) Otherwise Jesus will not claim them as material evidence. That places an enormous burden of proof on Jesus' "works" — especially his crucifixion and resurrection and sending of the Counselor — to cite them in contrast to God's whole history of self-revelation and then to commit God himself as responsible for this new rashness. His laying his life on the line for his clients, at the risk not only of death but of blasphemy, poses the sort of evidence which finally God must either vindicate or not.

Especially in the darkened eyes of the beholders, the jurors, this highly vulnerable evidence for the Defense is bound to appear self-incriminating. That is also its beauty. The very fact that the Defendant risks his case to the same slavish law which binds his jurors, yet without ever surrendering to it as they have, and that he rather tweaks that law as an in-family joke and then implicates the law's own God as his unseen Co-Defendant, his fond Father — that likewise strikes at least some of the jurors, these poor pent-up bastards, as uproarious and lasting delight. Who wouldn't welcome such daring evidence for our reinstatement as children of God! What is proof enough between this Boy and his snuggling Parent has got to be good enough for outsiders.

The "glory as of the only Son from the Father" could sound like an exclusively private, child-to-parent kind of glory, like the rarefied Wholly Otherness of the eternal Word "in the beginning." Such glory, like timeless truth, is what it is whether you and I lay eyes on it or not and indeed might be better — for us, at least — unseen. By contrast, the glory which in the trial before us wins the case for the Defendant Jesus is a glory which we, the jurors, "did behold." In fact, that *is* his glory, that "the Word became flesh." And it isn't that his flesh serves merely as some audio-visual, revelational medium for reducing his glory to visible proportions, so that we on the receiving end get a scaled-down version of the original. This is *his* glory, not just a means for revealing it. His glory is the depth to which he came to be for us "grace and truth" — "full of grace and truth." (1:17,14) Simply, "he dwelt among us." (1:14) *That* glory, in that graciously fleshly form, did not exist prior to Jesus. Unlike the Word he embodied, Jesus had not been "in the beginning." There was a time when Jesus was not. The Father's love of the world was only a "promise" until it *came* true when and where the Word "came to his own home." (1:11)

That is the same place, remember, where "his own received him not." But what a feat of parental love, then, that the Creator-Word, in being rebuffed, was not one bit scaled down or reduced by that. "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (1:15) It simply cannot be said of God's law what is here said of his Son, "We have all received grace upon grace from his *fullness*." (1:6) For his fullness is not diminished but is rather filled full by his enfleshment with us. That is the way of grace, not of law. In this trial the true test, the "glory" of an only Child is the length to which he goes to share his Parent with the disinherited.

Advanced Prognosis: Believing as Living

It is hard to imagine that the verdict gets better, but that is a strain we have to bear. Now that the Defendant, our Defendant, can claim the Creator as Co-Defendant, he invokes for himself that prerogative of deity, the role of Judge, starting immediately. Judgments of condemnation, about which he is ambivalent (8:15,16), he may be willing to postpone until The Last Analysis or even leave to other agents. But judgments of affirmation cannot wait. The fascination which the Johannine Jesus shows with those jurors who believe him, the disproportionate prominence he accords their believing, could easily give the impression that this response of theirs recasts them in the role of active cooperators with himself — that is, as full persons — not only as patients for whom he intervenes. That, of course, is the whole idea.

Maybe the believers' response is in one sense passive. They "receive," he gives.



They "behold," he dazzles. But then it is all the more remarkable, when seen from the generous perspective of this Judge, that mere believing enjoys the value he imputes to it. As if believing were not only being convinced but being put in possession of . . . "grace," "truth," "Life," finally of the incarnate Word himself. All of which is exactly what the Judge declares their believing to be, long before their faith could ever turn to sight.

The Judge's compliments to his believers are declaratory verdicts, I suppose, calling things as he sees them. But how he sees them and calls them is also what they become. His verdicts are simultaneously "Let there be's . . . " In our government's separation of powers we may keep the judiciary apart from the legislative and executive branches. But with the biblical God we do poorly to separate his judicial from his creative and governing activities, as we do, for instance, when we contrast his two aeons as "creation" and "redemption" (or "justification"). They are both creation, one "old" and one "new," and the Creator's characteristic way of governing his creatures, certainly human creatures, is to adjudge them as he does. If the Judge in this case declares that so passive a thing as faith ("this gossamer thread of faith") is nothing less than our participating in the Life of God, then we must in all modesty admit that we have his Word for it, yes, but also at times some suspiciously vivid experience of our own — cruciform, like his, and likewise glorious.

Final Prognosis: Life as Witness

At its best, the trial comes full circle. Those who began as witnesses against us, we now join on the stand as fellow-witnesses to the prior One. In the initial diagnosis, the biblical God-revealers with whom we were wont to categorize Jesus, rose to contradict us for that and accused us of biblicism. Assuming their accusation does not go to waste but readies us to receive a God in the dock, where we defendants sit, we who do receive him also live to tell of him. The telling is anything but passive. It is revolutionary, this "testimony" of ours. It may come off sounding innocent enough as an unpretentious account of our experience, "We beheld his glory." But the One whose glory we beheld has been known to use such deceptively simple testimony to turn courtrooms upside down, also lives and whole histories. We the receivers, now the doers? The Word who antecedes all creation and whose giving is always prior to our receiving, is at the same time so gracious as to allow his beneficiaries the dignity of reciprocating — in their own flesh, as on thronelike crosses, full gloriously. John the Baptist caught the point. So might we.

Suite for Advent/Christmas (With AFTERTHOUGHTS for Epiphany)

James H. Drury

Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, Lompoc, California

I. Here He Comes

SURPRISE! We often
miss it, unprepared as we
are for a mere child.

Hard to imagine
getting what we need. Our rough
edges become as soft as
this baby's bottom.

Here He Comes! Starlight
and song begin the child's work,
smoothing us with love.

II. Here He Is!

In the stall there lies a frightened
maid.
Some animals watch along-side a nearly
useless husband.
(Later there will be a few raggedy
shepherds
and a hint,
the barest hint of glory
with what some might think were
angels singing.)
Outside there is only the cool black
night,
the cold distant fire of a strange star,
wrapping itself around a lonely,
pain-touched family.

In the manger a lusty boy-child sucks
his first
human air, warm and moist,
thick with animal smell and mist-
sweat,
tasting of forsakenness and future
hurt.
His crying weaves a simple counter-
point to the panting
breaths of his new mother,
salty tears drop into straw,
the water of life still to flow.
Now there is the night,
the aftermath of birth,
the nearing warmth of a familiar
star,
(definitely angels singing)
and some tiny, raggedy figures hurry-
ing down a distant
slope on their way to witness a
miracle.

III. There He Goes!

Where shepherds
go, He goes,
to sheep and pasture,
their insides echoing in
awe. From each fire news flashes
out. Unaware just how NEW
dawn will be, flocks graze
their fields, and
shepherds herd.

IV. Here He Comes! Again!

Water drips, runs, falls, and flows
from fingers and fonts,
from little silver bookstore shells,
from shells that are (sea-shore) real.
Water sloshes into golden bowls,
jumps out of fountains,
sprays into stainless steel tubs,
gurgles out of earthen pottery
pitchers.

No one knows for sure about the
bread, so,
we get pieta, pocket, Wonder Bread,
(saltines in tiny pieces),
matzoh and freshly baked.
(I've never seen graham crackers used.
But once,
at camp, they told us potato chips
might work
as well. We knew better and used a
roll of the
French stuff with those tiny black
things
that get all over the place.
But it was BREAD!)

Somebody watered the wine!
Somebody used grape juice!
Once we used chablis given us by our
congregational-little-ole-wine-maker-
family.
I know of a parish where they like to
POP the corks on
champagne bottles, right up front at
the altar!

But somehow, for all that,
here's God for me,
tasted,
smelled,
heard, seen, and touched.

And somehow, for all THAT,
here's God for you,
a baby,
ordinary,
mundane,
miraculous as only babies
and a savior can be.
NOW, somehow, for ALL that,
Here's God for us,
love,
giving and given,
life.

AFTERTHOUGHTS for Epiphany

Sure. They left him gifts!
(I've always wondered what the
Holy Family did with
them?) What could they do?

And the WORD traveled,
not only with shepherds, with
Wise Men, wise enough to know
they'd been touched by grace.

They must have seemed like
madmen, when, home at last, gifts
gone, all they had to show and
tell was baby talk.

Human Mary, Mother of God

Jessica Crist

Lutheran Campus Pastor, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Jesus was not the only ancient deity to claim divine parentage. Athena lept full-grown from the head of her father. Dionysius gestated rather nicely in Zeus's paternal thigh. Venus materialized from her sire's seed upon the waters. Despite these analogies, though, Jesus alone was born of woman. Whatever else people speculate about the birth of Jesus, whether they be pious fundamentalists or skeptical agnostics, they never question that he had a mother. Paternity may be an open question, unproved because of the lack of blood tests and modern laboratory equipment, but his maternity seems to be an open and shut case.

With so many other models around, why did God choose to be incarnate through a mother? We tend to take for granted that Jesus had a mother and to spend our time arguing about whether or not he had a father and if so, who, and how. In this season of Advent and Christmas, however, I believe that focusing on the motherhood issue and questioning what we take for granted may be a fruitful way to gain fresh insight into the great mystery of God's love.

Why was Jesus conceived by God but born of woman? A flip answer might be that clearly God believes in the importance of Jewish mothers. Mary had an innate potential for being *the* Jewish mother of all times — treating her son with utmost love and respect, nurturing him, and bringing him up in the tradition with loyalty and a strong sense of achievement. Jesting aside, there's some validity to this approach: Mary, mother of Jesus, stands in a long tradition of competent, independent yet nurturing women. Beginning with Eve, who questioned authority and thought for herself, and progressing through Sarah, who laughed as only a wise matriarch can at the idea of God giving her a child, Mary's predecessors in the her-story of Israel showed extraordinary guts and competence. Like her people's mothers before her, Mary married into a historically significant family and then proceeded to transform that family's destiny through her being a part of it. Rebecca mothered Jacob and Esau, but then manipulated accepted custom to give Jacob the undeserved birthright. Israel, who struggled with God and demanded two blessings (one from his father and one from God) and who gave his name to the people who followed, was, through his mother, a usurper and a cheat. Ruth, the Moabite widow who followed her mother-in-law back into Naomi's country, married Boaz and produced offspring (half-foreigners) whose line begat David — the boy warrior and crafty king, whose name still symbolizes the hope of his spiritual and physical descendents. Bathsheba, by her beauty and her complicity, helped bring shame and rebuke on the glorious royal line. David, the star of Israel, was an adulterer; his children and Bathsheba's were children of adulterer's. So Bathsheba, too, war-widowed by David so that he might have her for his own, is an-



nexed to the Abrahamic line, and by being a part of it, transforms it radically. Matthew's genealogy states the situation: "And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah." (1:6b)

At the end of the maternal line of the Matthean genealogy is Mary, wife of Joseph. Grafted onto the line, her presence transforms its destiny and shapes our lives for all time to come. The beginnings are inauspicious. Joseph, a long-removed obscure son of the line of David, betroths a young woman who miraculously turns out to be pregnant before the socially acceptable time, or so some of the stories lead us to believe. Only through Mary's husband is Jesus of the line of David, even though Mary's husband had nothing to do with Mary's pregnancy. Genealogy, it seems, is a more compelling force than biology in the understanding of our ancient storytellers. The historical connection with the line of David and the fact of miraculous motherhood were seen by the transmitters of the infancy tales to be of greater importance than the biological consistency that more normal births beget.

Mary, the final and most astounding woman to marry into David's family, was remarkable not because of her beauty, as was Bathsheba, nor her loyalty, as was Ruth, nor her cunning, as was Rebecca, nor her wisdom, as was Sarah. Mary was remarkable because of her ordinariness. While later sentimentalists have made up all sorts of stories about the extraordinariness of Mary — especially her unabashed holiness throughout her life — the biblical accounts present a much more ordinary young woman, a woman taken totally by surprise at the announcement of her new calling. Mary's song, the Magnificat, is hardly a celebration of herself; it lacks the naive arrogance of some of the more buoyant psalms, and it certainly has none of the self-consciousness of Job, even in his cheerier moments. Rather, Mary's song comes from an unselfconsciousness that can only be the possession of the young and ordinary. Mary's song is a burst of astonishment at God's choosing her to be the bearer of human salvation, the hope of Israel, to be God's very mother herself, she who had heretofore never been mother to anyone at all. Barely stopping to question biology, genealogy, theology, or social mores, Mary sings a song of joy and wonder, accepting God's audacious mandate for her as if she had been born to it.

Curiously, it is Joseph's struggle of which we hear, Joseph's questions, his anguish, his pride and his decency. Like Abraham, who had to be tested on the matter of his loyalty to God and the love of his son Isaac, Joseph's dilemma in responding to Mary's pregnancy may be God's way of alerting fathers and would-be fathers to the ambiguities of parenthood known more instinctively by the women who bear the children. Nevertheless, it is curious that we do not hear Mary's questions, for she surely must

have had some. The Jewish Midrash provides us with plenty of speculation on what Sarah thought and did concerning the proposed sacrifice of Isaac, just as it chronicles her reactions to his predicted conception and birth. But for Mary we shall have to create our own midrash, deducing her thoughts and fears from her song, her conversation with the angel, and her meeting with her cousin Elizabeth. Perhaps people who have been caught in a situation over which they had no control, and who have felt shame and ostracism from the only community they ever knew, can feel the situation of Mary. Perhaps every woman who has been vulnerable because of her sex (and yet has been beloved by God) can articulate the fear and joy, the panic and resolve of that young woman wrenched out of her ordinary comfortable existence by the will of the Almighty, to be an unconsulted accessory to an outrageous scheme.

God's scheme was to be incarnate, to live and die a human life, so that all human creatures might be redeemed from their own destructiveness. God chose to be human all the way, from birth until death, though still retaining divinity. And so God's human existence started in the womb of Mary, a human mother, fertilized, it is said, by none other than the Divine. Jesus' gestation, Mary's pregnancy, was a time of transition for Jesus, from embryo to child, and for Mary, from accessory to accomplice. Mary emerged from the experience with a child of her own flesh whose divine father was willing to allow the child his full humanity as well as the genealogical claims of his mother's husband. Mary outdid all her pagan competitors by doing the unspeakable. Being for a brief moment the lustless co-creator with God, she went on to become, and to be remembered for being, the mother of God, revered by all generations for her performance of something so natural. Mary, the mother of God, transformed the natural, with grace, into the transcendent.

Protestantism has downplayed the role of Mary in the whole salvation drama. Perhaps there is an unreasonable fear of confusing mother and father or mother and son. We have tended to relegate Mary to a ceramic figure in the manger scene, calm, painted, as necessary to the scene as the mandatory sheep and cows, and as expendable. We rarely acknowledge her beyond her ceramic serenity, downplaying her pregnancy and overlooking almost entirely any later role she might have had in the life of her son. Fortunately, Luther was not so wary. A great admirer of Mary, he felt no compunction at referring to her as "the mother of God." What he wished to move away from, in the church's understanding of Mary and all the other saints, was the false security of a piety that relied on the intercessions of others, even Mary, rather than on direct contact with God.

The earliest followers of Jesus didn't



seem to know or care about his birth and origins. As fellow Galileans, they might very well have known. In any case, Jesus was not like the royalty who had their biographies written. There was no need. His life was his story, his story was himself, and it was still unfolding. After his death and resurrection, the church grew and spread by word of his resurrection. His breaking of the bonds of death was his unique contribution to the human condition, and it was this that was preached, this that was taught, this which was argued over and written about. Only later did there develop an interest in the rest of Jesus' life, and ultimately in its beginning. Among purists there has always been a bit of scorn about that whole business. Christmas is scorned as a pagan holiday, the commemoration of the birth is seen as historically innaccurate and hopelessly sentimental. Its excesses are inevitable. In the eyes of the sensitive, they range from heresy to adiaphora.

Christmas, I would propose, is the church's season for adiaphora. Lent, Easter, and even Pentecost may remain pure, secure in their place in the church year and in the life cycle of Jesus. Christmas stands out — situated in the church year, but with the central acts of salvation destined to come later. Christmas is for hyperbole, for understanding in concrete ways the fulfillment of God's promises to us. Jesus of Nazareth our Savior, who lived and died on a cross and was resurrected for our sake, was not a doctrine, but a living, breathing person who struggled with the minute and everyday things of life, even as we do. To understand the incarnation, we must understand it in terms of the ordinary, not the miraculous. The wonder is not that God chose to be with us, but that God chose to be one of us. That choice began with Mary, in her womb. That choice sanctified Mary, transforming her womb into a temple for God's nourishment, a sanctuary for God's protection. By choosing Mary, a woman and an untried one at that, God chose vulnerability and trust.

The incarnation was a pact between God and humanity for mutual vulnerability, shared risk, unprecedented trust. Mary's pregnancy was the seal of that pact, the beginning of a new life that would transform all life and make it all new. Celebrating Mary's pregnancy acknowledges the totality of the incarnation, its irreducibility to compartments, its denial of the abstract, its grounding in the concrete. I suspect that some of our latter-day Protestant compartmentalizing tendencies (combined with modern technical/medical knowledge, not least about conception and birth) have done more to undermine our appreciation of the incarnation than anything else. What was to the ancients a mystery, a miracle, is to us modern Protestants a fable or a sentimental piety. What was once alluded to discreetly, even perhaps metaphorically, as divine intervention, is now scrutinized clinically — a first cen-

tury faith story subjected to twentieth century truth tests. What gets lost in all the rationality is the joy and the mystery of the incarnation itself, of God's great irrational act in throwing in the divine lot with ours.

In this century we've moved away from an understanding of the pregnancy of Mary. Perhaps we are protecting ourselves from our own bodies. With the incarnation, God ripped away all protection developed by human beings to continue in the status quo, as if God didn't exist after all. The incarnation blows away social convention and religious expectations, and sets humanity on a new track. This Christmas season, as we prepare and wait for the humble arrival of our screaming, slimy little baby Lord, let us thank God for Mary, in whom God had the first divine inkling about what it is really like to be human. That cannot be quantified or systematized. It can only be celebrated!

Empathy

With a baby moving inside me —
It's easier to imagine Mary —
her wonder —
her pain —
her love —
her anticipation of Jesus' birth —
her longing for her baby —
and then —
the preparation over,
the birth —
the new beginning,
not only for Mary —
but for us all.

Southington, Connecticut **susan kay folks**

On Stones and Benefactors

Frederick W. Danker

Professor of New Testament, Christ Seminary — Seminex

At the beginning of the twentieth century Adolf Deissmann drew the attention of biblical students to a vast store of nonliterary documents that archaeologists had been progressively bringing to the light, especially during the nineteenth century. So important were the discoveries that many scholars revised priorities and went to work on revisions of grammars, lexicons, and Bible versions.

Although Deissmann had taken into account documents recorded on stone as well as on papyrus, papyrological evidence became the glamour exhibit in textbooks, including commentaries. However, during my research for the revision of Walter A. Bauer's lexicon of New Testament Greek, I observed the frequency with which the diction and syntax of formal Greek inscriptions clarified numerous passages in the New Testament.

As everyone knows, the discovery of the papyri taught theologians that the inspiration of the Bible is not in jeopardy simply because a contributor to the Canon uses *mē* where a stuffy grammarian anticipates *ouk*. At the same time, the papyri do not justify a view frequently expressed in variations of one scholar's verdict: "The New Testament is written in 'coffee-and-donuts' Greek," or what I would call "Busch Bavarian prose."

Arthur Darby Nock expanded on the point: Paul does not write "peasant Greek or soldier Greek; he is writing the Greek of a man who has the Septuagint in his blood. . . . Many curious imaginings have flitted across the minds of men as they have sought to reconstruct the past; but there can have been few more curious than the picture of Paul listening attentively to Stoic lectures at Tarsus or making inquiries about Mithraism and later enriching Christianity from these sources." (*Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* [Oxford, 1972] 1:347)

Yet a problem cries out for answer: how are the apparent endeavors by New Testament writers to communicate in everyday Greek to be harmonized with diction and syntax that clearly derives from a stratum of communication above the level of ordinary discourse? Once this question is answered, the phenomenon of a heavy Semitic linguistic cast evanesces, for it is well known that Graeco-Roman ears (ancient documents were read aloud) would readily adjust to the foreign accent of proclaimers of new religious ideas. Indeed, the foreign sound might well be part of the appeal, especially in the port cities of the Mediterranean, where the bizarre of today would be tomorrow's cliche.

Since all users of a language understand far more than they themselves can express verbally, it follows that they will be able to grasp diction and syntax deriving from social registrations where they have no personal input but whose expression impinges in some vital way on their lives. We may not be able to talk

mortgagese, but it is to be hoped that most of us know what our monthly payments will be. Even income-taxese is easy to master after a few tries. Now, what kind of diction and syntax qualifies for linguistic bridgebuilding in St. Luke's and St. Paul's world, dominated by the presence of Imperial Rome? Answer: BUREAUCRATESE. The language of the chancery or court of public records.

Emperors, like secretaries of state when they speak of "caveating," do not use the language of the street in their public communications. Their secretaries, and those of their officials on down the line, know how to write chancery dialect. And when such communication appears on stone, everyone knows that Rome means business. An inscription is meant to be read or heard — there's always someone around to clue illiterate folk in on the latest — by every citizen, temporary resident, slave, or tradesperson.

It is such bureaucratese or chancery prose that we find incised on stones, whose number runs well into six figures and which have been discovered in every part of the Graeco-Roman world. Other inscriptions are still being recovered from kitchen sinks and other sites of utilitarian usage. Fine marble has always been at the top of the list for recycling.

The basic theme in most of these documents is honor and praise of a public figure for benefactions bestowed on a province or a city. Not all of them, however, not even a vast majority, emanate from high political chanceries. Many are the productions of small clubs and associations, whose chief interest was fellowship, with varying degrees of religious observance, and with a primary concern for decent burial. The Roman Senate and Emperors kept a careful eye on them for any signs of subversive activity. Devotees of Isis, for example, were subject to sporadic harassment for decades until Emperor Gaius (Caligula) displayed his ecumenical piety in her behalf.

In a world in which ordinary individuals had little contribution to make in the formation of their political destiny, the small groups offered some semblance of corporate dynamics. And like the United Kingdom, which endeavors through pomp and pageant to suggest a political reality that is no more, these clubs and associations affected the diction and syntax of the council chambers of city-states or of the chanceries of the Ptolemies or of the Seleucids. This diction and syntax brought to verbal expression deeply imbedded cultural values. For a brief moment, as is the case in a variety of deistic societies popular since the French Revolution, their members could play the role of esteemed civil service officials, of members of councils and planning committees.

On the streets and in their public temples, they and other people from all walks of life would see a clutter of statues, busts, and gilded pictures that had been set up in honor of deities,



emperors, local administrators, and especially of philanthropists who had been responsible for building or restoring temples, baths, gymnasiums, theaters, and public malls, or who had staged gymnastic and theatrical contests. On the pedestal of a bust or on a wall they would read, or have someone read to them, an inscription very much like the following that was published in honor of Nero on the occasion of his pronouncement of liberty for Greece, at Corinth, on 28 November 67, a few years after the death of St. Paul:

> WHEREAS Nero — Lord of all the Cosmos, Supreme Imperator, designated Tribune for the thirteenth time, Father of his Country, New Sun that brightens Hellas, who has chosen to be the benefactor of Hellas, and with piety requites our Gods, who are always at his side and look out for his safety — is unique in the annals of time and as Supreme Imperator has proved himself the friend of Hellas, [Nero] Zeus Liberator, and has granted to us our liberty that from of old was so characteristic of us and germane to our land, but then was snatched from us; (and whereas . . . he) has added to his great and unexpected gift release from taxation, something that none of the Caesars ever granted before; IN VIEW OF ALL THIS, it is DECREED by the Magistrates, the Council, and the People forthwith to consecrate the altar hard by Zeus Savior and to inscribe it: TO ZEUS LIBERATOR [NERO] FOREVER, . . . so that . . . all the world may know that our city renders all honor and piety toward the [house] of our Lord Augustus [Nero].
>
> A copy of this is to be inscribed on a stele in the Agora, next to the statue of Zeus Savior, and in the temple of Apollos of Ptos.

On the basis of formal considerations there is little difference between this official decree, passed by a civic assembly, and that of a congregation who called themselves the *Sarapiastai* or worshipers of god Sarapis. In one of their decrees, from about 250 B.C.E., they treat their treasurer, their clerk, and a trustee, with all the deference that their forebears had shown toward Alexander the Great and that their descendants would display toward Nero:

> WHEREAS [Zopyros], the treasurer of the Sarapiastai, and the clerk Theophanes, and the trustee Olympichos have time and again proved themselves beyond reproach, not only in the past when they were entrusted with these responsibilities and made an accounting of everything before the public auditor, but also during the archonship of Hagnias [. . .], be it RESOLVED that the Sarapiastai commend and crown them with a wreath of olive in the temple of Sarapis at the next sacrifice of the

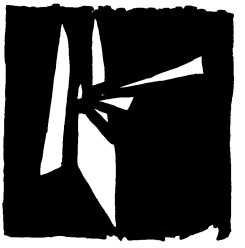
Sarapiastai and that the sacrificial officers proclaim their names at each sacrifice immediately after the sacred ceremonies . . . [. . .] so that the members might be prompted to emulate one another in generous service to the membership . . . And (be it further resolved) to commend and crown the priestess Nikippe for offering the sacrifices at the appointed times. And (be it finally resolved) to record this decree on a stone stele and to set in up in the [temple of Sarapis], with expenses for these items to be met by the treasurer Zopyros out of the Association's account.

To confer a benefit generously and to receive one graciously were two principal features of Graeco-Roman political and social life. St. Luke knows well the cultural structures of his time and in Acts 15:23-29 he records the generosity manifested at Jerusalem toward non-Jewish Christians in the region of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, by freeing them from legal confinement to the Mosaic law:

> The Apostles and the Elders, Brothers, to our non-Jewish Brothers and Sisters in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting:
>
> WHEREAS it has come to our attention that some people here have upset you with regulations we have not ourselves defined and are crushing your spirits, we RESOLVED as a body to choose men and send them to you in the company of our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas as our envoys, who are to confirm orally the contents of our decree. For the Holy Spirit and We RESOLVED to impose on you no further burden beyond these urgent matters, namely abstention from meat that has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual relationships that are taboo. If you observe these matters you can be assured of our complete cooperation. Farewell!

Literary exigencies have, of course, imposed on Luke the necessity of blending an official decretal epistolary form into his story line. It is quite apparent also that Luke has edited Semitic bureaucratese into something that sounds more like Hellenistic chancery style. Especially interesting is Luke's emphasis on the bicameral feature in verse 28: "the Holy Spirit and we RESOLVED." This language corresponds to the formulation in Luke's introduction to the decree: "The Apostles and the Elders . . . together with the entire Assembly." (v. 22)

In general, the Jerusalem (NOT 'Apostolic') Decree documents the reciprocity that was a basic factor in cooperative Mediterranean life. It is not surprising that the recipients of Jerusalem's generous and benevolent liberation from legal confinement are expected to reciprocate by observing a few matters



that have to do with basic social intercourse between Jews and non-Jews at that time. The principal items are: abstinence from meat that has been offered to idols or that has been improperly slaughtered from a Jewish perspective, and observance of Mosaic regulation concerning consanguinity. In a word-for-word rendering: "You will do well if you refrain from these." (v. 29) This is traditional bureaucratese. Translated it means that the recipients can be assured of the enduring love and affection of Jerusalem's congregations and that the fellowship at the home base will back them up in every way. Thus the Jerusalem Decree or Resolution is a display of interacting beneficence.

The Jerusalem Decree or Resolution is a display of interacting beneficence that reflects the theme of Luke 2:1-14, where the evangelist-historian writes about another decree, the one published by Caesar Augustus.

This Roman emperor recorded in an autobiographical account, known as the *Res Gestae* (Achievements), the numerous benefactions he had conferred on the city of Rome, Italy, and the world. High on his list of accomplishments was the peace that he ushered in by putting out the fires of civil war. Grateful citizens and provinces voted him honors that lofted him to the stars. He was in the eyes of the world the Prince of Peace. In him a divine epiphany had become reality for depressed humanity.

Yet, even while Augustus was winning immortal glory, an extraordinary event was taking place in a little village outside Jerusalem. A group of shepherds experienced a unique epiphany when "the glory of the Lord surrounded them with light." (Luke 2:9)

Caesar's birthday had spelled "gospel" for the world, according to an inscription published in Priene, Asia Minor. The birth announced that first Christmas Eve spelled "Gospel" for all time to come. Caesar's birth dried up the tears of the world, said the stone at Priene. This birth at Bethlehem would be a source of joy that time would never diminish.

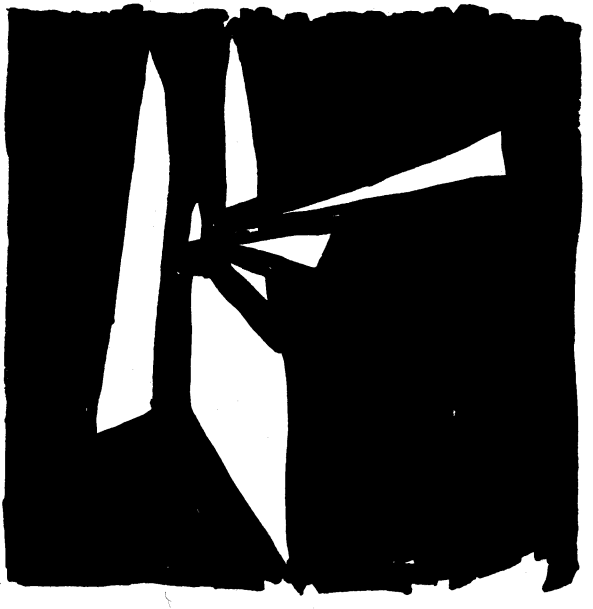
Caesar was hailed as Savior and Lord. The Child born to Mary bears those titles from the moment of God's decision to rescue the world through him. In his *Res Gestae* Augustus records the countless wars that he waged in behalf of Rome. The blood was heavy on his hands in his thrust toward power, and Caesar's finest rhetoric cannot eradicate the stain of it. Jesus Christ shed no blood but his own.

It was a good decree, the product of God's "goodwill," when God assured all humanity of amnesty and pardon for their crimes against the Benefactor of all benefactors. The pardoned can now pardon one another and interact as benefactors.

In a brief article one can only suggest possibilities that the benefactor model offers for fresh appreciation of the peculiar blend of language that finds ex-

pression in the New Testament. In *Benefactor*, published in 1981 (Clayton Publishing House, Inc., 6901 Manchester, St. Louis, Missouri, 63143, $24.95), I discuss the subject in detail, with reference to hundreds of inscriptions, a number of which are offered in English translation for the first time. This study is a means of providing students with organized access to a vast body of nonliterary texts that would for the most part remain untranslated for decades to come, yet whose data need to be opened up more generously so that a growing feeling of dissatisfaction with the dead ends reached through historical-critical methodology as traditionally practiced may be overcome through exposure to fresh hermeneutical experience.

Even the stones are our benefactors.



Advent

Advent —
so wonderful —
not the Christmas season,
but Advent.
Time to prepare —
As my husband and I prepared for the birth
of our child and as
we prepare for the one to
come —
We didn't start by celebrating
the birth,
but by preparing for it —
learning again to appreciate
ourselves as a couple,
before we were a threesome.
All Christians must use Advent
to look at themselves
as people — human beings
in need of Christ before
we can openly welcome him
in our homes, lives, and hearts.

Southington, Connecticut **susan kay folks**

Advent Questions

Patrick Hansel and Alison Leitzel

Students, Christ Seminary — Seminex. This dialogue sermon was preached at Bethel Lutheran Church (AELC), University City, MO, December 10, 1980.

Pat: Mary's song, The Magnificat, is the focus for our meditation tonight. It challenges any preacher, and at times seemed to us almost too powerful for the pulpit.

Alison: So we'd like to share some questions (our questions) with you in the context of Advent — as we prepare for and celebrate God's coming.

P: We'd want to ask, How did Mary see God coming? and how does Mary's vision speak to us today?

A: How does God come to us today?

P: How does God come for us today?

A: What is Mary saying?

P: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord.

A: My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

P: Why is Mary rejoicing?

A: For God has looked with favor on this lowly servant.

P: The Almighty has done great things for me! for you! for all of us!

A: What has the Almighty done for us?

P: Shown the strength of his arm!

A: Cast down the mighty from their thrones!

P: Uplifted the lowly!

A: Remembered the promise!

P: But what does this mean — what does this really mean for us?

A: Salvation!

P: Change!

A: Freedom!

P: Destruction!

A: Destruction?

P: Destruction?

A: The mighty cast down from their thrones?

P: The rich sent away empty?

A: The proud scattered in their conceit?

P: Wait a minute, where's the good news in this?

A: Where's the Gospel in this?

P: Where's the salvation in all this?

A: Where's God in all this?

P: How does God come to the powerful?

A: How does God come to the poor?

P: What does God do when HE comes?

A: What does God do when SHE comes?

P: What do WE do when God comes?

A: Do we flee from the wrath that is to come?

P: Do we take shelter in the wings of God's mercy?

A: Do we stick our heads in the sand?

P: Do we pretend that God isn't really here?

A: *Do we pretend that God doesn't care about the powerful and the powerless?*
P: Whose side is God on anyway?
A: *Does God take sides?*
P: Whose side are we on?
A: *How does God come to us?*
P: How does God come to our nation?
A: *What is the Third World saying to us?*
P: What are the poor saying to us?
A: *What are the revolutionaries in El Salvador saying to us?*
P: Are they right?
A: *Will we be cast down?*
P: Will we be sent away empty?
A: *What are we saying to the Third World?*
P: What are we saying in our government?
A: *What are we saying in our corporations?*
P: What are we saying in our style of life?
A: *What can we do?*
P: What should we do?
A: *Who should we be?*
P: What is God letting us be?
A: *What is God asking us to be?*
P: What is God demanding us to be?
A: *What is God doing, anyway?*
P: What does God want from us?
A: *What is God's promise to us?*
P: How does God's promise free us?
A: *How does God's promise enable us to be God's people?*
P: How does God's promise enable me to be God's chosen one?
A: *How do I hear God's promise?*
P: What is this promise God promised?
A: *To Abraham . . .*
P: To Sarah . . .
A: *And to all their descendants?*
P: The promised land?
A: *Will we look for God's promise in a new order of peace and justice?*
P: A promised people?
A: *Will we look for God's promise in a new community of trust and sharing?*
P: Will we look for God's promise in a new Pat Hansel?
A: *Will we look for God's promise in a new Allie Leitzel?*
P: A new __?
(Insert here names from the local congregation.)
A: *A new __?*
P: A new __?
A: *A new __?*
P: A new __?
A: *Will we look for God's promise in a new born baby?*
P: In a man on a cross?
A: *In an empty tomb?*
P: In our life together?
A: *How does God come in our church?*
P: How does God come in our community?
A: *How does God come in our families?*
P: How does God come in the struggle of the poor?
A: *How does God come in a suffering world?*
P: How will God come in us?
A: *How will God come through us to others?*
P: How will God come this Christmas?
A: *How will God come this day?*
P: How will God come to us?
A: *How will God come for us?*
P: How will God come?
A&P: Come, O God, Come!

Christmas in the Arab World

Norman A. Horner

Overseas Ministries Study Center, Ventnor, New Jersey

Christians are now a small minority of the total population in the Arab world, but they are as vigorous and persistent in faith as were their more numerous ancestors of earlier centuries. There is still a remarkable variety of Christian communities throughout the region — Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant — but in the Arab East (as distinguished from the North African Maghrib) the vast majority of the Christians belong to Orthodox churches. For them Easter, rather than Christmas, is the chief religious celebration of the year, because it is during Holy Week that the Orthodox liturgical calendar reaches its colorful and emotion-packed climax.

The sharp focus of these "Easter Christians" on the resurrection does not mean, however, that they sense any less the awe and wonder of Christ's nativity. Quite the contrary. Even today each church contends for its historic interpretation of the Christ-child's nature, persists in its own tradition about the proper date on which to celebrate his birth, and seeks creative ways of relating that celebration to the larger, non-Christian environment. They care very much about Christmas.

The theological nuances of the incarnation have been a major preoccupation of the Eastern churches for hundreds of years. Unfortunately, the divisions that arose from the Christological disputes of early centuries are still intact, long after most Western Christians have ceased to regard those particular disagreements as a sufficient reason for disunity.

The events of the first Christmas took place in a tiny corner of this very region. Throughout much of the fourth and fifth centuries thereafter, a struggle at the great church councils was to reach agreement about the nature of the child born to Mary in Bethlehem. Those councils did not seriously question the affirmation that Jesus the Christ is both human and divine. The questions were rather about how and in what measure his two natures are related to one another. Was he both God and human at birth, or was deity later added to his native humanity — perhaps at the time of his baptism? Was he more divine than human? More human than divine? It was over such questions that major divisions occurred in the church: the Nestorian separation at the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E., and the even wider breach at Chalcedon twenty years later, in 451 C.E.

The Christian majority, then as now, referred to Mary as the "Mother of God" — the *Theotokos*, a way of saying that her child was both human and divine from the moment of his birth. But the Nestorians (today called the Assyrian Church of the East) still reject that position, maintaining that Mary was the mother of Jesus' human nature alone.

The majority also believed (and so declared at the Council of Chalcedon in 451) that although the humanity and divinity of Christ are each perfect in itself and each distinct from the other, those two natures are perfectly and inseparably

united in the one person who is at once God and human. The Chalcedonian formula became official doctrine in both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. But three great bodies of Orthodox Christians still very prominent in the Middle East — Armenian, Coptic, and Syrian — opposed it and adopted a Christology with even stronger emphasis on our Lord's divine nature. The position of those three non-Chalcedonian churches is commonly, but erroneously, called "monophysite" (one nature). They do not in fact deny that Christ has two natures, but they vigorously reject the bifurcation implied in the extreme "dyophysite" (two natures) position of the Nestorians, which they regard as compromising Christ's divinity, and they accuse the Chalcedonian formula itself of tending in that direction.

The emphasis of these three Oriental (non-Chalcedonian) Orthodox churches on the divine nature of the child Jesus is illustrated in the Syrian Orthodox liturgy for Christmas day.* The processional hymn is as follows:

> The Virgin has begotten the Wonderful; let us go and behold Him who is older than time, wrapped in swaddling clothes, the Old One, the Ancient of Days, who was born of the Virgin; the Almighty, who weighs the mountains, was carried in the maiden's arms; He who gives food to the hungry was sucking milk as a babe; the Son, who is without beginning, wished to have a beginning; He came to be born, whereas He is eternal.

And thus a proemion (preface) recited by the priest in the same service:

> Glory to the Eternal Child who, for our salvation, was incarnate of the Virgin full of grace; whose coming was foretold by the prophets; whose mysterious conception was announced by the angel Gabriel; whose good tidings were proclaimed by the Apostles; for whose worship the Magi came in haste; by whose glory the shepherds were illumined; and by whose manifestation the world has gained life; to Him be glory, honor and majesty at this time of the Nativity celebration, and at all festivals, times, hours, seasons, and through all the days of our life.

So it is that Christians of the Arab world celebrate Christmas from a variety of theological backgrounds, but celebrate it they do — each church in its own way, but not all on the same day.

Whether the proper day for celebration is December 25, January 6, or even January 19 (as observed by the Armenians in Jerusalem only, following the Julian calendar), is a matter of varying interpretation. December 25 is, of course, the day observed by all Western Christians. Eastern-rite Catholic and Protestant churches in the Middle East long ago adopted the same practice, probably because of Western influence. But, except for a few Orthodox communions such as the Syrians who have also adopted that particular Western practice, Orthodox Christmas falls on January 6. The traditional Eastern Christians who so observe it maintain (with probable accuracy) that the celebration on December 25 originated in the Western part of the Roman empire, and not until the fourth century. Christians there, tempted to join in widespread pagan festivities of the winter solstice, were persuaded to celebrate the birth of Christ on that day instead. The Western

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*An unpublished English translation of this service by Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of North America, is the source of the two quotations that follow.

church thereafter retained January 6 as the feast of the Epiphany, relating it primarily to the adoration of the Magi to the infant Jesus (Matt. 2:1-12). But for most of the ancient Orthodox churches that January date is still Christmas, a festival second in importance only to Easter, commemorating three great "manifestations" of Christ: his birth, baptism, and the first miracle at Cana. (John 2:1 ff)

The twelve days of Christmas, to us in the West hardly more than the theme of a familiar song, are thus quite fully observed amid this variety of Christian traditions in the Arab world. This writer, who spent eight years in the region, regarded the prolongation of the Christmas season there as a matter of sheer delight. Many who live there share that enthusiasm about it. An Armenian bishop in the Middle East even urges the people of his community who emigrate to America not to forsake the tradition of January 6. His argument to them is that in all the commotion of December 25, the West risks losing the spiritual meaning of Christmas. When everything has calmed down, he says, and when even the New Year's festivities are over, it is a good time to reflect upon God's coming among us in Christ. But among other church leaders in the Arab world there is a growing feeling that a unified celebration of our Lord's birth would make a more positive Christian witness to the Muslim majority. A current proposal is for all churches to adopt the Western date for Christmas, but to follow the Eastern ecclesiastical calendar for Holy Week and Easter.

Two Muslim celebrations, each of which lasts three or four days, are natural occasions in the Middle East for Christian-Muslim relationships through personal visits: 'Īd-al Fitr (the breaking of the fast at the end of Ramadan), and 'Īd-al Adhā (the day on which pilgrims to Mecca sacrifice in the valley of Mina). Being determined by the lunar calendar, the actual coincidence of either feast with the Christmas season occurs only rarely. Yet the Muslim practice of exchanging gifts on those occasions provides Christians with an opportunity for helpful associations. A Melkite bishop in Lebanon, for example, sends a "pastoral letter" every year, at 'Īd-al Fitr to every Muslim household within the boundaries of his Christian diocese. Muslims are the vast majority of the population in that particular area, and they respond with genuine appreciation.

The Lebanon in which that bishop lives is a most troubled part of the Arab world today, and whatever the sizeable Christian minority in that country as a whole can do to keep the Christmas spirit alive seems especially important. The last Christmas this writer lived there was a dark time of fear and desolation in Beirut. The war was in the eighth month of unprecedented ferocity. Tens of thousands were already dead, much of the city lay in ruins, and there was no hope of solution on the horizon. The normally gaudy Christmas decorations were not found at all along Hamra Street in the fashionable shopping center, nor would there have been electricity to illuminate them had they been installed. A shop window, in a kind of no-man's-land close to the line that divided the city east to west, was so riddled with bullets and shrapnel that it barely remained in its broken frame. In the middle of that shattered window, the shopkeeper had hung a tiny Christmas wreath. It takes courage and resilience to hang a Christmas wreath, even a tiny one, in such a place. But that is what Christmas is all about. There is hope because there is Christmas. Emmanuel: God with us.

How Can the Church Better Respond to the Needs of Single Persons at Christmas?

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Celebrating Christmas is often equated with gathering with one's family or being a family. Our society emphasizes the family more during the Christmas season than any other time of the year; Christmas day seems hollow if you aren't able to spend it in a family. With such an emphasis on families at Christmas, many single people feel particularly lonely, empty, and alienated during this season. This article will explore how the church can better respond and minister to the special needs of singles at Christmas, as well as at other times of the year.

Our society does not often focus on the needs and concerns of single persons. Although the trend is slowly changing, it is still the general feeling that people should be married by the time they are 25 and that they are somehow incomplete if they are over 25 and unmarried.

This attitude is clearly seen in the mass media, which rarely present singleness as an enriching and enjoyable alternative to marriage. Singles are usually portrayed as "swingers" or very lonely. The media encourage the attitude that there is something wrong with those who are single, that single people are lonely, unhappy, and do not have a lot to give others. They tell us that single people wish that they were married.

Our society continues to be primarily oriented toward married people, in spite of the fact that almost half of our nation's population is single. Single people have greater difficulty in obtaining loans and credit. They do not get promoted as readily as married persons.

The church, too, is often guilty of not dealing with the needs and concerns of single people, whether they are young or old, divorced, widowed, or never married. The church stresses family in the place of humanness. Events such as "Family Picnics" and "Family Worship" contribute to the singles' feeling of aloneness and alienation. This emphasis on the family is accentuated at Christmas with special events and worship for families and children. And "Christmas" is not just one day. It begins at Thanksgiving and extends all the way to Epiphany.

While ministry to single people is needed at Christmas and at all other times of the year, it is important that we don't just establish singles groups which are separate from the life of the congregation. Single people also gain from being a part of diverse and intergenerational groups. It is, therefore, vital that single people be given the opportunity to participate in the life of the church at all levels, including leadership. Such active involvement would make Christmas and other special celebrations less lonely and more fulfilling.

Single adults have needs similar to those of married adults, but their needs are more intensely felt because they are trying to meet them on their own. Single people are particularly aware of their need for love and intimacy. They desire to have meaningful relationships with

both single and married people, and to share their emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual growth with others. Part of the pain for some single people at Christmas is that these basic needs are not met. With this season's emphasis on relationships, intimacy, and close family sharing, the single person's feeling of loneliness may also become a sense of alienation and despair.

Jesus can be a model for creative singleness. He had close, intimate relationships with many types of people — men, women, poor, rich, single, married. He made himself vulnerable and loved to the point of laying down his life for us. With Jesus as our model, the church can adequately speak to issues like wholeness, sexuality, and intimacy. And if so, we can also deal with singleness.

How do you tell a lonely person who is single that he or she is significant and whole? We need to live the Gospel. What do we find the community doing in Acts 2? They had fellowship with one another through the breaking of the bread. There is something meaningful and life-giving about sharing a meal with others. One significant form of ministry to single persons would be to invite such people home to dinner and to find opportunities to be invited to their homes as well. A component of wholeness for me is when the Body of Christ truly becomes the family of God, and when we feel that the Christian community is our family.

To know wholeness and intimacy is a human need. We need to touch and to be touched. In the early Christian church touching was considered healing. God's love and the love of the people in the community were communicated through the kiss of peace. For some people, the only time to be touched in the whole week is on Sunday morning. Let us learn from the early Christian community, who greeted each other with the kiss of peace. It is important that we feel free to care about one another not only verbally, but also nonverbally, in ways such as touching.
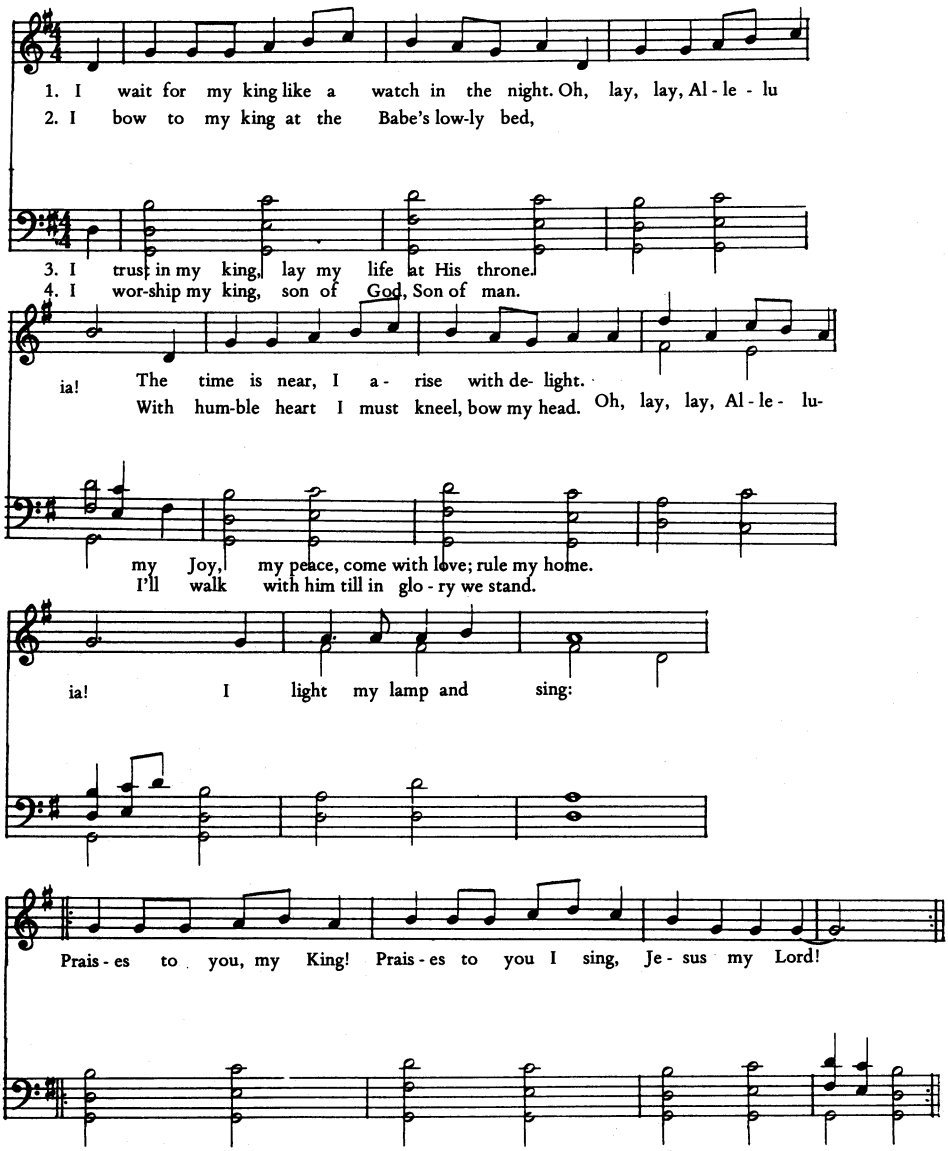
The church needs to develop rites of passage — beginnings/endings — to mark stages of growth in singleness/humanness. If we look at the church's structure, we see it is highly familial and exclusive. Life offers celebrative opportunities for all kinds in addition to the ones the church currently celebrates — birth, baptism, confirmation, marriage, and death.

The church can enable community during the Christmas season in the following ways. First, married and single church members can invite each other to their homes for meals. Secondly, married and single people can sit with one another in church in order that the single people feel a real part of the community. Thirdly, thoughtful gestures and efforts at reaching out facilitate single people feeling that they belong and are an important part of the church. Fourthly, we all can become increasingly aware of our language and actions in order that all people may feel included in the community which is our congregation.

Christmas is an excellent time for the church to rethink and reform its attitudes toward singles. Start by noticing how many single people are in church at Christmas.

ADVENT LAY

Frank D. Janzow



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Hymns for the New Age

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Three important reasons for the popularity of the birth narrative in Luke 1-2 have been the hymns found in these chapters. The Magnificat, Benedictus, and Nunc Dimittis have for centuries been regularly sung in the divine office as well as the Mass. Now with the publication of *The Lutheran Book of Worship*, the Lutheran Church is dedicated to a continued use of these hymns in its worship life. Are these hymns, however, still appropriate to worship in the late twentieth century and does the average person in the pew understand their significance? I want to address these issues by posing two questions: what is the function of the Lukan hymns in the birth narrative, and what is their function in the worship of the church today?

The answer to the first question may be found through a study of allusions to the Old Testament in the hymns. Basically, there are two types of allusions: character allusions and literary allusions. The characters portrayed in the birth narrative are closely patterned after a particular group prominent in the Old Testament called the Anawim. The Anawim, or "poor ones," may originally have designated the physically poor. Later the name came to refer more widely to those who could not trust in their own strength but had to rely in utter confidence upon God: the lowly, the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, the widows, and orphans. The opposite of the Anawim were not simply the rich, but the proud and self-sufficient who showed no need of God or his help.

When the hymns are examined in light of this definition, one can easily see how much the characters involved reflect a concern for the Anawim. Zechariah was a humble priest, who performed his duties faithfully and was indistinguishable from all the others involved in the daily sacrifices, except that the angel Gabriel appeared to him with some startling news about a son his wife Elizabeth was going to bear. Elizabeth resembles Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Hannah was childless, and thus a victim of one of the most grievous curses visited upon Jewish women, the disgrace of being barren. Hannah had to listen to the taunts of Peninnah, but she pleaded with God to hear her prayers and later rejoiced at the birth of her son, Samuel. (I Samuel 1:1-2:11) In the same way, the people rejoiced because of the great mercy shown to their neighbor Elizabeth at the birth of her son, John. (Luke 1:57-8) Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a young woman betrothed to the carpenter Joseph and in some danger because her pregnancy was probably cause for village gossip. Simeon and Anna were two elderly citizens of God's family. Anna had had a long widowhood, while Simeon believed that God was going to let him catch a glimpse of the salvation of God. Such are the characters in the narrative and such were the Anawim, people whose only claim to fame is that they had no claim to fame, but depend solely on God for their help.

In addition to exhibiting qualities of the Anawim, the characters in the birth narrative have other parallels to people of the Old Testament. Mention has already been made of the fact that Elizabeth resembles the description of Hannah in I Samuel 1 and 2. In particular, Hannah's song of praise in I Samuel 2:1-10 has many thoughts in common with the Magnificat. The latter's opening words, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord," echo the opening of Hannah's hymn, "My heart is strengthened in the Lord, my horn is exalted in my God." (I Samuel 2:1) Mary's "Because he has regarded the low estate of his handmaid," closely parallels Hannah's prayer in I Samuel 1:11, "O Lord of Hosts, if you will look on the low estate of your handmaid." Finally, the catalogue of reversals in Luke 1:51-53 — the proud, the mighty, and the rich — is much like the reversals in Hannah's hymn, I Samuel 2:7-8.

Other parallels include similarities between Abraham and Sarah and Zechariah and Elizabeth. In both cases, faithful believers are visited by a merciful God who blessed the woman with the gift of a son in her old age. There is also a great emphasis in both the Magnificat and the Benedictus on the promise made to Abraham and the covenant God made with him. Leah, the unloved wife of Jacob, became one of the "Anawim" when in Genesis 29:32 and 30:13 she cried out with joy in practically the same words as Mary. Furthermore, David exhibits the characteristics of the spiritual Anawim because of the depth of his dependence on God. Therefore, when we read in II Samuel 16:12 that David has called on God's mercy in the face of Shimei's cursing, we can certainly conclude that David has joined the ranks of the Anawim. Finally, in the Apocrypha we find Judith (Ch. 16) breaking into a song of thanksgiving to God for deliverance from the Assyrians.

There are some interesting parallels to Old Testament characters in the Nunc Dimittis itself. When Jacob saw Joseph in Egypt, he said, "Now I can die in peace," (Gen. 46:30) and when Tobit's mother saw him, she said, "Now I can die, I have seen you again." (Tobit 11:9)

A second type of allusion to the Old Testament in the Lukan hymns is literary in nature. Generally these are to the Psalms and prophets, particularly the Servant Songs of Second Isaiah, portions of Isaiah 9 and 11, the eschatological portions of Isaiah 60-61, and the New Covenant section of Jeremiah 31. One scholar found in the Benedictus seven elements from the Aaronic benediction: blessing, keeping, shining, granting, lifting, face, and peace.

The previous discussion of character and literary allusions from the Old Testament, specifically the references to covenant, the promises to Abraham, the Servant Song and other passages from Second Isaiah, the parallels between the characters related to the hymns, and the Anawim all lead to one conclusion: the Magnificat, Benedictus, and Nunc Dimittis, therefore, describe life in the New Age as the fulfillment of that promised in the Old Testament. These hymns proclaim that the New Age has come in the person of Jesus and the work of John the Baptist. When Mary sang of the great reversal of fortune involving the wealthy, powerful, and prosperous, she described God's action in the eschaton. God's salvation has come to his people. He has indeed visited and redeemed his people as Zechariah sings in the Benedictus. Some respond positively like the disciples or like Zacchaeus who, though rich and powerful, became one of the Anawim by his deeds of repentance (Luke 19:1-10). Others do

not recognize the day of their visitation and are given the message of woe. (Luke 19:44) The consolation of Israel has come and Zechariah sings like Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40:1ff.) of the preparations for God's journey to his people and all those who live in darkness and the shadow of death. To all these the eschaton has come bringing something new, namely the forgiveness of sins. (Luke 1:77)

The first readers of the Lukan hymns experienced the excitement of the New Age portrayed in the hymns. The question must now be asked whether the worshipper of today can gain from them the same message. To answer that question we should first look at how the church has employed these hymns in the past. Very early they were included in the daily recital of the Divine Office. The Magnificat has been the traditional canticle at Vespers where the theme of Christ's death on the cross has been most prominent. The Benedictus, with its emphasis on the Dayspring rising, was early linked to the morning office because of its emphasis on Christ's resurrection. The Nunc Dimittis was sung at Compline because Simeon proclaimed that the light of Christ did indeed shine in the darkness of our world. It has also served as the post-communion hymn at the Eucharist. The communicant, who has held the presence of Christ in hand and mouth, can reflect on the awesome nature of this event, in Simeon's words, "My own eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people."

That these songs continue to celebrate the New Age in which we live is demonstrated by the fact that our situation and that of the Anawim of the Old Testament and the Lukan birth narrative are similar. We live in the New Age and yet we await its fullfillment at the end of time. We are totally dependent on God, ordinary people who rejoice at the mighty acts of God performed for us by Jesus. We rely on God's power to effect for us and through us the coming of a sabbath rest in the New Age.

Each individual hymn fits beautifully into this scheme. In the words of the Song of Mary the church waits quietly for the fulfillment of the word of promise. Hers is a song of revolutionary import and should be learned and pondered by all the people of God as one of the essential items of devotion. The last lines of the Benedictus are especially appropriate: "the dawn from on high shall break upon us." The song is oriented toward the future, to the dawn of salvation, and beyond that to the full light of the Kingdom of God. Finally, the Nunc Dimittis continues to end the day appropriately with its idea of the fulfillment of long hoped for dreams. Thus, we might summarize the content of these hymns by the statement, "Benedictus, Magnificat, and Nunc Dimittis are called Gospel Canticles not only because they come from a gospel, but because they are a statement of the Gospel."

In light of what has been presented, an appropriate title for the Magnificat, Benedictus, and Nunc Dimittis would be, "Hymns for the New Age." The new age for Luke is characterized by the reversal of fortune for the Anawim, a reversal which finds its blueprint in the characters of the Old Testament as well as the Psalms and the Prophets. Lest anyone think that this talk of the New Age is confined to lofty ideas and has nothing to say to the present conditions of people, it must always be remembered that the New Age has only begun. Therefore, the indicatives of God's visitation are also imperatives for God's people. The following words written specifically for the Magnificat can apply as well to

the Benedictus and the Nunc Dimittis.

"The Church, aware of the continued injustice and hunger, can sing the song with confidence, nevertheless, looking toward the final fulfillment of the promise in the eschatological age begun now but not yet completed. The song tells of the great reversals of salvation history, comfort to the oppressed, but a warning to the oppressor. . . . Personal and national concerns merge and Mary's experience is but an example, although the principal one, of God's revolutionary care — moral, social, economic." (Philip Pfatteicher, *Proclamation — The Lesser Festivals 2*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975, p. 12)

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The Grief of Christmas

Stars itch in sleepy eyes.
Winter-shod feet hold their frozen tears.
Numbness lingers as the overshoe snow
Melts on the entry rug.

The tinsel of grief surrounds the Yule Tree:
Toys are broken; hug-and-squeeze animals
Are dis-armed and de-furred.
Loves die and get buried.

The Christmas Tree is a dying tree,
Like cut flowers in a vase.
Will all the needles shed at once?
Or will some be left for next year?
One by one the dried-up spears are vacuumed.

We dream, join hands with the gifts we bring,
Sing carols, and let the Dream that dreams us
Dream on until the cold of grief is gone.

Grafton, Wisconsin **Maynard E. Stokka**

Thy Kingdom Come: Some Recent Work on Mark's Gospel

Robert Smith

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The Gospel of Mark is the source for the majority of Gospel lessons in the 1981-1982 church year. In the following update, Professor Smith reviews in detail a recent monograph on Mark and then calls attention to a series of recent Markan studies that will benefit preachers and all other worshipers in the coming year.

The immediate impetus behind the writing of this brief sketch of a few recent books on Mark's gospel was supplied by a reading of Werner Kelber, **Mark's Story of Jesus**. One is tempted to say, "It is the best of books; it is the worst of books," but such a description probably only means that I wish I had myself written one half of his book, and I happen personally to disagree with the other half. Specifics may be more helpful all around.

Kelber's book is a popularization of his doctoral dissertation, *The Kingom in Mark*, previously published with footnotes and all the rest of the scholarly apparatus one expects in such works. Both books are the formidable offerings of a thoughtful mind.

Especially in the smaller and more recent book Kelber popularizes not only his own earlier and more scientific production but also a number of scholarly trends in Mark studies. Some of those trends I regard as wholesome, admirable, and helpful. Others, however, seem especially characteristic of a particular circle of scholars, several of whom studied under the late Norman Perrin of Chicago.

The title of Kelber's latest book, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, tips off the reader concerning his procedure and concerning a basic and wholesome perspective. Kelber in a most intriguing fashion retells Mark's story, section by section, helping the reader to grasp Mark's gospel as a whole. It is one of the strengths of Kelber's book that he strenuously insists on treating Mark as a narrative whole, not as a haphazard collection of paragraphs or verses. Someone has said that whereas Matthew offers at least five sermons, Mark is one sermon.

To grasp the Good News, it does not suffice merely to read some definition of "gospel" or any single verse in Mark — not even 1:14-15. It is necessary to read the entire narrative from 1:1 to 16:8 and to be alert to all the plot devices employed by Mark. (See Norman Petersen, 1978)

A corollary of the view that Mark is a complex and artistic whole is the notion that Mark was a literary genius. Many are saying that with varying degrees of emphasis and with differing intentions. Nearly everyone seems today to reject the older view (expressed for example, by Karl Ludwig Schmidt in *The Framework of the Story of Jesus* and in his essay on the gospels as popular or low-brow material) that Mark was an untutored and naive collector of short bits and pieces of tradition: parables, interpretations of parables, sayings of Jesus, stories

about Jesus, miracle stories. According to Schmidt, Mark artlessly strung together all the varied bits of tradition available to him. His naive labors yielded a book that is a simple and direct concatenation of remembered episodes and utterances resembling nothing so much as the letter of a youngster writing home from summer camp.

Much in the newer view is wholesome. Gospel study is moving beyond the kind of redaction criticism which sees Mark's intention or "the real Mark" only in Mark's disagreements with tradition. It is good to focus on the present shape of the gospel as an integrated literary whole and on the way individual texts function within that whole. Literary criticism has arrived, and some would say "with a vengeance."

It probably sounds like indecisiveness on my part, but it seems likely that the truth of the matter lies somewhere between two extremes: the one seeing Mark (and the other evangelists) as dull experts in the use of sharp scissors and sticky paste, and the other viewing Mark and company as literary geniuses, whose every phrase is as heavy as a plum pudding, loaded with symbols and reeking with subtlety.

Very wholesome (and by no means extraordinary) is Kelber's insistence that Mark proclaims a theology of the cross. The mystery of Jesus is inaccessible to those who simply equate God and his Kingdom with power and success. Faith means taking up the cross, and discipleship means following Jesus on his way of ministry and service in spite of the cost.

In terms of reading Mark's text, that means that the Gospel has not been proclaimed and faith cannot be described prior to the crucifixion and resurrection. Once readers have gone all the way through the gospel to the end, then they must go back and start again, reading each paragraph in the shadow of the cross and in the light of Christ's resurrection out of death and the grave.

Kelber says part of this, sometimes speaking eloquently of the mystery of the cross. It is disappointing when he translates the meaning of Mark's theology of the cross in these flat phrases: "There is no reward without toil and pain, and there can be no success without the suffering that precedes it." (p. 52) This, we are told, is the "philosophy" which Mark derives from his contemplation of Jesus' life. Kelber can often do better than this, and we all need to.

In the matters noted above — reading Mark as a narrative whole, granting to Mark high grades for intelligence and invention, insisting on the centrality of the cross in Christian faith and life — Kelber is helpful. He handles these matters in impressive and sometimes original fashion, even though his originality (like our own, if ever we are fortunate enough to have any) sometimes also leads astray.

Kelber represents still other trends in Mark studies, and here his judgment seems to me to be wrong. Prominent and controversial in studies of Mark are the theme of discipleship and the meaning of Galilee.

Without a doubt the disciples figure prominently in Mark's gospel. Mark is vitally interested in the nature of discipleship.

Kelber is one of those who views much in Mark and almost everything about the disciples from the perspective of 16:7-8:

> Tell his disciples and Peter that he (Jesus) is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you. And they (the women) went out and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them; and they said nothing to

anyone, for they were afraid.

Everyone admits that these verses — most likely the original ending of the gospel — are dark and difficult. They may even be opaque and impossible. Several theories have been proposed as solutions to their puzzle.

Kelber follows one particular solution, insisting that verse 8 be understood as meaning that the women disobeyed the "young man" or angel and never said a word to the disciples.

The twelve had failed Jesus repeatedly, finally forsaking him and fleeing. Now "the one message designed to rescue" them was not delivered. Therefore the disciples never learned that Jesus wanted them to go to Galilee. At the end of the gospel both the twelve and the women are portrayed as disobedient failures, according to Kelber.

Kelber thinks that the twelve, the women, and the family of Jesus remained in Jerusalem and lived lives of disobedience. He builds on interpretations of "Galilee" (especially in 14:28 and 16:7) proposed by Robert Lightfoot and Ernst Lohmeyer in the thirties and by Willi Marxsen in the fifties and apparently inspired also by Hans Conzelmann's handling of references to topography and geography in his book, *The Theology of St. Luke*. Kelber maintains, then, that mountains are places of revelation, that Jesus' multiple crossings of the lake indicate his desire to break out of Jewish particularism (4:35-8:21), that "the way" is a key to understanding 8:22-10:52, and that Jesus' opposition to the temple dominates 11:1-13:27.

All this is argued in an interesting fashion, throwing light on many passages, but leaving the impression that the conclusions are often only possible, rather than probable or proved. Things get out of hand occasionally, as for example when he suggests, a la the usage of the fourth gospel, that "going up" to Jerusalem and "coming down" from the cross signify that the cross was Jesus' "chosen place of elevation." (82)

Kelber shares the view that the gospel was written after the Jewish-Roman war (66-70 C.E.) and the destruction of the temple, and that in the gospel "Galilee" has a particular symbolic significance. For Kelber "Galilee" signifies the kind of Christian community usually associated with Paul: law-free and open to the Gentiles, but also (in Kelber's view) democratic. Kelber speaks glowingly of "the Galilean community" which championed an "egalitarian" ideal. He thinks Mark's gospel features a startling "elimination of all authority figures" in a theology "strongly reminiscent of Reformation theology."

Galilean Christianity, in Kelber's construction, is opposed to "Jerusalem Theology." The Jewish-Christian community of Jerusalem is popularly associated with James the brother of the Lord, with the strict observance of the old Law including the traditions of the elders, full of suspicion toward the Gentile mission, attacking Paul as heretic or renegade. To all this Kelber adds that in the theology of the Jerusalem church the cross was not only not central, but was largely ignored or set aside in favor of a theology of power.

Kelber's "Jerusalem Theology" is an interesting but speculative construct, given the lack of sources on the one hand and his aggressive use of the sources we do have on the other. Kelber supports his construct in part by arguing as follows:

> It seems doubtful whether the Jerusalem Christians made much of the cross of Jesus. Politically it was dangerous to propagate the death of one crucified as a criminal in the city of his execution.

> Religiously, more distance is required . . . before one can reflect back upon an event as horrendous as the cruficixion. (90)

It was indeed dangerous, as the martyrdom of Stephen in Jerusalem (Acts 7), the persecution and scattering of the Jerusalem community (Acts 8), the imprisonment of Peter and execution of James the son of Zebedee (Acts 12), the arrest of Paul in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 21), and the slaying of James the brother of the Lord at Jerusalem in 62 C.E. (Eusebius) all testify. Not all of these are directly related to preaching the cross, but they are remembered as acts of violence against members of the Jerusalem community who displayed courage to be Christian in spite of political danger. These events, however, do not seem to offer any support for Kelber's position. The Christians of Jerusalem knew not only the cross of Jesus but their own cross, nor will it do to say that Acts and Eusebius are wrong about the courage of the community or the severity of their suffering. In addition, the available traditions speak of the Jerusalem community in the days before 70 C.E. as "the poor," and that does not agree with Kelber's assessment.

Furthermore, Kelber's argument about distance required before the cross can be appreciated is without any force in this context. Did Paul not require any distance? Did Pauline congregations or Pauline supporters need less distance than others? Was Mark himself simply precocious? What does Kelber mean? Paul himself says that he received from his predecessors in the faith the credal formulation centering on cross and resurrection contained in I Cor. 15:3-5 and stresses the unity of faith and proclamation in the church.

Kelber spins a profile of Jerusalem theology out of selected hints and out of thin air, but states his case as though he were offering hard facts.

Then Kelber interprets the Twelve and the family of Jesus as the leading exponents of the Jerusalem theology. He agrees with people like Theodore Weeden (*Mark: Traditions in Conflict*, 1971) in offering a radically negative assessment of the Twelve. The disciples, says Kelber, are in Mark's gospel "the true opponents of Jesus." (42) He seems to think that the twelve together with the members of Jesus' family lived in Jerusalem after the crucifixion, ruling over the community in grand fashion as exemplars of an early Christian curia or caliphate, espousing a theology of power, looking for Messiah to come as strong liberator from Roman oppression and as founder of an earthly kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital.

Other (Markan) Christians lived both literally or symbolically "in Galilee" and were oriented to the cross, to service, to openness towards Jews and Gentiles, males and females, and were also democratic rather than hierarchical in their structure. At least that is Kelber's hypothesis.

When Jerusalem and temple were destroyed by the Romans (70 C.E.), Kelber thinks that the Christian community was also annihilated, contrary to early Christian traditions that the bulk of the Christian community fled the city temporarily and then returned after the war, reestablishing their community.

Other non-Jerusalem Christians are supposed to have been dismayed at the alleged destruction of the Jerusalem Christians, and Mark is thought by Kelber to have written his gospel to explain why the tragedy had occured. Apparently Kelber thinks that Mark is saying that the destruction of the city, the temple, and the Christian community was a sign of divine disapproval of Jerusalem theology. If this interpretation of

what Kelber says is accurate, then is not Mark a representative of the same theology of power which he is said to oppose?

Mark 16:7-8, quoted above, is a tough pair of verses. Kelber has a theory. So do I. And ours are not the only ones. Mine goes something like this:

> The women who came shuffling sadly to the tomb to perform a last act of devotion toward the body, thinking only of a corpse and the stone before the grave, were actually confronted with the unthinkable, the miraculous, the joy of his resurrection reported to them by "the young man." Seized with astonishment and numinous awe, they ran from the tomb, not even greeting neighbors or walkers along the road, and delivered the message to Peter and the disciples — and to the reader. (See Mark 1:44-45; Luke 10:4; 2 Kings 4:29) All — disciples or readers — who follow Jesus on his way in ministry and service will truly "see" him. (see Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52)

Kelber's is a most interesting and stimulating book, and if one reads it bearing in mind the kinds of caution catalogued above, I think it can be extremely helpful. Swallowed whole and undiluted, it could have bad side effects!

This is again the year of Mark in terms of the lectionary, and it is appropriate therefore to add a few notes about other books on Mark which I hope will be much used in the months ahead. Articles are too numerous to mention, except that I will venture to mention a couple which introduce many others.

Howard Clark Kee has written "Mark's Gospel in Recent Research" in *Interpretation* 32 (1978): 353-368. In fact the entire October 1978 issue of *Interpretation* is devoted to Mark's gospel and contains much useful material. Jack Dean Kingsbury contributed "The Gospel of Mark in Current Research" to *Religious Studies Review* 5 (1979): 101-107.

Ralph Martin has written a study of Mark and of the literature on Mark under the title **Mark: Evangelist and Theologian** (1972). Martin's views are more traditional than Kelber's — too traditional for some — but the book is readable and insightful.

Especially helpful commentaries on the text of Mark are those by Eduard Schweizer, **The Good News According to Mark** (1970), and Dennis Nineham, **Saint Mark** (1963). Both authors — one Swiss, the other British — are masters of all the pertinent historical, literary, and theological data, and yet they write without any posturing, pretense, or puffing. The works are economical, direct, forceful.

Countless studies of individual aspects of Mark's gospel have appeared in recent years. An old favorite of mine is Robert H. Lightfoot, **The Gospel Message of St. Mark** (1950). In this work and in other, earlier books, Lightfoot anticipated the current literary critical approach to Mark and used it imaginatively with Mark as author and theologian.

One of the least flamboyant and most careful books I know on Mark was written by Paul Achtemeier for the Proclamation Series of Fortress Press and is called, simply, **Mark** (1975). It contains a series of very helpful chapters on such topics as "The Intention of Mark's Gospel," "The Structure of Mark," "Jesus as Preacher," "Jesus as Teacher," "The Passion in Mark," "The Disciples in Mark." The book is one of the finest and most helpful in the Proclamation Series, and it is basic for getting oriented in the study of Mark.

Indispensable for catching on to the new mode of reading Mark as a unified story or single sermon, a view rightly

championed and exemplified by Kelber, is a work by Norman Petersen called **Literary Criticism for New Testament Critics** (1978).

Petersen introduces the whole subject of literary criticism in an especially lucid manner and then offers studies of Mark and Acts as examples of the approach. Along the way Petersen casts light on many of Mark's devices of plotting and writing. Very interesting is Petersen's description of Mark's use of prediction and fulfillment and of predictions not fulfilled within the limits of the text. Mark 16:7 falls into the latter category and as part of a larger pattern was surely intended by Mark to be understood as fulfilled outside the limits of the story in the church of disciples and family and all the rest.

There is a feast of books readily available for people who want to grapple seriously with Mark in the months ahead.

Mark includes no Christmas narrative, no crib, no star, no Wise Men or Shepherds. But Mark begins by announcing that this man — ministering, serving, forgiving, enigmatic, rejected, triumphant — has arrived in our midst as the ultimate inbreaking of God, who is at work through him to free and quicken, to unite and renew. The prayer has been answered and yet must still be prayed: "Thy Kingdom Come!"

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"Soon and Very Soon"

David H. Benke
Pastor, St. Peter's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, New York

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They gathered in a little knot
seeking higher ground
up against the remains of what once
had been
a park bench
at the Ridgewood Reservoir
in Brooklyn
on Memorial Day
among a crowd of thousands.

They proceeded to sing up a storm
ruffling the feathers of a lone duck
far off on a shimmering inlet
roiling the deeper waters of the soul
in a puffing minister of the gospel
as he clomped
in four beat
sore feet time
the 1.2 mile jog
around the circumference of the pond.

They were the women
of the
Four Square Triumphal
Holy Ghost Revival
Pentecostal Tabernacle
Brooklyn Division
and you better watch out
you better not pout
because these ladies had come to do
battle
with tamborines, tracts
and five tone harmony
their weapons of Holy War.

This is what they were up to:
"Soon and very soon
We are goin' to meet the King
(Tamborine)
Soon and very soon
We are goin' to meet the King
(Hallelujah)
Soon and very soon
We are goin' to meet the King
(Tamborine)
Halle lu(tam.) jah
Halle lu(tam.) jah
We are goin' to meet the King
Are you ready? (Bang, bang...bang)
Are you ready? (Yes...Yes, I'm ready)"
Tamborine ching chang
melody pulsing
tracts hawked like raffle tickets
and most folks buying.

Why not?

Come on, King Jesus.
Come back, King Jesus.
The crowds urged him on
at the choir's instigation.
Get down here and do your stuff.
Give us a park with benches you can sit
on
and rest rooms with toilets that flush
and kids who don't mind minding
cheaper rents
rooms with a view
and no roaches.
Come on back, King Jesus!
Come on, Baby!
The crowd had caught the Spirit.

Soon only the duck seemed
disinterested
and the jogger
disgruntled
the other odder duck
lone white man at the party
beet red from
exercise
frustration
embarrassment:
the excercise of calcifying bones
the frustration of decomposing dreams
the embarrassment of running in circles
listening to the rhythm 'n blues
of escapist theology
poor theology
and watching it take.

Are you ready?
the sing-song accused.
Hell, no!
I'm not ready!
I've five more pounds to lose
litanies to write
a career in the Church to consider
for God's sake!
Still, they chanted on
and took the show on the road
around the water
against my grain.

Then as I approached them
to thump by in a huff
thoroughly affronted
a young woman
smiled
at me
and
reaching out her hand
stuck a thumb in the air
and shouted
Keep it up, baby!

In that moment
I got my second wind
born fresh
princely pavement pounder
and loped on
in foot slap synchronization
pipes no longer wheezing
but singing
chortling
harmonizing
with the regal orchestration
of the gospel message
that softener of rigid bones
re-enlightener of darkened dreams
reassembler of the disparate
protesting
parts and partners
of the Humpty Dumpty Body of
Christ.

Are you ready?
she
full-throated princess
sang to me
on my last lap.

All right!
Hey...sure, I'm ready!
All I needed was
a little
encouragement.

The other duck flew off
as well
no doubt to meet the King
en route.

Book Reviews

THE GNOSTIC GOSPELS. By Elaine Pagels. New York: Vintage Books, 1981. xxxix and 214 pages. Paper. $2.95.

This Vintage Books edition is a verbatim reprint of the original Random House cloth cover text. The cloth cover sold at $10.00, but by reducing the size of the page by 25% and going to a paper cover, the publisher has reduced the cost by slightly more than 70%, an amazing, welcome achievement. Every person who wants to be informed about the origins of Christianity should read this very good book. The author knows the Gnostic literature thoroughly, explains Gnostic theology clearly, and writes with a refreshing simplicity.

In the words of Robert M. Grant, "She has a genius for detecting social realities amid what looks like the speculative fantasies of the Gnostics." She concentrates on six social realities. In Chapter I she argues that the orthodox Christians had to defend the historicity of the resurrection in order to legitimize the communal authority of a group of people who claimed to have seen the resurrected Lord. The Gnostic, spiritualized resurrection had to be driven out from the community. In Chapter II, she deals with the social reality of episcopal authority, and in Chapter III with the problem of male-female positions in the religious community. In Chapter IV she relates the passion of Christ to the social reality of persecution and finds in Jesus' passion the necessary authentication of the role of martyrdom in the development of the Christian community. Chapter V discusses which church is the true Church while Chapter VI is a brilliant analysis of the nature of self-knowledge contrasted with knowledge that is based exclusively on external sources like Scripture and tradition.

The author's thesis is that orthodox Christianity triumphed over Gnosticism because its theological and political structure "coincide[d] with social and political issues" of the second and third centuries more fully and closely than the Gnostic theology and lack of ecclesiastical structure did (171). She agrees with Walter Bauer that "[it] is the winners who write history — their way." One might ask whether in her valid concern to interpret the struggle between orthodox and gnostic Christianity as a struggle over concrete social realities she has deemphasized the power of ideas in the development of institutional Christianity. This thesis would be further confirmed by a comparative analysis of the way in which the orthodox and Gnostic communities dealt with the pressing social reality of poverty, hunger, imprisonment and social classes.

Her ten-page conclusion is a brilliant summary of the book and will surely whet the appetite of even a casual student of early Christianity for reading the entire book.

Herbert T. Mayer
Christ Seminary — Seminex

FEMININE SPIRITUALITY IN AMERICA: FROM SARAH EDWARDS TO MARTHA GRAHAM. By Amanda Porterfield. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980. 248 pages. Cloth. $16.50.

The spiritual expression of American women from Puritan times until today has profoundly affected American civilization. Conversely, changing religious and cultural perceptions of femininity have also helped define the inner and outer space in which American women live. This book covers the range of feminine spirituality as exhibited for over two centuries in the differing avenues of religious enthusiasm and poetry, romantic fiction and modern dance, social reforms and political activism, maternalism and domestic theology.

Much that seems so contemporary about women's particular religious concerns today, including the feminine aspects of God, a Christian's feminine stance toward God, and the freeing of

women's potential for growth and service, has historical roots in America. This is Porterfield's gift as she puts us in touch with the feminine side of our spiritual and cultural heritage. In doing so, she offers needed corrective to traditional ways of studying the history of religion in America.

Using a biographical approach, Porterfield, an assistant professor of religion at Syracuse University, focuses on and connects the lives, works and spiritual attitudes of a constellation of great women and shows how these ancestral counterparts' relationships with God, humanity, and themselves have influenced underlying social and religious values then and now.

Among many more, here are biographical vignettes of such diverse figures as Emily Dickinson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Seton, Mary Baker Eddy, Jane Addams and Edith Wharton. Changing perceptions about virtue and grace, saint and witch, female spirituality and Victorian a-sexuality, beauty of God and woman, ecstatic experience and intellect, piety and moralism, home-maker and missionary-teacher-reformer, fantasy and reality are all examined through the flesh-and-blood lives of earlier spiritual sisters from our past.

I see this book as offering valuable historical insight and provocative discussion material for both mixed and single-sex groups and programs.

Ruth B. Ressmeyer
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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FAITH UNDER FIRE: BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF SUFFERING. By Daniel J. Simundson. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980. 158 pages. Paper. $4.95.

For the Christian, the scandal of suffering is not merely its pain but the fundamental challenge it represents to faith in a loving God. Simundson's experience as parish pastor, hospital chaplain, and professor of Old Testament (Luther-Northwestern) brings a unique combination of insights to this challenge. The result is a helpful, down-to-earth application of Scripture to a ministry to the suffering.

Simundson begins with a basic Scriptural approach to suffering and retribution found particularly in the prophetic, law, and wisdom traditions. He then illustrates a wealth of refinements of, and contrasts to the retribution approach. The lament, including ⅓ of the Psalter and the confessions of Jeremiah, protests bitterly against unjust suffering. The servant songs of Isaiah speak of suffering for others ordained by God. Job renders retribution irrelevant within a renewed fellowship with God. Ecclesiastes seemingly gives up hope of finding any answers. The apocalyptic writers postpone retribution to the coming age. The New Testament utilizes virtually all these approaches but recasts them by tying them to the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thus, there is no single comprehensive answer that unravels the mystery and scandal of suffering. There is, however, a wealth of Scriptural approaches from which the counselor can help the sufferer clarify and express feelings and continue a deepened quest of faith. This presumes that the counselor has pursued all aspects of suffering, both "intellectual" study and "survival" confrontation to draw on the resource appropriate to the sufferer's stage of faith. The "right" answer at the wrong time can be destructive of faith. Though short, the last chapter is perhaps the best, with a summary of Scriptural approaches, suggestions for their appropriate use, and a statement of the counselor's basic task.

Simundson's clarity, readability, and application of Scriptural study to the recurring challenge of suffering for faith and ministry combine to recommend this book to all who suffer and all who minister to others who suffer.

Henry Rowold
Concordia Seminary
Chia Yi, Taiwan

FINDING HOPE AGAIN. A Pastor's Guide to Counseling Depressed Persons. By Roy W. Fairchild. San Francisco: Harper, 1980. 160 pages. Cloth. $8.95.

Fairchild differentiates between hoping and mere wishing. Wishing is depicted as holding unreal expectations for specific goals to be met. Hope is the ability to remain hopeful about life even when specific desires are not realized. "The realistically hopeful person is able to transfer energy from disappointed hopes to better prospects." Fairchild makes an Adventtide connection between hope and waiting with patience.

The author draws on theological as well as psychological resources. Recognition of sin and acceptance of forgiveness are important steps to resolving guilt and renewing hope. Faith, hope, and love are an inseparable triad. The Psalms, Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, and Luther show how people of God experienced depression and discovered strength to hope again. "Possessing hope, the champions of faith have not been reluctant to reveal their own desperate struggles in the 'slough of despond.' " In an autobiographical preface Fairchild includes himself among those who have suffered occasional depressions and have yet found new values and meaning in life.

As the subtitle indicates, Fairchild's work is of specific help for the congregational pastor, with chapters that include itemization of aspects of and causes of depression, discussion of various danger signals calling for consultation and/or referral, and pastoral counseling strategies for activating hope. The author aids the reader who is without formal psychological training by carefully defining terms.

A most significant aspect of this book is its agenda for congregational organization to provide an ongoing support system for people subject to the effects of pain and distress. "Hope cannot be achieved alone." Whether it is only two people or an entire congregation, a *community* is required for a person to recover from depression and experience personal liberation. Fairchild claims that the advantages of the total congregation for providing mutual care for members are often overlooked. In a chapter titled "Nurturing Hope in the Church," he supports the conclusion of social psychiatrist Mansell Pattison that "the primary function of the minister is pastoral care of the social system of the church to the end that the church system can provide the necessary basis for being."

I received from Fairchild's work renewed courage to imagine new possibilities, some good biblical references and other material for a sermon series on hope, and a number of sound ideas for counseling and caring in and by the congregational community.

Keith Gerberding
Southgate, Michigan

REACH OUT TO SINGLES. By Raymond Kay Brown. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979. 191 pages. Paper. $6.95.

Why aren't single adults active in the church? Is the church only oriented toward families and married persons? Does the church communicate that single adults are incomplete? Raymond Kay Brown addresses these and other challenging questions in exploring how the church can better respond to the needs of single adults.

Brown begins by discussing how many congregations aim their primary ministry toward families and couples. Family retreats, family nights, couples clubs, and worship focusing on the family and marriage are very much the norm. Congregations are unaware of the subtle ways that single adults are excluded.

Brown's hypothesis is that there is a great gap between single adults and the institutional church. He contends that much education concerning the needs of single adults must happen before ministry to the single adults can be effective.

To gain a more inclusive understanding of the single adults and how the

church can better minister to their needs, Brown surveyed 40 pastors and 300 single adults. This book not only provides excellent data on the pressures and problems which single adults face, but also deals very concretely with biblical issues of singleness and various forms that a singles ministry can take.

This insightful and very practical book would be especially thought-provoking for those actively involved in church leadership. It is time that the church consciously works toward stressing humanness and not the nuclear family. Brown challenges and impells us to rethink and reform our attitudes toward ministering to the single adults.

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CHRISTIAN ORIGINS IN SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE. By Howard Clark Kee. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980. 204 pages. Paper. $8.95.

After rehearsing in a particularly lucid and helpful fashion the story of the rise of interest in sociological method (including anthropology, sociology of knowledge and sociology of literature) as a tool in biblical research (ch. 1), Kee describes the usefulness of the distinctions made by the sociology of knowledge by examining the ways ancient Jews and various early Christian communities constructed their cosmos or structured their social world (ch. 2).

In chapter 3 Kee focuses on the way followers are attracted to charismatic leaders with revelatory messages and marvelous deeds promising life and forgiveness and meaning in the face of basic anxieties.

Kee turns in chapter 4 from the authority of leadership to a study of conversion as the process by which people are detached from old patterns of identity and find new personal and social identities in a new community. Then he studies (ch. 5) the ways new religious movements develop fresh patterns of ritual, story and other institutional forms essential for maintaining the newly achieved identity.

Finally he looks at various New Testament documents in an effort to discover the social functions they were intended to serve (ch. 6).

Kee not only describes but advocates the use of sociological methods. The existentialists and structuralists take their lumps in this book. They are too doctrinaire or too individualistic and operate at too high a level of abstraction far from the maddening crowd and the social matrix.

Kee has previously published a book on Mark's gospel and the community using it. Here he steps back, looks at sociological methods such as he used in that prior volume, and presents a balanced and comprehensive guide to those methods.

Robert Smith
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