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SURPRISE PACKAGE II

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Drawings by *Patricia Kraay*

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Welcome to earth, O noble Surprise Package!

The poems, articles, drawings, and reviews that make up this issue are an effort to help you recapture the joy and the depth of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. They are a surprise package designed to delight the eye and the ear and the mind; they come with the hope of rekindling within you once more an open-armed, palpitating reception for God's dear Son. He was, is, and always will be a Surprise Package. And, as usual, we understate ourselves.

We are not going to gild the Tannenbaum by explaining or commenting on the opening selection of poems and hymns. We just want to call attention to the works of **Jan Gallagher**, **Robert Smith**, **Thomas W. Shaefer**, and **Mike Sherer** lest you skip by them like so much wrapping paper. If you want to quote them in bulletin, newsletter, or sermon, be our guest.

Robert W. Bertram does an Epiphany crossing (that is, a systematician's reading) of the story of the wise men. It exposes that kind of authority-seeking in us that subjects others to our control until we finally want to exclude or even purge them. God lets us have our own way in this, thus coming under his judgment. But he also sees us through thanks to Jesus, who made such a difference to God because of his compassion for the strays. Identifying with his friends, the sinners, cost Jesus his life, and that is the basis of his new-style authority. The magi then, and we now, are moved by him to believe and to redeploy the old quest for authority, not to be served but to serve. You ought to look forward to the trip through this article, hanging on for the plum in the last line.

Articles on Luke 2 should come as no surprise at Christmas. But **Paul Meyer** and **Robert Smith** take us beyond the cliche to new, substantive readings. Meyer has written an imaginary, poem-like prayer and put it in the mouth of a first-century Jewish Christian. What great news he hears because of his Jewish heritage and his setting in the Roman World! Smith begins with those opening

verses of Luke 2 that bristle with historical difficulties and unpacks for us their theological intention. Luke is offering a political apologetic and giving warning to Christian rebels. The Christians he defends are falsely accused of being subversive to religion, morality and public order. Jesus is a universal lord who is bringing in a kingdom of surpassing peace. In telling of the trip by Joseph and Mary to pay taxes, Luke describes and prescribes obedience to the Roman state. Luke makes room for both Caesar and Jesus as lord though the latter is lord of lords. Jesus and the kingship of God are not rivals to Caesar and Rome, but they are overwhelming realities of a different order of magnitude. The Augustan peace was a dim foreshadowing of the real thing.

We are not only often jaded by Christmas, but overwhelmed by its trivial materialism. **Mary Schramm** calls for an alternative in which *shalom* will transform our relationship to God, our environment, other people, and the Western-preoccupation with gift-giving. To have merely enough is a banquet. Can we learn that and celebrate that this Christmas?

The "religion" **Elmer N. Witt** wants to get back into Christmas has more to do with responsibility for the poor than it does with inward spirituality. He tells a Christmas story about family life in America's ghettoes and then suggests how we might praise the wondrous God who became poor so that we might be rich. With his definitions, who would dare to be for "religionless" Christianity?

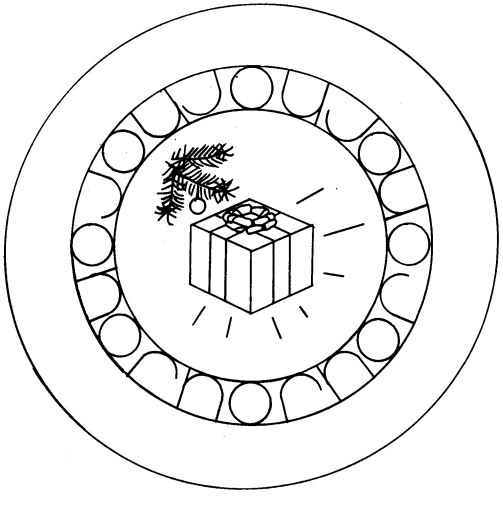
Need some relief from heavy reading? Study (and make) the banner drawn by **Michael Hiller**. The banner is simple enough to be made by the most non-artistic *Currents'* reader, but it is evocative enough to sum up the Gospel readings for the whole Advent season. Maybe your worship services need *this* visual aid. Then try the "once upon a timer" by **Hubert Beck** who offers a way of making Christmas surprising and whole again.

H. H. Mirly shares what Christmas means to the Lutheran, charismatic congregation he serves in Charlotte. He reports some of the deep acts of piety that characterize the flock and the *cantus firmus* — of the church year, the liturgy, and the eucharist — Lutheranism offers in its most ecumenical expression.

All good things, including the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, come to an end. **Kurt Hendel** concludes his series of Augsburg vignettes by reporting on Philip of Hesse — politician, soldier, bigamist — and militant confessor. He was one of the most important, though not always one of the most exemplary leaders of the Reformation. Jacob, David, and Peter could be his kin.

How shall we meet our surprising guest? All of us, finally, must answer that question for ourselves as we worship with one another at Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. I hope this issue gives you a dozen new and surprising ways to say, "Welcome!"

Ralph W. Klein
Packager



Apology

How dare I,
yet another Christmas poem,
speak to you?
For a poem, humility is the important virtue.
Unhumble poems say, "sylvan home,"
and, "Night's plutonian shore,"
and no one likes them.
As you see, I am not one of those.
Much as the pundits prattle of
"the creative power of the poem,"
I do not claim to be God.
Can I create or destroy,
I who am only a bit of ink on paper,
only words?
Yet (let me say it with all humility)
there is something,
a Christmas something which makes a poem
more than ink on paper —
perhaps you know the feeling?
Call it, if you will, promise.
Look at it this way:
A poem is only words.
The Word is only a baby.
Just wait till we both grow up.

Westwood, New Jersey **Jan Gallagher**

"A Sign for You"

Black, chill,
On the hill
Men with sheep
Watch did keep
Long, long, ago.

Dark, Dark,
But then — hark!
Angel bright
Gave a fright
Standing by them.

"Cheer, cheer!
Do not fear,
Be not sad.
Tidings glad
I bring to you."

"Peace, Peace!
Warring cease!
God and man
Are at one.
The Savior's born."

"When? Where?
Tell us, Sir!"
"This same night
There in sight —
In David's town."

"Now, how
Shall we know
His noble face
Or the place
Where he's sheltered?"

"Crib rude,
Wood rough hewn,
Straw like nails,
Oxen tails
Surround the child."

Hearts leaping,
Doubts creeping,
Down they ran
To Bethlehem
To find their prince.

Quick they found
Sleeping sound
Their young King
— Wondrous thing —
Tiny baby.

The Child-King
Had no ring,
But the cow
Gave a bow
To his young Highness.

Dogs small
Camels tall
Lamb and fox
Bear and ox
Own him their Lord.

Standing mild
By the Child
In the light
Of that night,
Old hates were forgotten.

Joyous night,
All is right.
Christ is born,
Glorious morn.
Peace to all the earth!

Robert Smith
St. Louis, Missouri

Let Us Share The Father's Blessing

Christ, a child, an infant bless-ed
Held in loving arms secure.
May we say to children homeless
"Child of God, our love is yours."

REFRAIN: Let us share the Father's blessing
Live as heirs of heav'n above,
Celebrating and confessing
God's familial song of love!

Christ, a man, alone and broken
For us in that dying hour.
May we hear in anguish spoken
Cries for Resurrection power. *(REFRAIN)*

Christ, the Servant, Christ, the Savior
Out of death your pathway leads.
May we follow with your favor
As we serve your people's needs. *(REFRAIN)*

Praise to God, the Family's Father,
Praise to Christ, the Servant-Son,
Praise the Spirit, Who by water
And the Word, new Life's begun! *(REFRAIN)*

Suggested tune: Holy Manna, *LBW* 463

Thomas W. Shaefer
Wichita, Kansas

Advent Lament

What's keeping him?
He knows as well
As anyone
The power of hell.

What's keeping him?
My faith is weak.
If only he
Would come and speak.

What's keeping him?
Our children cry
For something new
And drift and die.

What's keeping him?
The armies roar
And cemeteries
Fill once more.

What's keeping him?
The wealthy steal,
And crush the poor
Beneath their heel.

He's left us broken,
Hopeless, grim.
So what on earth
Is keeping him?

Mike Sherer
Maple Grove, Minnesota

An Epiphany Crossing — Programming Matthew 2:1-12 For Readers Today

Robert W. Bertram
Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology, Christ Seminary — Seminex

I. Diagnosis

In this Matthean cliff-hanger about the gullible foreigners ("magi from the East") and their predatory host (Herod), the real suspense comes only when we recognize that the same plot which imperiled the characters in this ancient story still imperils its readers today. If the story is God's way of diagnosing or "seeing through" Matthew's readers then and now, what is our problem which we here "see him seeing?" Since such a large diagnosis could be too intimidating to be credible all at once, we had better approach it one step at a time.

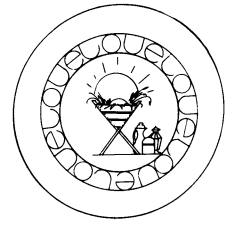
Preliminary Diagnosis: Astray

The first problem is that the magi wind up in Jerusalem by mistake — not by accident but by a quite sophisticated mistake. Notice, it is not only Herod and the Jerusalem establishment who are the problem characters in this story. So are the magi, at least at first. At this early stage in the diagnosis the magi suffer from much the same fault which besets the Jerusalemites. They all are misled by an initial prejudice, albeit a reasonable prejudice, about what "the newborn king of the Jews, the Messiah" must be like. Call it "The Jerusalem Bias."

The kind of king the magi were looking for is the kind anyone would look for who knows anything about authority. And who knows more about that than the smart wordling or, in Matthean terms, "the Gentiles?" "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them." (20:25) As one middle-management Gentile put it: "I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." (8:9) That is Gentile authority: some are "in" it, but only by having others be "under" it.

So it is understandable that the Gentile magi, who also were authorities in some field or other, should set out from home with the same preconception of kingship. You can tell by the kind of presents they had packed along, fit for a worldly king. That is a dead giveaway. Moreover, look where they were heading. What further need had they of "the star!" Thank you, they could make it the rest of the way on their own, to Jerusalem of course. Where else but in the capital of his realm would any self-respecting "king of the Jews" be born?

But then how were the poor magi to know that Jewish kings are supposed to be categorically different, especially when Herod himself, the sitting king, could not disabuse them? He likewise assumed that any future king of his people, indeed any "Messiah" (v.4), would have to be a contender for Herod's own Gentile brand of supremacy. For isn't it always so: whether Jew or Gentile, someone always has to do the subjecting and, therefore, some others the submitting?



Herod's own subjects agreed with that — "and all Jerusalem with him." (v.3) Oh, eventually they might oppose the king — for his "soft raiment" and "kings' houses" (11:8), his philandering and political executions — and the king in turn might "fear the people" (14:5) lest they should gain the upper hand. But what if they did? In that case it would be they, "the people," who now would be *in* control and someone else would still be *under* control. Either way, in Jewish Jerusalem the magi would find their Goy (Gentile) prejudice about authority roundly endorsed.

The Jerusalem clergy were no exception — "all the chief priests and scribes of the people." (v.4) They were authorities of the Jewish Scripture, a clout which they had over layman Herod. Scripture, too, was perceived by them just as it was by Herod: an authority to be submitted to merely because of its superiority, meaning its superior rightness. No wonder that, when this Scripture contradicted their Goy *Vorverstaendnis* about the nature of rulership, they were constitutionally unable to take the hint, right while they quoted the passage word for word. They could read the directions to misguided strangers but could not take the directions themselves. There must be some psychiatric term for that pathological loss of direction, something like "The Goy Vertigo."

Is it all that different in your religious establishment? Or mine? Test question: where would we go to find who is in charge of it? To what address? And why there? Is it because we assume that that is where the church's real authorities are: the church bureaucrats, the professors who cite Scripture, "the people" who topple the bureaucrats and the professors? How Goy! "All these things do the Gentiles seek" (6:32) and they dead-end in Jerusalem by mistake, with all those exotic trinkets on their hands.

Advanced Diagnosis: Exclusive

The worse problem — worse than this Gentile authority confusion which like a Bermuda Triangle disorients ourselves — is the way in which this confused authority has to fear others, and has to purge them as rivals. I say "has to," for Herod's problem (he carries the story's "problem" role alone from here on) is not only a problem of his own making but is compounded more and more by factors beyond his own control, to which he then must react in character. He is now the problem's pawn as well as its perpetrator, not only just its subject but increasingly its object. Given his false orientation to authority, one party after another appears to him as a threat whom he must then eliminate. Diagnostically, Herod continues as a present option for us all.

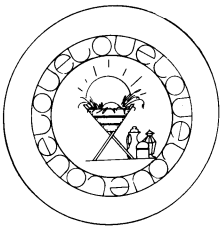
The most immediate threat is the Child in Bethlehem. See how the news about him leaves Herod "startled" (v.5), so much so that Herod has to have him killed. (He succeeds posthumously.)

The tragic irony is that Herod had to expunge the Child physically because he had already expunged him theologically, having replaced him with a fantasy, an imaginary rival for the Herodian throne. *That* "newborn king of the Jews" on whom Herod now put a contract existed nowhere except in Herod's one-track delusions about authority.

Up against that authoritarian fixation, this contrasting Davidic Child-King from a burg like Bethlehem was simply inconceivable, also for Herod's theological experts. Years later their successors still could not imagine why David the king had ever deferred to his own offspring as "Lord": how on earth could the child be both? Ever since, this childlike Christ has been unnerving us theologians into re-casting him as some Goy authority, legalistic or antinomian, thus disposing of him.

But it isn't only this Jewish Child, Herod's own best hope, and it isn't only Herod's Jewish roots in the history of Davidic promise from which Herod has to cut himself off, presumably to protect himself and Judaism. No, he must exclude other Jews as well, including those very legitimators of his, the scribes and priests, who cannot be trusted with his scheme: they might turn it against him. (v. 7) Next, he reaches "into Bethlehem and the region all around," where Matthew reports him to have "massacred all the boys of two years of age and under." (v.16) To argue about the historicity of that claim would at this point evade the issue. For isn't there historicity enough in all those later "Herods," especially Christian ones, who still destroy their fellow-Jews under the same Herodian pretext "that I too may come and pay [Jesus Christ] homage?" (v.8)

It isn't only Jews, however, whom Herod schemes against but Gentiles too, maybe Gentiles most of all. I mean these Gentile magi who arouse Herod's jealousy by acting as though a Jewish king could somehow be a welcome ruler for themselves, Goy outsiders, and at the same time be a "king of the Jews" — a wild combination which no doubt had often fired Herod's own ambition albeit without real hope of lasting success. Such an unrealistic extension of Jewish kingship would already be enough to rule out the Bethlehem child as an impostor. At any rate, whether or not Herod thought that way, many later did who resented Jesus for fraternizing with "tax-collectors and sinners." Some of my fellow-Jews, I think, are most offended not so much by Jesus himself as by the objectionable Gentile company he keeps, those sinful and unwelcome gate-crashers whom he brought home with him and who because of his unilateral invitation claim equal rights within the Jewish family. To which exclusivistic prejudice the Matthean gospel seems to say, How Goy! Herod, for his part, found no better use for his Gentile guests than to exploit them as means for getting at the Child. And they naively went along, "obeying the king." (v.9)



Herod's kind of Goy authority would have persecuted Jews and Gentiles whether or not the Child had appeared. That kind of authority always does, whether in its civil or ecclesiastical guise. It has to remove competitors, real or imaginary, precisely to stay in power as that kind of overling-underling authority. What the coming of the Child did was to provoke that holocaustic drive into the open and expose it, a kind of pre-Apocalypse anticipating The Day when this Child would return as Son of man to complete the exposure. Meanwhile, the Child's authority has already been extended to everyone, to all nationalities and ethnic communities. (28:18,19) Therefore, authoritarian oppression against absolutely everyone, the hungry and thirsty and strangers and naked and prisoners, is oppression against Christ himself. (25:41-45) Which leaves little doubt as to who it is whom Herod's sort of Goy authority, legalist or antinomian, must ultimately exclude: not only the Child or his peoples but the Father.

Final Diagnosis: Excluded

The worst of the problem — worse than the misguided system of Goy authority, worse even than its paranoid exclusivism — is that it gets its way. And it does so with massive cosmic, even divine cooperation. Herod the excluder is himself excluded. He pulls the door shut, but there is also someone on the other side pushing, and locking. Herod saw to it that no one would be marching up from Bethlehem. No one did, not even the magi he had counted on. If what he had wanted was to be left alone, then how alone he is left is more than ever he could have wanted.

Herod's conspiracy, already with the help of the unsuspecting magi, seemed to be moving right on schedule directly to Bethlehem, with even the star reappearing to provide extra logistical support. But then one thing led to another. Once in Bethlehem the magi, who on their own were really not all that clever, just happened to have this dream: "Take the Jerusalem bypass." So it turns out that Someone else had been riding coattail on Herod's scheme. It wasn't only Herod who had wanted the magi in Bethlehem, and who got them there thanks to Herod's cunning. Herod the Goy-user was himself being used, so was his Goy authority, against himself. What had begun as a perfectly workable plan to rid himself of the Child gets out of hand and becomes instead a way for the Child to be rid of Herod, permanently.

In face of this uproariously funny Jewish-Christian wisdom story, our own problem seems to be how to keep from laughing — something I suspect the magi could not manage either, all the way home. I recall with amusement G. B. Shaw's Blanco Posnet, who concludes that there are always two games being played, the game we play together and the game being played on us. But then, on second thought, I recall that Herod,

in being beat out at his own game and with his cooperation, is hardly an exception. Over and over throughout this Matthean gospel Jesus repeats the selfsame warning to his own followers. There may still be cause for a last laugh, except that now the question has shifted: how to keep from being the Herods on whom the laugh is?

II. Prognosis

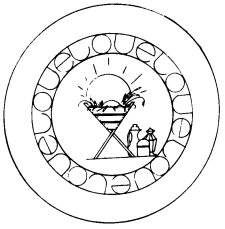
If that much was diagnosis, God seeing through us, then at least as surely is this a story of his seeing us through, prognosis. But that also is too much to believe all at once. Gradual is more credible.

Preliminary Prognosis: Shepherded

The first factor in the Christian solution, though not all there is to it, is always the christological factor. That comes first if only because it is the most obtrusive. Where else but in the Christian gospel do you begin by diagnosing one set of patients and then, when you come to their prognosis, suddenly change the subject to quite another Patient? The practice of "changing the subject" — not only from ourselves to God, which is hardly unique to Christians, but from ourselves to this no less human and harried Child — is basic to every Christian crossing. It happens also to be odd, hence hard to ignore. All the more reason to start there.

If Herod's preoccupation with Goy authority fated him to exclude others and ultimately to be excluded by the highest of all authorities, a fate from which the magi themselves were snatched only by outside intervention, by what authority can this "newborn king of the Jews" intervene in behalf of his friends? Answer: by Jewish authority. That Jesus should arise out of Judaism and be born in Judea (v.1) and, after making symbolic "exodus" from Egypt and undergoing "exile" up north amidst "the nations" in Nazareth, should eventually return to Jerusalem, in that Jewish capital to have his authority finally confirmed, was no historical accident. On the contrary, that was all "necessary," altogether according to historic promise. Only a Jew could be (amending Bonhoeffer) a man for *all* others, God's authoritative Everyone.

Christologically, however, the acid question remains, Why just this Jew? And read "Jew" not only ethnically but theologically. What does God see in this Jew? Not just: what do *we* see in him? Or even: what do we see of God in him? But first: what does God see in Jesus — of himself and of us, together? In any honest christology "from below" Jesus dare not be exempt from that critical question any more than Herod or the scribes or the rest of us are. What is it, up against God, that qualifies Jesus for an authority unlike all Goy authority and superior to it? *Coram Deo* as well as *coram hominibus!* Before God as well as



before human beings!

Let us not piously spare Jesus that tough question, as other christological fashions have done, by asking merely what difference Jesus makes to us, his human friends. No, what difference does he make to God, that his friends should thereby qualify as God's friends? Otherwise, with only his effect upon us to consider, we conveniently relieve him of that ultimate accountability which all humans have to face and, instead, we predefine him one-sidedly as *God* facing *us* — to be sure, God in human form. Once the question is so hedged, Jesus evaporates into God's "revelation" to us, or God's incarnational-sacramental "drawing near" to us, a kind of divine-human tubular extension of deity into the world. Then his earthy Jewish biography functions chiefly as a front for God, God's pantomime or mating dance vis-a-vis us. But that depreciates how this mundane Jew, a person in his own right, was himself vis-a-vis the heavenly Father (and still is), not just one with the Father but also "distinct" from him, whose fatherly confirmation Jesus quite historically had to win.

It is game of Moltmann to reintroduce the big christological question (would that he made more of it), "What does Jesus' death on the cross mean for God?" Bolder yet is the version of that question which seems to inform the Matthean gospel: what *difference* did Jesus make to God, that this one Jew at last enabled God to be the different God he had so long promised to be — "to all nations?" What difference did Jesus make to God, that he, of all "the sons of Abraham" and "sons of David," at last was that one son of theirs who was as well the universal "Son of God?" What difference did Jesus make to God, that his Jewish style as last allowed God to duplicate the impossible "reign of heaven" in a mundane equivalent, "upon the earth" — and to put this very Jew in charge of it all as junior king? Granted that it is Jesus' resurrection which confirms historically that he makes some difference to God. But what difference does that confirm, other than that God finds Jesus himself unsinkable? What is it historically about Jesus which endears also his friends to God?

The answer Matthew calls "the good news of the kingdom." (24:14; 4:23; 9:35) The thing about Jesus which made such a difference to God is that it was "the sinners" who made such a difference to Jesus. Anyone who meant so much to him as the sinners did, he was entitled to and was authorized to bring them home with him to his Father's party. That about Jesus is the long-awaited Jewishness which proved him to be his Father's Son: his Davidic, shepherdly compassion for the strays. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (9:36)

How hilarious, therefore, by hindsight, that Jesus' royal birthplace should be obscure little Bethlehem, the ances-

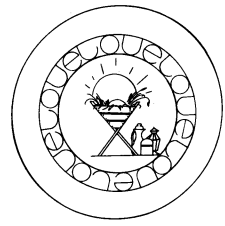
tral town of Judaism's shepherd king, for which the old prophet had seemed almost apologetic: "And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are by no means least . . ." (v.6) To this offbeat town the straying, sheeplike magi had to be led gawking and uncomprehending by every trick in The Book, and by authorities in the Jerusalem travel bureau who could not comprehend their own directions. It was because this Jew-Child in sheeptown Bethlehem would be (as the chief priests' own travel directions tried to tell them) the one who at last "would shepherd my people Israel" (v. 6) that the heavenly Father himself could finally end his search for candidates and announce, *This* is my beloved Son" (3:17) — the one by whom the sinners were so beloved. How kingly of Jesus, how congenitally like his Father who sired him singlehandedly. (1:18,20)

That is what cost the Child his life from the moment it began. But the price which he paid for so identifying with his friends the sinners, "his life as a ransom for many" (20:28), is the very basis of his new authority, not just the style of it. For his befriending the rejects, for treating them as his equals and thus upending the whole Goy authority system of topdog-underdog, "the chief priests and elders of the people" demanded of him "by what authority" he did that. (21:23) Really, though they had never caught on, he had anticipated their question long before in the case of the paralytic boy. At that time their objection had been not to the boy's being healed and certainly not to his being cured of sin as a precondition of his medical cure. Only antinomians, with their own inverted brand of authoritarianism, would oppose that. No, what offended the scribes is that they mistook Jesus for an antinomian. The way Jesus claimed to get rid of the boy's sin was to forgive it. Understandably that pretension struck the authorities as cheap grace. If heaven comes to earth to make sinners "righteous," surely it does so not merely by forgiving them out of hand. That, as Jesus seems to agree, would be too easy.

But what his critics missed was Jesus' devastating irony: so you think my absolving the boy is "easy." (9:5) Have you forgotten what gives the Son of man his unique authority: not some Goyish barking out a command that the sin should vanish but rather that, as the suffering Servant of the Lord, "he *took* our infirmities and *bore* our diseases" himself? (8:17) His forgiving sin is authorized by his own "blood of the covenant poured out for many." (26:28) So his being born in out-of-the-way Bethlehem, almost snubbed by the magi, hunted by Herod and misrepresented by Herod's theologians were not just attacks on the Child's authority. They were also the making of it.

Advanced Prognosis: Involving

At first the sinners' rescue had to be taken out of their hands by the Messiah's



intervening for them, seeing that the Herodian dimensions of their problem were beyond their control, necessitating a "change of subject." But once this messianic Subject intervenes, his patients immediately become agents again and are immediately pressed back into the most responsible, exalting subjecthood. They believe. Or in Matthew's elaborate version of the magi, "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" (v.10) as though that response of theirs was an essential condition of the Child's successful kingship. Where the rumor of the Child had left Herod and all Jerusalem "startled," the magi by contrast are characterized as "overjoyed."

True, their joy is only as warranted as their object, namely, whether the Child truly *is* "the newborn king of the Jews." Still, it is a peculiarity of his sinner-loving authority to return the compliment back upon them, on their quite human response. Yet this Christ exerts his authority by raving about their response with epithets which should properly be reserved only for deity: "Great is your faith" (15:28, 8:10), "Your faith has made you well, your faith has saved you." (9:22) If the contrary authority of the world is inevitably exclusive, the new authority of the Child is radically inclusive.

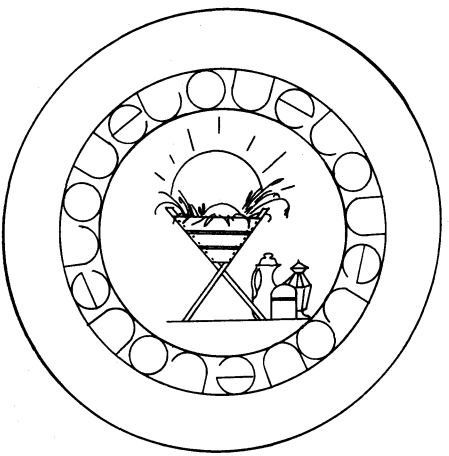
Final Prognosis: Returned

The best thing of all about Jesus' childlike authority is that it relieves the hostile earthly authorities of their false priority but, in that very sublimation reinstates them to their intended dignity. Perhaps the loveliest thing the Jewish Child does for the magi, or really gets them to do, is to make the most of what they are: the Goyish gifts they bring, the Goyish place where they live, the Goyish things they do for a living. The Child's world-embracing authority finds new room for all that.

When "they opened their treasure-boxes and brought out gifts for him, gold and frankincense and myrrh" (v.11), there is not the slightest suggestion that "Mary his mother" so much as harrumphed or tried politely to explain that this Child, you see, is here to do his own giving, not to be given to, and that after all he is not named "Jesus" (Yahweh saves) for nothing, to be demeaned by such materialistic ostentation. She doesn't even say what (in the structural counterpart at the other end of the gospel) the pious disciples say: "Why this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." (26:8,9) Perhaps the later Jesus would have put the magi at ease by reinterpreting their incongruous gifts: "In pouring this ointment on my body [they have] done it to prepare me for burial." (26:12) But the point was not to put the magi at ease, a question of etiquette. The fact is, they were, though unintentionally, more than half right: he does have authority also "upon the earth." (9:6;28:18)

But therefore so do they, his friends. Nowhere in the story are the magi advised, now that they have been inducted into the kingdom of heaven, that henceforth they had best withdraw from the secular world. Jerusalem may have been under a travel advisory, but for other reasons. We may be sure that where they did return instead, "to their own country," (v.12) was no haven from Goy authority. Neither were they forbidden to resume such authority in their accustomed vocations (whatever it is magi do) any more than the Goy centurion had to resign his commission and hang up his sword. (8:13) But what the magi did do with their old authority now that it had been redeemed by the Child, how they redeployed it "not in order to be served but to serve" — to serve the Messiah's sick and poor and the naked and the prisoners and the unforgiven — may well have alienated the secular authority system which they were now infiltrating. So what? Longevity isn't everything. Anyway, servants are not above their master — like their master, yes, but not above. (10:24) Nor need they ever again aspire to be, now that his mastery and theirs is likewise cruciform.

But that is probably when the magi came up with earthier gifts than ever: when they, the once unwelcome strangers in Jerusalem, found strangers of their own back home to welcome and so risked more estrangement for themselves by earthing the Father's heaven there among the casualties of Goy authority. Then they, still as naive as ever, must have discovered that they had just hit upon the Child's most favorite tastes in material gifts: "It was I who was a stranger and you welcomed me." (25:35) Imagine the laughter.



Free Flowing Reflections on Luke 2:1-20 — From A First Century Perspective

Paul Meyer

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How might a late first century Christian Jew have reacted to reading the birth narrative in Luke's Gospel? Jerusalem once again lay in ruins, leading to great confusion as it had when Nebuchadnezzar's armies invaded six centuries before. This poem-like, imaginary essay takes account of the many Old Testament allusions in Luke 2, and the references to Roman history and theology as well.

Adonay, what gives?
What do these words mean?
What are you up to?
You open old wounds,
recall old disillusionments.
But if this were true?
My forebears believed the prophets'
glowing reports
of your light shining upon us,
Your glory rising upon us —
that Judah, yes, puny little Judah
might be the rallying place for nations[1]

Look at us, Adonay, we who are
scattered
and flung over someone else's empire,
We who have been raised
only to be cut down.
Have you seen your holy place
Jerusalem?
"Make the circuit of Zion,
walk round about her,
count the number of her towers"
(if you can find any).
Consider well her bulwarks,
examine well her strongholds
that you may tell those who came after:
This God is our God forever and
ever."[2]

What does Jerusalem destroyed,
the temple desecrated, say about your
love,
your covenant faithfulness?
Do you hear the weeping of Rachel
for her children?
They are not!

Look and see; listen and hear.
Would you again have us hope?
fill us with visions of joy?
Why do you wrestle so with us,
yet do not let us go?

There was a time, not long ago
when I wondered whether you forgot,
whether another nation had been
elected,
or whether Zeus replaced you as ruler
of the world.
What newness seemed within reach,
what portents of auspicious
beginnings!
For when Roman Augustus' sun arose,
the world seemed to be lighted.

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[1] Isaiah 60. Other references could be added.

[2] Psalm 48:11-13

The Empire gone mad before his reign
gave hope,
with more blood than wine
being poured forth throughout the
world
treachery and treason, multitudes
murdered,
the slaves in revolt, the economy
in chaos,[3]

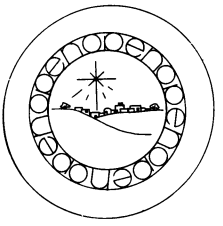
Well did Virgil cry
the need for savior by Providence
sent,
who could regenerate life and bring
an epoch of peace, strangely favorable
to virtue and integrity.
This savior's work — so Virgil
prophesied — would involve suffering,
but would give birth to a new spirit
and a more humane ideal.

What seemed to the fathers like a
poet's pipe dream
found fashion and form in human
flesh —
Caesar Augustus brought peace:
The doors of the temple Janus closed;
A "golden age of justice";
peace by forgiveness,
conciliation instead of punishment;
the people of nations invited to share
in Empire
even while they pursued local customs
and deities.
Travel and commerce were world-wide.
No part of life seemed untouched or
unrenewed.[4]
Well was he ascribed "Augustus" —
the Exalted.
The populace believed
the gods had visited and walked among
men
and so ascribed to him the title of
"savior" and
"benefactor" of the world.[5]

I have to admit, Lord, he had me
leaning,
the closest thing to David I had heard
of.
For though I never took his claims to
deity seriously,
I did wonder about him in light of
your promises to us!

But with his demise went the dream.
The corpse decayed and the empire
disintegrated.
The shades of darkness and despair,
so recently withdrawn,
again began to fall.
Perhaps t'was Octavian's son ne'er born
that nipped the vision before full
blossom.
The boy, in Virgil's vision, of virgin
born
and shepherds praised,

who new ages would inaugurate
and make peace permanent.
But a daughter to that union
vaporized that vision of Emperor.[6]
And with no issue from the Exalted's
loins
to guide Rome in seeking Providence's
destiny,



intrigue returned, suspects paying the traitor's price.
The state again became friend of rich and privileged
Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius —
their histories narrate the fall from greatness
and return of despair.[7]

Caligula liked to be greeted as god!
With Augustus the title conferred was plausible,
With Gaius and Nero quite tragic.
The exalted were humbled,
and the world felt the pain
And now a proclamation
and an indication that you haven't retired,
gone out of business or deferred,
but much as you dealt with the fathers
so you challenge us with strange signs and wonders.
The proclamation of an age of hope
resides in the birth of a child.
The promise from the provinces,
from the land of my roots,
the land where you work your wonders.
Prophetic words, recalling promises
lying cacooned for fulfillment.
Hope not only for your people,
but for "the peoples."
Great King David's place of birth
has sired one worthy of the line.
And did not the Prophet Micah proclaim
that renewal of Israel would be given birth in Bethlehem?[8]

How strange the connections
between prophetic utterances, poetic words
and Theophilus' mentor.
Virgil's vision finds fulfillment
in Virgin mother and Shepherd's praise.[9]
Might such portents prophesy
a world of peace, a time of fulfillment?
How symbolic that great Augustus,
whose legacy of Pax Romana still blesses,

[3] This is chronicled in *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol IX. Cambridge: University Press, 1963. B. Mayor, *The Messianic Idea in Virgil,* London: Murray 1907, gives the following account, 33: "No one who is even superficially acquainted with the terrible century before Augustus (say 133-31BC) will doubt that the sufferings ... had reached an unbearable pitch. In that period ... twelve separate civil wars ... a long series of political murders ... five deliberate legalized massacres ... Men still spoke ... of the butchery of seven thousand Semite prisoners ... and the last act of the struggle with Spartacus and his army of escaped gladiators — six thousand prisoners nailed on crosses along the whole length of the (Via Appia) ..."

[4] *The Cambridge Ancient History,* Vol X, Cambridge: University Press, 1963. A check of the Table of Contents will impress one with the breadth of Augustus' reforms.

[5] Danker, p. 24

[6] Mayor, pp. 29, 30

[7] *Encyclopedia Brittanica,* Vol. 19, Chicago: Encyclopedia Brittanica, Inc. 1973, pp. 525, 532

[8] Micah 5:1

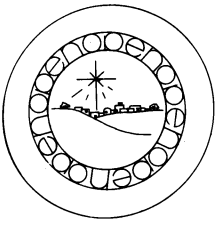
[9] Mayor pp. 2-9. For years the Church saw in Ecloga IV by the Roman Virgil a prophecy of the birth of Christ.

signs the edict that sets God's work in motion.[10]
How like you, Adonay!
Of old you used strong Cyrus,
who knew you not,
to be your servant and accomplish your bidding.[11]
Why in your design
should not illustrious Caesar be pawn
to get the principals to their places
that God's great drama might continue!
And Augustus, so acclaimed "Savior of the world,"
now enrolls through census decree David's heir to rule,
to take that title and give it new meaning.[12]
"In the census of the peoples," sang the psalmist,
"this one will be born of thee,"[13]
I like it, God, I like it!

Strange, yet "so Adonay-like," the birthplace
a manger stall and swaddling clothes.[14]
"The ox knows its owner
and the ass its master's crib,
but Israel does not know."[15]
But now Israel will come to its master's manger
and know its Lord.
And the swaddling clothes,
as Wisdom's Solomon did speak,
"I was nurtured in swaddling clothes, with every care.
No King has known any other beginning of existence."[16]

As Solomon, King David's heir
so now the claimant of David's throne
is swaddled in the Lord's manger bed.

What duality of signs
humility and sovereignty
poverty and majestic grandeur
manger, swaddling clothes, shepherds,
signs of meekness and lowliness,
symbols of Messianic royalty
So like you, Adonay
You — king of the universe,
divest yourself and dwell among your people.
You, whom the heavens cannot contain,
choose to abide in the midst of your chosen.
You, who will or whim of man cannot bind,
bind yourself to us in swaddling clothes and human form
You bid us walk humbly, and lead the way,
You take the identity of your people.
There might be those who see the pagan parallel
for shepherds presence,
mimicing myths of Jupiter's, Mithra's and Osiris' birth,[17]
But, Lord, you who called the shepherd King,
and made him "Tower for the Flock," so again you deliver[18]
your people and give them a shepherd king's care.
For from Migdal-eder, so the promise goes



"You shall be given back your former sovereignty
and royal power over the House of Israel."
David's city, infant Solomon's garments,
the shepherd witnesses —
The pieces begin to merge and come together!

An angelic visit —
how it fits the pattern
of the good news of old[19]
as you revealed your will
and brought it to pass.
And the Good News, good news indeed!
Adonay's imperial proclamation reads
the One whose birth marks the dawn of a new era.[20]
This day the world has a new beginning,
which all peoples may celebrate.
"For to us a child is born
to us a son is given
. . . and his name shall be called"
Savior, Messiah, Lord![21]
O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is
Thy name in all the earth!

And even as the morning stars
burst into song at Creation,[22]
as Cherub shouts of Praise the temple resounded,
why wouldn't the hosts, whose joy is the Presence of Adonay,
burst into acclaim as he augers a new creation
and makes earth the residence of his dwelling?
"Glory in the highest to God
and on earth peace to men favored (by him)"[23]
The "Peace of God and of his Messiah"
will surpass the Peace of Augustus,
for Adonay has come!
those shepherds who seek no sign are given signs
and come to see that God is faithful.
Once before when knees shook in fear,
as trees in heavy wind,

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[10] Brown, p. 415

[11] Isaiah 45:1-7

[12] Brown, pp. 415, 416, also Danker

[13] Psalm 87:6; also cf. Brown, p. 417

[14] Brown, pp. 418-420

[15] Isaiah 1:3

[16] As Brown notes this may be reference to Wisdom 7:4, 5, hence giving the swaddling clothes a "kingly connotation" rather than "Jesus born in poverty" concept. Might not the two belong together?

[17] Brown, p. 420

[18] This is part of a play on words. "Tower for the Flock" is the translation of Migdaleder, which is given prominence in Micah 4:8. These two chapters speak of the Messianic Age beginning. This same section contains the "Bethlehem" prophecy.

[19] Brown, p. 156

[20] Brown, p. 416

[21] Brown, p. 425

[22] Job 38:7.

[23] Brown, p. 425. Brown assembles a number of Biblical witnesses to this good news: Isaiah 52:7; 61:1; Phil. 3:20

God himself gave a sign:
a maiden conceived and bore a child,
"God with us."
And God delivered.
And so a sign —[24]
and the mother ponders,
and shepherds praise
for they have *seen* and *heard*[25]
O Lord, God of a people who have a history
of not seeing and not hearing
lest you turn and heal,
may the shepherds a prototype be
of all your People and Me!

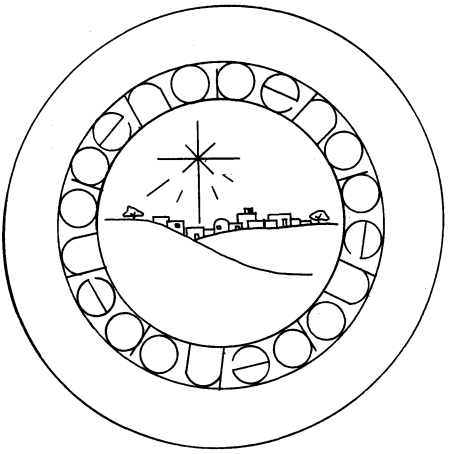
[24] Is the comment "And this shall be a *sign* unto you" reference to Isaiah 7, especially vv. 10-14a? I believe so.

[25] *Seen* and *heard* — two Lukan themes on faith and discipleship, for Israel of old did not see and hear. (Isaiah 6:9-13)

Note: Several books were key in the development of this paper. B. Mayor's *The Messianic Idea in Virgil,* London: Murray, 1907, provided background for the age into which Christ came as well as intriguing parallels between a pagan's "prophecies" and God's fulfillment, recorded by Luke.

Fred Danker, *Jesus and the New Age.* St. Louis: Clayton, 1972. Chapter two, "Jesus, Benefactor of the World," provides excellent insight on how Luke used the inscriptions of that era to proclaim the birth of the one who had just claim to the titles.

Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah,* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977, details the Old Testament references and nuances which are interwoven into Luke's narrative.



Caesar's Decree (Luke 2:1-2): Puzzle or Key?

Robert Smith

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We moderns have a problem because Luke had a problem and a brilliant solution. Once we understand his problem, ours begins to fade, and we may be able to read Luke's account of the birth of Jesus with fresh appreciation for his message.

Our problem is a peculiarly modern one, bequeathed by the Enlightenment. It revolves around the historicity or factual accuracy of a number of assertions in the opening verses of Luke's Christmas story.

Notorious are the following vexing questions:

1. Was there really a decree from Caesar Augustus affecting all provinces of the empire simultaneously, demanding that every inhabitant must be counted in one colossal census?
2. Was Quirinius really the governor of Syria at the time of the birth of Jesus, that is while Herod the Great (died 4 B.C.) still sat on the throne of Judea (Luke 1:5; Matthew 2:1)?
3. Was there really some manner of census which could have required Joseph to travel from his domicile in Nazareth to his ancestors' dwelling place in Bethlehem, and to involve Mary in that difficult journey?

These questions have repeatedly received negative answers from modern investigators who have concluded that Luke's account is seriously flawed. It is a fact that 1) no record of a decree mandating a universal census has been found in any ancient inscription or document for the year in question or for any other year, 2) Quirinius was governor or legate of Syria from A.D. 6-9, and that P. Quinctilius Varus was the governor of the province in 6-3 B.C. when Jesus was born, and that 3) certain kinds of property tax might require personal appearance in the district where the property was located but a universal census would hardly demand mass migrations.

At the same time these problems — and they are only the best known of many others — have elicited some ingenious apologies for the accuracy of Luke as historian.

After wrestling with the problems, one recent conservative commentator has concluded that "no solution is free from difficulty, and the problem can hardly be solved without the discovery of fresh evidence."[1]

I do not think that the historical problems are trivial or that attempts to solve them on the basis of historical data are insignificant or necessarily misguided.

[1] Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 104. Marshall offers a convenient review of the difficulties and of many proposed solutions. See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 547-557; A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 162-171; Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1960), pp. 21-32.

But I do also believe that the problem can be fruitfully addressed even without the discovery of hitherto unknown ancient scrolls or inscriptions, if we refocus our vision and adopt the perspective of the preacher and proclaimer rather than that of the scholar and historian.[2]

On the historical level the verses are a clear signal of one of Luke's chief aims in the production of his whole work from the beginning of his gospel to the end of Acts. And meditation on those aims is not at all inappropriate at Christmas as we celebrate the birth of the Savior.

A consideration of Luke's aims may begin with another look at the problem passage.

The Decree

Luke says that Caesar issued a "decree" (*dogma*, Luke 2:1). The same word occurs once more in a very illuminating context in Acts 17:7 (cf. 16:4; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14; Heb. 11:23 vl; *TDNT* II 230-232), where the Jews of Thessalonica are described as dragging Jason before the city authorities, charging that Paul and his companions "have turned the world upside down . . . , acting against the decree *(dogmata)* of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

Luke here and elsewhere betrays his awareness — indeed his nervousness — that the Christian movement at various times in its history was suspected of being rebellious and of undermining loyalty to the emperor and public morality. That is a kind of preliminary assessment, and more evidence will be offered in due course.

Quirinius

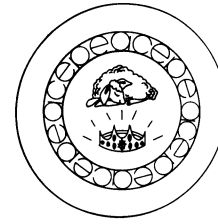
In his infancy narrative Luke pinpoints the decree by saying it was issued when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius is known to have become consul in 12 B.C., to have led a campaign against brigands on the southern border of Galatia, to have been active in Armenia in A.D. 3-4, and to have died in A.D. 21.[3]

He is best remembered for his actions as imperial legate of Syria in A.D. 6-9. As soon as he entered office in Syria he removed Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, from the throne of Judea and banished him (A.D. 6).

Judea was then attached to Syria and so brought under direct Roman rule for the first time. Quirinius ordered a census, a necessary preliminary to assessing taxes on a newly incorporated territory.[4]

Many Rebellions

The tax was not only unpopular but was viewed as an act of foreign, pagan tyranny and generated fanatical resistance. Some Jews were provoked into taking arms just as others had done a few years earlier following the death of Herod the Great (4 B.C.) when his son Archelaus was named ethnarch of Judea



and Samaria. Both in 4 B.C. and in A.D. 6 thousands of Jews with Phineas (Numbers 25; 4 Macc. 18:12) and the Maccabees as their models rebelled against the Romans. In 4 B.C. Varus crucified thousands of "holy warriors" and in A.D. 6 Quirinius was hardly less firm in establishing Roman control of the situation in the land.

The memory of the rebellions in 4 B.C. and in A.D. 6 and other insurrections lives in Luke's narrative. Rabbi Gamaliel speaking to the Sanhedrin recalled the uprising under Theudas (A.D. 44) and the rebellion under Judas the Galilean (A.D. 6) "in the days of the census" (Acts 5:34-39).

These two passages in Acts (5:34-39 and 17:6-7) are directly related to the material in the opening of Luke's account of Jesus' birth. The Book of Acts links rebellion, insurrection or disobedience with decrees of Caesar or a census. A picture is beginning to emerge, and other peculiarly Lukan passages fill out the portrait of Luke's situation.

1. According to Luke alone, Jesus was accused before Pilate of fomenting a political rebellion: "We have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute (taxes) to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king" (cf. Acts 17:7). Furthermore his accusers continued, "He stirs up the people teaching throughout all Judea from Galilee even to this place" (Luke 23:2,5). That was the equivalent to saying that Jesus had carried the torch of insurrection from Galilee to the south.[5]

2. When Paul was arrested in the temple the Roman tribune asked, "Are you not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and let 4000 men of the assassins *(sicarii)* into the wilderness?" (Acts 21:38). Answer: No.

3. At Philippi and Corinth Paul and his company were accused of disturbing the peace and advocating unlawful practices (Acts 16:20-21; cf. 18:13).

4. Luke loves to record instances of judicial declarations of innocence or charges against Christians being summarily dismissed and thrown out of court (Acts 16:39; 18:14-17; 19:37-40; 23:26-30; 24:23).[6]

[2] For a history of various approaches to the issue and for a constructive proposal along the lines adopted here see Horst Moehring, "The Census in Luke as an Apologetic Device" in David Aune, ed., *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 144-160.

[3] "Quirinius" in N.G.L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, ed., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1970). (Cited as *OCD.)*

[4] Josephus, *Antiquities* 17:13,5; 18:1,1.

[5] Stauffer, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

[6] Primarily on the basis of the several trials in Luke-Acts it has been proposed repeatedly that Luke designed his work as a kind of lawyer's brief addressed to the Roman magistrates assigned to hear Paul's case in A.D. 60-62. That theory takes account of the prominence of the trial scenes and of the considerable size of the body of apologetic material in Acts, but it nevertheless conceives the use of Luke-Acts too narrowly, requiring an inordinately early date for the work.

5. The defense speeches in Acts are full of Christian assertions of loyalty to Caesar, and those assertions to magistrates function as assurances to the readers. In fact Paul is pictured as trusting Roman justice so much that he appealed to Caesar (25:11; 28:19). Before governor Festus Paul defended himself by declaring that he had committed no offense against temple or torah or Caesar (25:8), and that covers all the Jewish and Roman ground there is.

Luke's Situation and Aim

One conclusion to be drawn from all this material is that the Christian movement in Luke's day was suspected in Jewish and Roman circles of being subversive of religion, morality, law and the public order — a danger to traditional ethics, piety and good citizenship. And it may well be that some Christians themselves associated the inbreaking of God's kingship with a form of revolutionary, radical, apocalyptic overturning of the present social and political order. (see Luke 17:20; 19:12; 24:19; Acts 1:6)

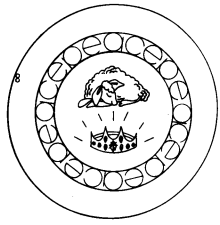
In that situation Luke was not simply attempting to record the events of the past as accurately as possible. He wanted to do not less but more than that. Above all he was intent on proclaiming the good news of Jesus as universal lord *(kyrios)*, higher than the Caesars, and as inaugurator of a universal kingdom of surpassing peace. He is an evangelist (and a historian) and had to become an apologist, because of the dangers inherent in speaking about a lord other than Caesar and of a kingdom rivalling or eclipsing the empire.

Consider the magnitude of Luke's difficulties. He accepts unreservedly the traditional royal-political titles of Jesus — Son of God, Christ, Lord — and, just as the other synoptists do, he defines the center of the Christian message in terms of kingship *(basileia tou theou)*. That sort of talk was dangerous in the extreme.

Luke was probably writing in the 80's of the first century after Nero's persecution of the Roman Christians (A.D. 64-65) and before Domitians's persecution of anyone he suspected of "atheism," that is of not confessing him, Domitian, as Lord and God (A.D. 91-96). The Jews had rebelled in their homeland in A.D. 66, and further rebellions occurred in the Diaspora (A.D. 116-117) and again in Palestine (A.D. 132-135). Luke was dealing with a very sensitive issue as he labored to define the nature of God's kingship for outsiders and insiders alike.

Rereading Luke 2

The opening verses of Luke 2 bristle with historical difficulties but those very difficulties should alert the reader to the fact that Luke is working hard to address pagan suspicions about the Christian movement and Christian misunderstandings of the kingdom.



In the opening words about the decree of Caesar and the rulers of this world, commentators have frequently seen an example of Luke's theology of providence: God uses the dictates of the emperor to accomplish his own purposes in history. Such is no doubt a Lukan theme, and the focus can even be sharpened. Luke's imagination does not envision worlds in collision. He is not an apocalyptist. He hears profound and moving harmonies. His is not a book about Rome against the church and the church against Rome. He believes that world history and sacred history are interwoven so that world history serves sacred history, and both flow or can flow smoothly, if only there is proper understanding and appreciation of respective roles.

But Luke's irenic posture and his habit of stressing positive points of contact and commonalities are the deep background. In the foreground are his political apologetic and his caution to potential rebels in Christian ranks.

Joseph is portrayed by Luke as a law-abiding citizen of the great empire, piously obedient to the decree of Caesar Augustus. At first it seems surprising that he did not travel alone but was accompanied by Mary. Since she was with child (2:5), Jesus himself traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem as the decree required. There is in the scene no hint of rebellion, no odor of insurrection, not a whisper of resentment at the length or hardship of the journey or at the prospect of taxation. Luke portrays instead a scene full of simple quiet obedience. In fact he is both describing and prescribing obedience.

Jesus and Augustus

Other elements in the birth narrative are illuminated once the overriding purpose of Luke's design is perceived.

Of all the New Testament authors Luke is the only one who mentions a Roman emperor by name.[7] He speaks of Augustus and Tiberius in the gospel and of Claudius in Acts, and he furthermore refers to Nero (to whom Paul appealed) not by name but by three of his most characteristic titles: caesar, augustus, and lord (*kaisar, sebastos* and *kyrios:* Acts 25:8,21,26).

Luke was conscious of Roman power and the Roman environment of the early Christian movement and perhaps of Roman readers, and he wanted to compare and contrast Jesus and Caesar Augustus.

Sometimes it is suggested that Luke pictures Jesus as lowly and humble in contrast to the prodigious might and wealth of the Caesars, and interpreters focus on the fact God acted to save the world not by means of a powerful deed in the center at Rome but through the birth of an infant on the distant fringes of the empire in Bethlehem of Judea.

[7] A note appended in some ancient manuscripts to 2 Tim. 4:22 mentions Nero by name.

However the swaddling clothes and the manger, so prominent a part of Luke's description (2:7,12,16) — they constitute a "sign" — function like the log cabin in American rhetoric, a parable of Lincolnesque origins and destiny.

In Livy's time (died A.D.12 or 17) a thatched hut was shown on the Palatine hill in Rome as the hut of Romulus. Octavian regarded himself as a second Romulus, a second founder of Rome, and for a time contemplated taking the throne name Romulus but thought it might not be propitious to bear the name of a fratricide, even one so great as Romulus, and so took instead the name of Augustus.[8]

Roman readers would easily understand Luke's Christmas story. Humble origins, far from being a disqualification, were perfectly appropriate for the world ruler.[9]

The Shepherds

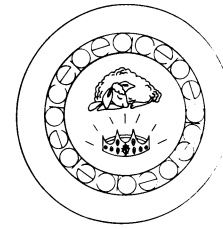
The shepherds (2:8-20) are often regarded as symbols of the outcastes who are Jesus' special audience in Luke-Acts, but they serve very well as representatives of the new humanity led by the savior. Romulus and Remus of course were found by a shepherd and were the friends of shepherds, and the new golden age was widely pictured as a restoration of paradise and as a simple pastoral life. Vergil's Fourth Eclogue is a prophetic celebration of the new age of peace inaugurated by Augustus, an age pictured in pastoral terms.[10]

Of course the patriarchs and David also were shepherds, and Jesus is the fulfillment of the hopes they represented (cf. Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11; Luke 12:32).[11]

Luke realized that early Christian rhetoric was politically loaded and it was easy for Roman officials and for Christians themselves to misconstrue that language, but Luke refused simply to dispense with it. He uses language which indicates his belief that Jesus is the fulfillment not only of Davidic hopes but also of the sentiments and devotion attached to the accession of Augustus and the reigns of his successors. The Roman emperor is for Luke no dark and demonic nemesis marked for destruction (as he is for the author of Revelation) but serves rather as a bright and positive parable. He is a kind of pagan parallel to David, a prefiguring and prophecy of Jesus. Jesus fulfills and outshines both David and Augustus. Jesus and no other is the Son of God, and he brings royal gifts.

Euanggelia or Joyful Messages

To the shepherds the angel of the Lord proclaimed final, total joy in the birth of the Savior and the dawn of the new age (Luke 2:10-12), and the words of the angel strangely parallel the words of the famous inscription found at Priene in Asia Minor and dated as 9 B.C. The inscription declares that "the birthday of



the god (the emperor Augustus) is the beginning of the good news *(euanggelia,* gospels or joyful messages) for the whole world."[12] Other joyous proclamations would follow. The visit of the twelve year old Jesus to the temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-52) may be another in a sequence of joyful messages, namely the proclamation that the crown prince has come of age.

Furthermore the angel called Jesus "Savior," a title found predominantly in Christian documents written late in the first century and in pagan rather than Jewish contexts. In the Greco-Roman world there were many competing saviors. The title was used of Helper gods (such as Zeus, Asclepius, Castor and Pollux [cf. Acts 28:11], Isis and Serapis), of physicians, of philosophers, and especially of Hellenistic rulers and then of the emperor. The Priene inscription calls Augustus "Savior" as it speaks of his advent as good news, and he is Savior and Benefactor beyond all predecessors because he brought an end to the civil wars that wracked the republic in its last days and he restored general order.[13]

Luke and Rome

Of all the New Testament writers Luke and the author of the book of Revelation exhibit the greatest awareness of the existence of the Roman Empire, but they assess the empire in diametrically opposed fashions. Whereas the Seer views Rome as the enemy and looks for the collapse of Rome, described as a harlot seated on a scarlet beast full of blasphemous names representing the titles given to Roman emperors (Rev. 13,17,18), Luke's whole way of thinking — about Rome and

[8] Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans* (New York: New American Library, 1962), pp. 314-315.

[9] Another very attractive and not necessarily opposing interpretation is that of C.H. Giblin who thinks that Luke was working with three basic Old Testament texts: Isaiah 1:3 ("The ox knows its owner . . ."), Jeremiah 14:8 (The prophet pleads with the Lord: "Why are you like an alien, a stranger in the land lodging in an inn?"), and Wisdom of Solomon 7:4 (Solomon says he was wrapped in swaddling clothes and no king ever has any other beginning of existence). He concludes that swaddled and laid in a manger because there was no room in the inn means that Jesus began as all kings do, that he is the food and sustenance of his people, and that he is not a stranger or alien dwelling in inns but is at home in the midst of his people. *CBQ* 29 (1967), pp. 87-101.

[10] For the text of the Fourth Eclogue together with discussion and bibliography see Raymond E. Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 564-570.

[11] Furthermore Luke may have been offering an example to Christian shepherds and pastors (cf. Acts 20:17-35). Their function was to be watchful, guarding their flocks (Luke 2:8; Acts 20:28) from ever-present dangers. It was certainly not their task to lead people into rebellions. (cf. Luke 6:12; IQS vi. 7,8)

[12] On "gospel" and the Priene inscription see G. Friedrich, "euanggelion" in *TDNT* II 724-725. More skeptical of conscious political paralleling is Arthur Darby Nock, *Early Gentile Christianity and Its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 32-50.

[13] See W. Foester "Soter" in *TDNT* VII 1004-1012 and Nock, *op. cit.*

about everything else — is less antagonistic, less apocalyptic, and far more irenic.

Luke's consciousness was shaped and informed by the Roman reality. He wrote with a kind of automatic presumption that the Roman empire with its assemblies and magistrates, its laws and courts, its cities and roads and sailing vessels both is and will continue to be the context and environment within which the church is called to live. And Luke trusts the Roman system to deliver justice rather than injustice to Christians.

Luke-Acts resembles other early Christian literature associated with the city of Rome and the western reaches of the empire: Romans (ca. A.D. 55), the Gospel according to Mark (A.D. 65-70), Hebrews (A.D. 80), First Clement (A.D. 96), Second Clement (A.D. 130), the Shepherd of Hermas (A.D. 110-140). All these writings attempt to come to terms both with Roman hegemony and with the ongoing history of the world in a positive fashion. In spite of sporadic popular and sometimes officially sanctioned persecution of the church by Rome and her citizens, the authors of these writings perceive the relations between church and world as at least potentially harmonious.

The attitude expressed in Luke-Acts (and the other western Christian writings) is akin to that found in the Hellenistic synagogue and in Stoicism. Christian believers are not so much strangers and aliens in a dark and hostile, hateful and hated world (as in gnostic and Johannine thinking and in many Christian documents from Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor). Rather they are misunderstood — suffering in spite of their goodness, piety and loyalty to the powers that be. Conflict is by no means inevitable, but when it comes, it results from ignorance and misunderstanding.

Conclusion

The historical difficulties connected with the opening verses of Luke's Christmas Gospel have not been solved. For the moment I am quite content to set to one side the task of resolving the questions of dates and times connected with various rulers and the census. I think Luke's real interests lay elsewhere than in merely recording the history of Christian beginnings. He was intent upon dealing with the charge that Christians of his own day (some 80 or 90 years after the birth of Jesus) were disloyal or treasonous, rebellious or insurrectionistic, contemptuous of Roman rulers and Roman laws.

Facing similar suspicions outside the church and impatience inside Paul had written some 30 or 40 years before Luke, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1).[14]

Luke did not write an essay or an epistle but a gospel, a narrative proclaiming



the life and ministry of Jesus as good news. By his choice of traditions and publication of them, Luke puts to rest any suspicion of political insurrection and quiets Christian hearts. Here is no deadly clash between king and child, as in Matthew's report of Herod's enmity, no deceitful words from the lying lips of a ruler, no hurried flight to Egypt, no royal rage condemning innocent children to early death, no inconsolable wailing and weeping of Rachel for her lost children (Matthew 2:1-23). Luke simply names officials, recalls the decree mandating census, and describes the obedience of Joseph and Mary.

In the Lukan universe there was room for both Jesus and Caesar all the way up to the end when Jesus would return in power as judge and savior of all. Luke calls both Jesus and Caesar "lord" but Jesus is clearly Lord of all lords and King over all the kings of the earth.

Luke respects Roman institutions and the Roman emperor while recognizing that they are not ultimates but at best only penultimates. Luke proclaims the spiritual lordship of Jesus and kingship of God which are not political rivals of Caesar and Rome, do not pose a threat to the peace and order of the Roman state, but rather exist as overwhelming and tremendous realities of a different order of magnitude altogether.

The good news of peace throughout the cosmos — embracing all things in heaven and on earth — which first pierced the night when Jesus was born, has since his resurrection and ascension been proclaimed everywhere, offering the reality of which the Augustan peace was a dim foreshadowing. Christ the Savior is born.

[14] Luke may have preserved the historical context of the positive words of Paul. In Acts 18:1-2 Luke says Aquila and Priscilla had recently come from Italy to Corinth because Emperor Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. It was in A.D. 49 that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because of riots and public disorders instigated, says Suetonius *(Claudius* xxv), by one "Chrestus." He apparently meant some public confusions involving Jews and Christians. By the time Paul wrote Romans, only six years later, the Jews and Christians were back in Rome, and Paul felt the need to admonish Christians to live peaceably and quietly.

An Alternative Christmas — Let it begin with you!

Mary Schramm

Holden Village, Chelan, Washington

How many cards can we afford to send out? Who gets cut from the list? Will super-mom get the cookies baked in time, the bazaar items made, the gifts purchased and wrapped and still have enough energy to invite the relatives over for dinner? It's hard to find a time for the entire family to get together to put up the tree. There are three parties to attend. What shall we buy for the grandparents? They don't seem to need anything.

Something is wrong. The kind of Christmas we all want to celebrate seems so far from the Muzak and "blue light specials" that have become part of our holiday observance. Perhaps we need to let the business community, with their ten billion profit from the sale of Christmas gifts and gadgets, have their holiday on December 25, while we try to recapture with compassion and creativity a celebration to honor Jesus, the Christ, the Lord of our life.

Surely the theme for reclaiming our Christmas celebration is *peace*. The first song ever to be heard for the Christ child was that there would be peace among men and women. Later Jesus would weep over Jerusalem and say, "Oh that you knew the things that make for peace!" The role of the people of God continues to be one of facilitating good will among men and women. Jesus promised that peacemakers would be called the sons and daughters of God. When we, like our Lord, break down the walls of hostility that divide nations and races and sexes and ideologies, then we are being peacemakers.

Peace is a universal desire. It is the ideal nations and people seek. The ancients built their war monuments of wood so that the memory of the war would be short. Our modern statues with their roosting pigeons dominate our town squares and circles, their gleaming marble resplendent in the sunshine.

Biblical people speak of a *Shalom* vision. Of all words for peace, this Hebrew word is the fullest. God's people understood shalom as a social concept. There is no reference to shalom as being an inner tranquility or individual in nature. This peace-word refers to love/-justice, to wholeness and total well-being of all that God has created. Shalom is the true peace we celebrate at Christmas. Christmas shalom — how can we celebrate with this vision in mind?

Shalom: Our Relationship to God

Shalom has some basic themes. First, it has to do with our covenant relationship with God. Emmanuel, God with us, is the source of our strength and our hope. Christmas celebrations need to stress a renewal of this baptismal God-connection, not draw us deeper into the idol worship of American materialistic culture.

Solitude, a Sabbath time in each day, is an integral part of being a peacemaker. Renewing our discipline of meditation

and reading the word is a gift we can give ourselves. Those saint heroes of old spent long hours in meditation so they could "pay attention" to those around them. To meditate and spend time in contemplation is not to see a different world, but to see this world differently, a world as God intended.

The Gospel infancy narratives give us clues for observing Christmas. The first Christmas worship was done in utter simplicity. Jesus is laid in a feed box, the bread of life and the nourishment for the strengthening of those who would come to him. Shepherds and wisemen coming to worship, Mary pondering these events in her heart, Joseph obeying God's commands as they were revealed to him . . . so often our Christmas services are anything but simple. The parsonage family and those in charge of the Sunday School program and worship services are exhausted instead of refreshed when December 26 arrives. The beauty and excitement needs to be in our worship but not the extremes of "performance."

Christmas without music would be hard to imagine. Allow quiet times in the week to be filled with the joyous music of Bach or Handel. Share Christmas albums with friends. Give the gift of a ticket to a symphony or ballet. A spontaneous gathering of neighbors and friends invited to your home to sing together and play instruments can be an alternative to the cocktail or dinner party. The saying is true that "those who sing, pray twice," for music itself, as well as the words sung, can express a deep level of praise and thanks to God.

Shalom: We and Our Environment

Shalom also has to do with the connection between us and our environment. If we recognize our complicity in the misuse of natural resources and act to curb our wastefulness, then we are shalom people. Bishop John V. Taylor in his book *Enough is Enough* says we behave like spoiled children. We have assumed that we have two nursemaids to clean up after us — air and water. This is not so. Oceans are spewing up garbage on east coast beaches, and the smog of our cities deepens in direct proportion to our self-indulgent way of life. To be peacemakers is to live in shalom with creation.

Chief Seattle in his beautiful speech to the white government wanting to "buy" the land 120 years ago said, "This we know. The earth does not belong to man: man belongs to the earth . . . Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth . . . The whites too shall pass, perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Continue to contaminate your bed, and you will one night suffocate in your own waste . . . The earth is precious to God and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator."

Can our Christmas celebration keep in mind our connection with the earth? Perhaps we need to look first to the example of the native American culture as a model for our living with all of creation where the air and the water and the animals were part of the family. Read books on native American culture or give such a book as a gift at Christmas.

Consider purchasing a live Christmas tree. Decorate it with natural tree trims made from shells, nuts, cones, dried flowers and pods. Making tree trims is a family affair and the decorations also make excellent gifts.

Adopt a tree. Donate money to help non-profit groups re-forest areas that are in danger of losing trees. (see *Alternative Celebrations Catalogue,* 4th edition, Jackson, Mississippi: Alternatives, 1978. $5.00.)

Give a gift to your neighborhood. Pick up some litter. Begin to recycle bottles and cans. If there is no recycling center near you, talk with your congregation about starting one through the church.

Is Christmas travel an absolute necessity? If so, can public transportation be used? Rethink the use of recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles. Consider the purchase of bicycles for the entire family as the primary source of transportation where this is feasible.

Give a gift to the birds around your home. Build feeders and houses to attract birds such as Purple Martins. In return the Purple Martins will greatly diminish the mosquito population in your area.

For gift wrap use paper bags with potato block prints, or save the pictorial section from the Sunday paper. Tie dye tissue paper and use yarn scraps for ribbon.

Refuse to purchase any toy or gift made from non-renewable resources such as plastic gadgets. Make sure the gift you intend to buy has a lasting quality. Will it wear out or fall apart before Christmas is even over? If it does get broken can it be repaired or will it have to be thrown away? Carefully evaluate any large purchase you plan to make. Is it something really needed or has someone else convinced you it is a need? Will the purchase use non-renewable resources, pollute the air, contaminate the water and give only individual enjoyment instead of encouraging community/family participation?

Start a number of houseplants from cuttings of your own. A plant you have nurtured and cared for becomes very much a part of you. To share this plant with another is a way to give continued pleasure throughout the year.

To honor the Prince of Peace we will not heap contempt upon the creation. Shalom reminds us of our intricate connection to the earth. A creative Christmas celebration will keep in mind that we are to tenderly caress the creation.

Shalom: We and Others

Shalom connects us with one another and Christmas is a time to do something other than pay lip service to this vision of wholeness. We can begin by giving to our families the gift of ourselves. Set aside time to be with one another. Listen to each other, laugh together, play together, worship together. Gifts we give to each other can be a talent or skill we have worked to develop. Examples are 8 year old Kathy memorizing a piano solo to be shared on Christmas day, or her older sister learning a dramatic reading to be presented around the Christmas tree. A teen aged son learns to tune up the engine of the family car and the husband, keeping the secret from his wife, learns to speak Spanish — a language in which she is fluent. Another spouse agrees to jog daily with her husband and takes tennis lessons, a sport which he enjoys and wishes she could play with him. These gifts all say "I love you" in a way few material gifts can, for they express creativity and discipline and a willingness to stretch and grow.

An advent idea, reminiscent of the "Shoemaker and the Elves" fairy tale, is the Austrian custom of drawing the name of a secret Advent friend. Family members secretly do for another tasks they may dislike doing. Even small children can participate and learn very quickly the difference between a Christmas that says "what will I get," and "what can I give."

Coleman McCarthy, writing in the *Washington Post,* reminds parents that a great service they can do for their children is to use some "creative

deprivation." Few of us decide for ourselves and for our young children what "enough" is. One of the saddest Christmas days I can remember is when one of our children, after opening 10 packages, said, "Is this all I get?" I remember feeling that I had somehow failed my children by not being able to teach them the joy and freedom that comes from knowing how much "enough" is. God fills our baskets to overflowing, but when we come with bigger and bigger baskets wanting them to be filled, we never experience the joy of being satisfied. To desire less as a way of having enough is always more freeing than to acquire more and more. The subtle seduction of a consumer oriented society and the idol-worship of convenience causes us to take on again the yoke of slavery.

Our shalom connection with others reaches beyond our immediate family. We don't have to go far into our communities to realize how lonely the Christmas season is for some. Depression and suicides rise during this time of year. Prisoners long for some human contact. Widows and widowers wait to be invited into the atmosphere of a warm and loving home. Foreign students and refugees exist on the fringes of our society needing our compassion. Celebration and compassion are intricately linked. One does not exist without the other. Peacemakers will include as part of their Christmas celebration, and throughout the rest of the year, attention to those who are hurting in our society.

Shalom: Peaceful Giving

One of the finest Christmas card/gifts we ever received was one that said, "We love you and wanted to give you a meaningful gift.

> Because you are not hungry, thirsty, homeless, sick or imprisoned, we have given a gift of money in your name to Bread for the World. May our Lord, whose birth we celebrate, add his blessing to this gift."

Even when we have decided what is "enough" for us and for our family, we have the added responsibility of that radical Christmas stance that asks, "Does my global family have enough?" Alternative Christmas gifts can be contributions to groups and organizations needing our support in their ministry of compassion. One of the finest sources for this kind of information is the previously mentioned *Alternative Celebration Catalogue*, 4th edition. The *Voluntary Simplicity Study-Action Guide* is a booklet of biblical themes and practical suggestions for alternative celebrations throughout the year. Both can be ordered by writing to P.O. Box 429, Ellenwood, Ga. 30049.

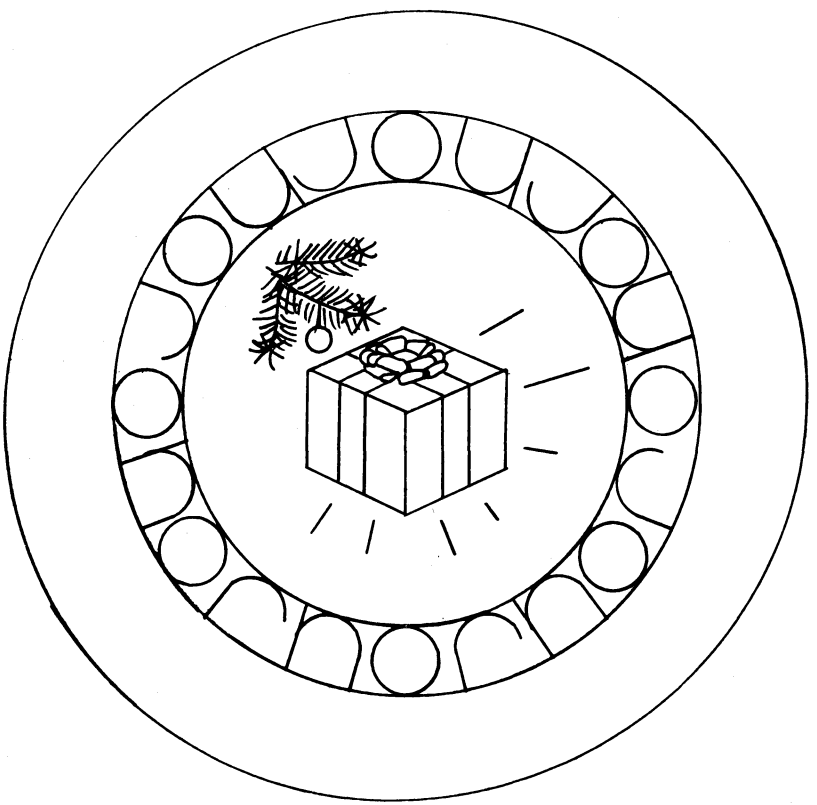
Relatives seem to be the hardest to convince that we do desire an alternative Christmas gift, and would like to change the whole giving pattern that is so much a part of our Christmas. "It's not the gift, but the thought that counts," may be a fine cliche, but it somehow just doesn't work at Christmas. It takes some serious conversation and consciousness-raising to change habits and attitudes.

Gifts that we plant, grow, sew, make, can, bake, compose or write are not always convenient for us to do but being a peacemaker means we have to change some of our priorities. Few of us cannot *afford* to buy gifts for those we love at Christmas. We don't choose an alternative gift as a way of being tighter with our cash, but as a chance to free up our money to care for "the least of these." One family I know has an exciting time each Christmas deciding where to send the Christmas bonus that is theirs. Even

the children have good suggestions as to who in their global family can best use the money. Other families wished the others in the congregation a blessed Christmas with one card attached to the tree. The money saved from purchasing cards and postage goes in a fund for Lutheran World Relief.

There are many ways to celebrate Christmas with creativity and compassion. The suggestions made here are a few of the ways that can be labeled "alternative Christmas." They are "alternative" to the present frantic, materialistic holiday we usually celebrate. They are not "alternative" to the intent of the early church in regard to how this holy day should be kept.

There is a Welsh proverb that says, "Enough is a banquet!" The rest of our global family and the created universe waits for us to learn that again.



Getting Religion Back into Christmas

Elmer N. Witt

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> "The kind of religion which is without stain or fault in the sight of God our Father is this: to go to the help of orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself untarnished by the world."
>
> (James 1:27)

Getting *that* kind of old-time religion back into Christmas is what this piece is about.

We begin with a Christmas story. Titled "A Silent, Holy Night in Harlem," it was written in 1967 and appeared in *The Vanguard* published by the Lutheran Human Relations Association. The author is the Reverend Clemonce Sabourin, now retired and living in Petersburg, Virginia. In 1967, Dr. Sabourin was pastor of Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Harlem.

A Silent, Holy Night in Harlem

Unto us a child is born . . .

After all, we *are* married . . . .Not at first, but when your doubts were dispelled, you were as pleased as I was about the pregnancy . . . and when the child came, you welcomed him . . . This mystery of life, it overwhelms you. It catches you up. And, while we would have planned it better, something happened. Some outside force took over, and what we would, we did not; and what we would not, that we did.

True, it's crowded here, but remember, Joe, it could be worse . . . Stuff paper in the window, bang on the radiator, nail tin over the rat holes . . . It can't be long now, Joe. We *will* get out of here! You have a skill, remember? You are a tradesman and . . . and . . . there's a building boom! What? . . . The Union? . . . Yes, the Union . . . God, help us . . .

Unto us a son is given . . .

A male child . . . What will we do with him, Joe? Teach him a man is the head of his family? . . . This is a tradition we'd better hide . . . but how? TV, radio, movies, newspapers — all present the male as the bread-winner, the one on whom the family depends . . . How much will it hurt when he finds that so many black men can never play this role? Will his honest heart be broken when he sees that the men who prosper are the pimps, the number runners, the muggers, the dope pushers, the bribe-givers and takers who walk the streets of Harlem?

And the government shall be upon his shoulders. . . .

To drape a sleazy coat around his sagging frame, to promise equal opportunities in a land of racial barriers, equal justice where no white man has ever paid the supreme penalty for killing a Negro, and freedom from fear where, even after Emancipation, Negroes have never known a day of peace . . . To promise, always to promise, but always to have our rising hopes thwarted by basic bigots who wear a liberal mask and white exploiters who build super-highways to get

their profits out of the ghetto at sundown and raise transit fares to keep the Negro in . . .

And his name shall be called . . .

Hey, boy! . . . George, will you make down my berth? . . . Look, Uncle, I've tried to be nice to you . . . Parson, won't you tell your people that they should love their neighbors and be grateful for what white folks do for them? . . . You black son-of-a-, who told you that you could be an electrician?

Wonderful . . .

All life is a miracle, even this little black bundle of humanity.

Counselor . . .

It was a brisk note on a piece of brown wrapping paper:

Dear Rachel,

It is difficult for me to write this. Things keep going from bad to worse. I have tried to get work. You know I have tried. It's always, not today, maybe later. Don't call us, we'll call you. The job was just taken. We can use only union men here. We don't discriminate. We just don't have any openings. They lie! Good Christians know they lie! They all condone the lie! . . . Rachel, I can no longer take bread from you. You can't earn enough to take care of you and him. How, then, can you go on sharing with me? If I leave, you can get help. Try to understand. I am sure it's better this way. I am leaving you, because I love you. . . . Joe . . .

In the fulness of time . . .

The dirty street was crowded with fire trucks. Black smoke billowed into the sky and then seemed to swoop down on the milling mob below . . . Rachel had heard the sirens and quickened her steps. She saw it as she turned the corner. Pushing, shoving, screaming her way through the crowd, she reached the front of the building just as they brought the limp form of her three-year-old down the stairs . . . God, I couldn't help it! I had to go to the store . . . I had to! . . . Could I take along a child with fever? . . . Could I risk making a sick child sicker still? . . . I'd be gone for only a minute! . . . There was no one else to get his prescription filled . . . I had to go! I had to! . . . My God, what do you expect of me? . . .

A trembling arm encircled her. From nowhere Joe had come. Beaten, ragged, a derelict from the alleys of Harlem, he tried to comfort her . . . But Rachel could not be comforted.

The white snow fell over the shabby neighborhood like icing over a human skeleton . . . The odor of old things, and dead things, and rotting things was subdued now . . . Tiny colored lights blinked from a thousand windows . . . From the loudspeaker over the record shop on the corner came the strains of *Silent Night, Holy Night . . .*

Rich/Poor

So far Dr. Sabourin's story.

For all the silent, holy nights since, all still is not calm, all still is not bright.

A pertinent hymn stanza is a favorite childhood Christmas memory:

"We are rich for he was poor;
Is not this a wonder?
Therefore praise God evermore
Here on earth and yonder."

Based on the second Corinthian letter, the poem reminds us of our richness in Christ who had everything but gave up many things in order to be one with creation and humankind. We praise God evermore for the incarnation of his son.

Interestingly, the Corinthian reference comes in the midst of what appears to be

a highly effective promotion piece for gathering money for the poor. The writer makes a bold case for generosity and for equality. He urges followers of the Christ to use their riches for justice. This too is a sign of God's peace on earth. This too is praising God evermore.

Christmas is about Babies

In one of his Christmas sermons, Martin Luther asserts it was not without purpose that God comes in the flesh as a baby. He calls attention to God's gentleness, inviting us to see our Savior and Lord playing at his mother's breast. There is no need for fear.

But as Brother Martin knew, not all babies are Jesus. Babies are fragile. Their minds, spirits and bodies are breakable. Babies crave and need tender loving care. Not all babies receive such care.

At a special point in time, when orphans seemed to abound, Christians and others responded with orphanages. They did not always give tender, loving care. They were not in many ways what was needed. But Christians and others cared for babies, as we still do in family and social service agencies. We used to say, with partial truth, that Christmas is for children. With at least as much truth, we can say, Christmas is for babies.

Not many people think about babies. Some do. Many new parents and some want-to-be parents seem to think as much of themselves as about babies. The temptation is to live through our offspring rather than with them. And some today consciously avoid parenthood because of the responsibility and work connected with babies. I wonder betimes how much these think of babies or only of themselves.

Is Christmas the time for us to concern ourselves with babies and babying? Why do people choose to have a baby? Is a baby simply natural, or the thing to do? Is a baby born mostly for eager grandparents-to-be? Is babying simply having something to do other than "going to work?" Is a baby for keeping the marriage together? Should everyone want to have babies? Should every marriage result in babying? How many babies in your congregation do you suppose were *only* the result of sexual arousal and in no way part of a decision to have a baby, to become parents, again or for the first time?

Can Christians question the casualness with which so many babies are conceived? Do we have anything to say to one another and to the world about babies unwanted, babies unloved, babies neglected, babies maltreated, babies abandoned?

In what we call the natural and the social sciences, God's will and purpose for the world are partially revealed. Hospitality seems a crucial part of that will and that world. Welcoming babies into the world is part of that hospitality. We are not called to worship at their shrine. Babies are not God. They bring much work, much more for the mother than for the father in our society. Babies can be boring, bothersome and drudgery (and so can we).

But babies need to be welcomed, as children of the heavenly Creator as well as our progeny. Babies are for praising God's name and not merely for the often-overrated "carrying on of *our* name." Babies need a place to be, a place to grow, a place to be nourished, to be held, to be respected, to be loved.

So, for me, part of the Christmas celebration is sharing with our children not only where babies come from, but why they are here and how we are called to be Christs to them as well as to others.

Part of Christmas-ness is being open to concern for babies of the poor in this and

other lands. Many babies do not have enough of what we now know is necessary to nourish and care for their bodies. Celebrating Christmas is also a commitment, individually and with others, to be part of the response to hunger, through which usually babies are first harmed if not killed.

Part of celebrating the Feast of the Nativity is concern for the growing abuse of babies and other children. "By his stripes they are healed." Part of observing the Feast is solicitude for babies caught in the infant formula debates. There is need for us to keep corporations and one another honest in earning our daily bread and in our concern for others. Part of the festivities is learning again and again that no one *owns* a baby. Babies are given to be cared for, and then they are meant to grow up, to be themselves, and to live under God's kingdom. No human being ever possesses another human being. We are possessed only by God.

Because we can forget and because we can neglect, God chooses to remind us by coming as a baby.

Is not this a wonder?

Aside: Some may surmise I am unaware of single people or of those married who have chosen not to have children. I am not unaware of them. I specifically and directly include them in all I write. Singleness, chosen or imposed, is not freedom from being concerned with others, including babies. The decision for the married not to have babies of their own, for whatever reason, is not exemption from caring about babies.

Christmas is about Houses

When the woman with the Baby reached the town of her lineage, there were no vacancies in the motels, no rooms in the hostels, no space in the homes. Christmas is about babies and about houses.

Shelter is a basic human need, we have come to understand. We seek protection from the elements; the heat, the cold, the wind, the rain, the snow. We want space to call our own — inherited, mortgaged, rented or put together with our own hands — in which we can be ourselves.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch
Friday, September 19, 1980
(classified ad section)

34XX Humphrey, 5 large rooms, newly redecorated, 2nd floor, nice neighborhood, no children or pets, $235 a month. 773-2447.

3 rooms, 1840a Russell, $105. adults, porch, bus, 227-2919.

3 ROOMS & Bath, $125, $50 deposit, 2nd floor, rear, 2162 GEYER AVE.

3 ROOMS, no children or pets, $125. Good location. Security deposit necessary. 993-1193.

29XX PESTALOZZI, 1st floor, 3 rooms, adults only, no pets. $125. Call for appointment 644-4747

23XX S. GRAND 4 room Apt. large foyer & kitchen, small fireplace, no pets, no children $200/Mo. or negotiable
Apartment Cinema R.E. Co. 725-4663

68XX MANCHESTER, 2 bearoom, carpered, redecorat , stove, ref rig., no children, no pets $140
Apartment Cinema R.E.Co. 725-4663

2256 BLENDON: 2 bedroom, built-in kitchen, carpeted, real fireplace. No children, pets. Quiet. $250. Deposit & lease. 645-2464.

1149 LOUISVILLE: St. James Par ish, 4 room efficiency, 1 bedroom. No children, pets. $175. Deposit & lease. 645-2464.

There was no room in the inn. The Son of Mary had no place to lay his head. "The hour, the place and the furnishings, were as much within divine choice as had been the selection of the mother of God," someone has observed. I believe we are meant to think and talk and be concerned about houses and

housing at Christmastime.

There are still children of God for whom there is no room, no house, for whom finding shelter is a day-by-day, even hour-by-hour hassle. Not only is there no space to call one's own, there is no protection from wind, rain, heat, snow, vermin, disease. For most of us stylized, sanitized, westernized people, it is not only our houses that are heavily insulated. Our minds and spirits have also been "protected" from the realities of homelessness, houselessness. The world continues to shrink but our hearts seem sanforized, and we do not feel the tight fit of people on our globe. India, Zimbabwe, China, and Brazil still appear to us to be light years away rather than hours by plane and seconds by satellite. The mileage has even increased between us and our own inner and center cities. Our expressways quickly pass by on the other side.

Twenty centuries later, much of our housing is poor housing. Shelter for many is minimal and often life-threatening. Toilets don't work, paint is peeling from the walls, electrical wiring is ancient and dangerous. Low-rise windows won't shut or have no glass. High-rise elevators are stuck most of the time. Robbery, vandalism, purse-snatching, mugging and rape are not news but a lifestyle.

Twenty centuries later, housing grows more and more expensive, especially for those who earn less and less, or who live on fixed incomes. Rents keep spiraling; minimum income level requirements for housing projects get higher so the poorest are the first to lose out. Absentee landlords use mega-organizations as ever-present landlords the day the rent is due. The top line, middle line and bottom line are all quick-profit lines.

Twenty centuries later, housing creates greater and more formidable barriers between classes and color and calling of people. Many white people are poor. But the chances of your being poor are greater if you are Black or Hispanic or of the house and lineage of Native Americans. Heads of single-parent poor families are mostly women. The elderly watch ever-so-wistfully and sorrowfully as savings are swallowed daily by inflation, and often feel shunted into housing reminiscent of stockyards.

Christmas celebrations should include care for houses and the houseless. Christmas is not merely time for canned goods 'neath the decorated tree or in undecorated boxes in the narthex. Christmas is for learning who is without shelter and where. Christmas is for joining with people of good will in doing what we can about it, personally, in prayer, with our voices and with our money, in Christian love, through local, area and national agencies, and, whenever possible, also through the government. The Spirit leads here, too, into all truth. Proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord means going to the help of orphans and widows in their distress and — thereby ?? — keeping ourselves untarnished by the world.

For the woman's Baby grows up and shows anew how God's strength is made perfect in weakness. The woman's Baby grows up and teaches us,

> How blest are you who are in need;
> the kingdom of God is yours.
> How blest are those who hunger
> and thirst to see right prevail; they
> shall be satisfied.

Because we can forget and because we can neglect, God chooses to remind us by coming as a baby, without a place to lay his head, and with a cross as his destiny.

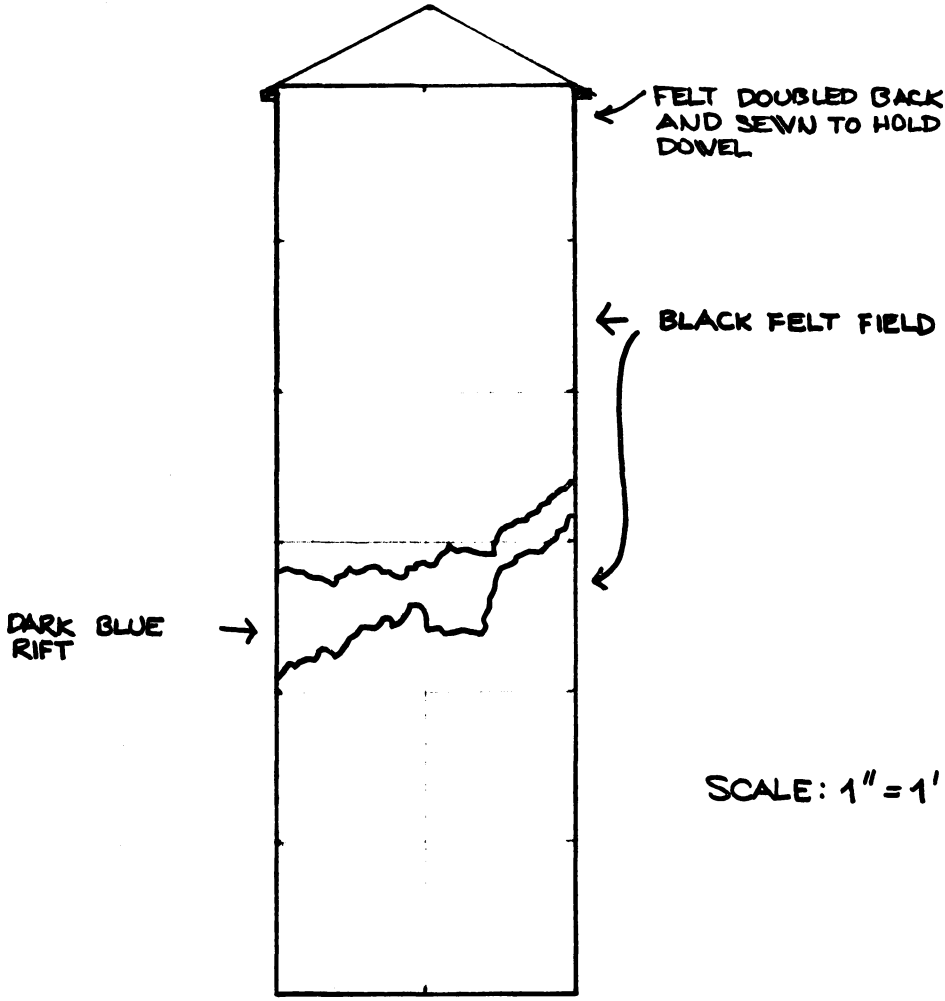
> We *are* rich for he is poor.
> Is not this a wonder?
> Therefore . . .

An Advent Banner

Michael T. Hiller

Pennsville, New Jersey

The dark blue streak that races across the black field of the advent banner hopes that the viewer will wonder what it represents. Is it two parts that once made a whole but are now being removed from one another? ("one is taken, one is left"; the Gospel for Advent I) Is it repentance, one part turning away from another? ("bear fruit that befits repentance"; the Gospel for Advent II) Is the blue streak a glimpse of something more, as John's disciples and even John himself begin to see Jesus for what he really is? ("What did you go out into the wilderness to behold?"; the Gospel for Advent III) Or are the two dark areas heaven and earth coming together in the Incarnation? ("which means, God with us"; the Gospel for Advent IV)



A BANNER FOR ADVENT

Surprising Christmases

Hubert Beck

Lutheran Campus Pastor, Texas A&M University

Once upon a time there was a country in which the day of Christmas always came as a surprise. It was arranged in this way:

The mayor of each town appointed a "Proclaimer of Christmas" on each New Year's Day. Only the mayor knew who this person was, so when he/she announced Christmas it came as a complete surprise.

The surprise was even greater than you can imagine, though, for the day of Christmas was not the same to everyone. Each person had their own Christmas Day appointed in secret, and it was revealed only on the evening before the day to be celebrated as Christmas.

Perhaps you wonder why this custom came about. It was really quite simple: the first Christmas had come quite unexpectedly, and it made sense to have every Christmas thereafter come unexpectedly. Nobody even realized fully on that first Christmas what a great thing they were celebrating. The parents, the shepherds, even the kings hardly had an inkling of what was breaking upon the world in this birth.

Since God had chosen to surprise the world (in spite of plenty of "advance notice") with the first Christmas, why should it not be celebrated as a surprise to each person? The results were really quite astonishing! For one thing, the persons who were privately told that tomorrow would be their Christmas had no time to "prepare" for the day. There could be no urgent and frenzied activity to rob the day of its significance. It just happened one day, and one celebrated it! That was that! The people celebrating their Christmas had to give gifts that were immediately at hand.

It was quickly discovered that on such short notice it was easier to give oneself in service rather than "things" wrapped in paper. Christmas gifts commonly became a very special kind deed, an invitation to supper, a visit to a lonely or sick person, a remembering of people less fortunate. The astounding thing was that such gifts were not only much easier to give on short notice . . . they were also far more satisfying gifts to give than any of the wrapped "things" that had once been so common.

There was a problem, of course, and perhaps you have already wondered about it. Since each person's Christmas was a surprise announced only the day before and a purely private day, there was no opportunity for the celebrants to *receive* gifts! Nobody could prepare for your day. So what happened? Why, the obvious, of course! Since nobody quite knew *when* to give Christmas gifts, they treated each other to "gifts" *every day of the year* to be sure they gave as well as received.

Since the gifts were now "love" rather than "things" they found it possible to be gift givers all the time.

And Christmas meant more than it had ever meant to that country before!

A Resurrection Christmas

H.H. Mirly

Pastor, Resurrection Lutheran Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

500 people sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" by guitar and drum music. A former Southern Baptist lights a single candle on the Advent Wreath. A former Roman Catholic reads the prophecy for the day and comments on its significance for him. An ex-Presbyterian begins his sermon with "Happy New Year!" Advent has come again to Resurrection Lutheran Church, Charlotte, N.C.

Resurrection has been one of the fastest-growing Lutheran churches for 10 years. People of every major denomination in Charlotte have been drawn to it because of its openness to renewal in the Holy Spirit. Protestants find a strong emphasis on the Word of God, Pentecostals find the exercise of spiritual gifts, and Roman Catholics find regular celebration of the Sacraments.

The source of unity amid this wide diversity is the person of Jesus himself. He is the Word made flesh, the baptizer in the Holy Spirit, the Bread of Life. Whatever their background, people learn to appreciate the revelation of Jesus in their tradition and to receive more of Jesus from their brothers and sisters.

Resurrection's emphasis on Jesus finds expression in its observance of the church year. The church year is understood as an opportunity to relive the life of Jesus with the expectancy that we will experience more of his life. We "remember" the events of his life in the biblical sense of re-experiencing that past in our present.

The three parts of the Christmas cycle, Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, help the congregation come into a deeper experience of the presence of Jesus through preparation, incarnation and manifestation. Even as God became meaningful to us by incarnation, so the observance of incarnation becomes meaningful to us through the senses, what we see, hear, touch, feel and do.

It wasn't always this way at Resurrection. When Dolores, my wife, and I came to Charlotte 12 years ago, there was no Christmas service or special observance of Advent at Resurrection. All the Christmas celebrations and children's services were held before Christmas.

As Dolores remembers, change came through patient teaching and "getting the people of God involved." She observed that "people are being turned on to what worship is all about" through observance of the liturgical year. I see an interplay between liturgical and charismatic renewal. Emphasis on worship opened the door to spiritual renewal, and "when the Holy Spirit fell, a willingness to bring the parish into more liturgical observance soon followed.

Advent has enjoyed the longest history of emphasis at Resurrection, especially in home devotions. The beginning of a new Church year has been an opportunity for new beginnings, and the Advent Wreath provides focus for a family's devotion time. Printed guides have been provided for more than 10 years, including readings, litanies and prayers.

Barry and Carol Blackwood and their children Connor, 9, and Shana, 4, have

been members of Resurrection for seven years. They joined the parish "because Jesus was there."

Although their former church had used seasonal church colors, the Blackwoods became aware of their meaning through frequent reference to the changes at Resurrection. When my wife taught a course on worship at home five years ago, the Blackwoods decided to try using an Advent Wreath with their son. "That's really what got us started in family devotions," Barry recalls. "Now we light at least one candle at devotions all year. The children enjoy lighting it and snuffing it out."

The Blackwoods begin preparing for Advent weeks before the season begins, and they add something new to their observance each year as the children grow older. They build the Nativity Scene day by day and make banners, Chrismons and decorations throughout the season. Last year they made cookies symbolizing different names of Jesus and ate them at devotions. Carol reports the results: "At the end of the season, the children remembered every single name we had studied." Next year they plan to have small manger gifts to give to each visitor during the 12 days of Christmas.

Connor and Shana show the fruit of this preparation in their lives. They do not hear of Santa Claus, because "everything we have comes from the Lord," as Carol testifies. "It was so meaningful to all of us on Christmas morning when the first thing Connor said was 'Look what Jesus has given me!' It was the difference between night and day. He had received what we were doing during Advent."

The Jewish tradition is represented among the various backgrounds in the parish and provides insight into the Old Testament hope for the Messiah. Jan Price, a lifelong Lutheran who attends Sabbath worship with her Jewish husband every week, says that reading the Advent prophecies reminds her of God's faithfulness.

"The festivals, too, have so much more meaning," she comments. "Hanukkah has a direct correlation with the Advent Wreath. As we light the Advent candle in connection with the readings, we are building on prophecies which were a light to the world, culminated in God sending his Son."

The second coming of Jesus finds appropriate emphasis during this season. Eschatology does not dominate during Advent or any other time although a New Testament attitude that Jesus will return soon characterizes the fellowship. End-time teaching is always in the context of Jesus' admonition: "It is not for you to know times or dates that the Father has decided by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." (Acts 1:8)

The present coming of Jesus through his Spirit is Resurrection's primary emphasis during Advent and throughout the year. Advent reminds us of the need to make ready for his coming, but always with the assurance that he is already among us in his Word and sacraments. Christmas and the second coming bring us fuller revelation of the Jesus who already lives in our hearts and in our midst.

The Advent movement from hope to fulfillment is symbolized in several ways. Progressive lighting of the Advent Wreath shows the approaching light of Christ. Banners which seemed nearly empty on the first Sunday of Advent have more content on successive Sundays. A stable with animals and an empty manger is set up in the narthex. Weddings, parties, Christmas carols,

decorations and even cards are postponed until Christmas Day. This season is an opportunity to witness that we live differently from the world which exhausts its observance of Christmas by December 25.

Waiting until after December 25 to have Christmas parties has not been easy for everyone. Kathy Kuhnel admits that "the Lord had to deal with me" when friends suggested she postpone her planned mid-December party. "Then I recognized it was a time to prepare for the coming of Jesus, not just something on the calendar where we light a candle every week."

Kathy testifies that she was driving down the road one day when she sensed that "the Lord was saying, 'Why not have an Epiphany party?' It blessed me so much. It would be in the right order, in the right place, on the right day." When she shared her experience with the fellowship, others were able to understand the value of keeping a preparation time.

By the fourth Sunday in Advent, bare Christmas trees stand waiting in the churchyard. Only the Christ Candle remains unlit on the Advent Wreath. Banners are filled with "Watch, Repent, Rejoice, Behold, Maranatha." Mary and Joseph have arrived at the stable. The season of waiting has run its course.

After services on the fourth Sunday in Advent, members of the fellowship fill the church with decorations for Christmas. A tall Chrismon tree is decorated with hand-made symbols of Jesus. Smaller trees representing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life are hung with red apples and white roses. Another tree holds decorations made and offered by families.

The first celebration of the Nativity is the Children's Christmas Service on Christmas Eve. The children of the parish lead the congregation's worship with song, drama and dance which they have prepared during Advent. Deaconess Chris Raess reports that "the children know what they are waiting for. We teach the children how they prepare their hearts and homes for their King." The midnight service on Christmas Eve focuses on the history, the story of angels and shepherds, mother and child. The restoration of the angels' Gloria, which is omitted during Advent, fills the liturgy with excitement. The hope of Advent does not disappoint us. Jesus has come! He is here for us to hear in the Word, to touch in the Eucharist, to praise in the songs. The worship goes on and on, with candlelight and carol singing continuing after the liturgy.

The morning service on Christmas Day focuses on the mystery, the Word made flesh, the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature. This, too, fulfills the hope of Advent. The Son of God has become human so the people might become sons and daughters of God. The awesome reverence of this service completes the exuberant jubilation of the night before.

Both of these services, like every service at Resurrection, center on the celebration of Holy Communion. The relationship of the Sacrament to the Incarnation receives special attention. The historic Nativity is made present most clearly in the Eucharist, where the celebrant announces: "This is the Body of Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary. This is the flesh of the Word made flesh."

The celebration of Christmas continues for the 12 days of the season. Decorations remain and Christmas carols are sung. Members are encouraged to observe the same customs in their homes, and Christmas devotions are now provided for home use to follow the Advent devotions.

The Festival of the Name of Jesus, the eighth day of Christmas, has become a highlight of the season for Resurrection. Falling on January 1, it gives another opportunity to demonstrate that Resurrection does not follow the ways of the world. It also celebrates that which is most precious to this fellowship, the Name of Jesus.

The basis of unity in this diverse congregation is our confession that Jesus is Lord. We are encouraged to speak his name to one another in every situation. We are baptized into his name. We call down his name on ourselves at every liturgy according to the promise in Numbers 6:22-27, the Old Testament lesson for this festival. One celebrant, Gene Stowe, remarked, "I've noticed a real expectancy in people when I speak the blessing since we celebrate the name of Jesus."

The Festival of the Epiphany has become an important celebration for Resurrection. Wise Men replace shepherds at the manger, and Christmas decorations are up for the last time. The gifts of the magi teach that our offering in the liturgy should be a token that we recognize who Jesus is.

Epiphany shows that Jesus lived on this earth as one who functioned under the power of the Holy Spirit which he received at his baptism. He went where the Spirit led him. He taught and worked miracles through the power of the Spirit. He was transfigured and changed from glory into glory by the Spirit. What was true of Jesus is true of us.

The purpose for all of this is to learn to live the life of Jesus every day. As our various backgrounds and traditions are united in the Body of Christ, people can see that what was true twenty centuries ago is true today: The Word is flesh and dwells amoung us. Alleluia.

Philip of Hesse: Militant Confessor

Kurt K. Hendel

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Philip, Landgrave of Hesse from 1519 until 1567, remains an enigmatic figure in the Lutheran Reformation. Although he was a man of deep convictions, he was at the same time perhaps too ready to compromise in order to achieve what he perceived to be essential goals. A kind and sensitive individual who was already called "the Magnanimous" during his lifetime, he was also driven by seemingly uncontrollable sexual passions which resulted in a loss of personal prestige and in embarrassment for the evangelical movement. He recognized the necessity of a Protestant political alliance during the sixteenth century and worked diligently to build such an alliance, but he became the weak link in that alliance and seriously debilitated the Smalcaldic League. Philip was one of the leading political proponents of unity within the church during the time of the Reformation and was also one of the most militant of the evangelical confessors, always ready to take up arms in order to defend the evangelical cause. He was one of the most important, though not always one of the most exemplary, political leaders of the Reformation and a bold confessor at Augsburg.

Philip was thrust into the political limelight at an early age. His father died when Philip was only five years old, and Philip was raised in an atmosphere of political unrest as various factions vied for power in Hesse. In order to put an end to this political strife, Emperor Maximilian I declared Philip to be of age in 1518 when he was fourteen! His actual rule of Hesse began the following year. Quickly demonstrating an innate political acuity, he restored peace in his realm, and worked diligently to enhance Hesse's stature in the European political arena. He ruled his kingdom as an absolute, though enlightened, monarch.

Philip's conversion to Lutheranism was a gradual one. Indeed, as Lutheran ideas first infiltrated his territory and even his court, he opposed the Reformation and exiled or imprisoned a number of evangelical preachers. Gradually however, Philip's loyalties changed. In 1524 he met Philip Melanchthon, who provided the Landgrave with a detailed explanation of evangelical theology and reforms. He began to acquaint himself directly with Lutheran ideas, read Luther's translation of Scripture and promote rather than oppose evangelical preaching and teaching. By the spring of 1525 he openly declared his allegiance to the Reformation.

Efforts for Military Alliances

Soon after joining the Lutheran camp, Philip became the main proponent of a protestant military alliance. He feared that a Catholic, military offensive against the Protestants, led by Emperor Charles V, would result in the defeat of the Lutheran princes and the possible loss of their territories. At the same time, the

young Landgrave was ready and willing to defend and promote his new faith with force, if that became necessary. He did not share the reluctance of Luther or of his political ally, Elector John of Saxony, to take up arms against the Emperor.

One of the most important military alliances was the Smalcaldic League organized in 1531. The League resulted directly from the failure of the Diet of Augsburg to resolve the religious conflicts. When the Emperor Charles V threatened the Protestants with military action and gave them only six months to submit to the authority of the Church, the evangelical princes, led by the Elector John of Saxony and Philip, determined that they had to stand together militarily just as they had done confessionally at the Diet. Although it was constituted as a defensive alliance whose purpose was to protect Protestant territories from imperial interference in religious and political affairs, Philip also recognized the League's offensive potential. In 1534 he defeated an imperial force at the battle of Lauffen, restored the Protestant Duke Ulrich to his throne and thus facilitated the protestantization of the duchy of Wuerttemberg. Philip's victory was generally viewed as a victory of the Smalcaldic League, and the prestige of the Landgrave, as well as of the League, was greatly enhanced. Although political division, military indecision and the treachery of Duke Maurice of Saxony enabled Charles V to defeat the League at the historic battle of Muehlberg in April, 1547, the League had been a protective force during a crucial and formative period of the Reformation. Philip's dream of decisively weakening Hapsburg power through military action however, was never fulfilled.

In order to make the alliance as strong as possible, Philip also hoped to include the Swiss and the South German evangelical cities, some of which had come under Zwinglian influence. Unaware of the intricacies of theological argumentation and unprepared for the strength of conviction of Luther and Zwingli, the Landgrave hoped that theological differences among the Protestants could be resolved through discussion and compromise. It was due primarily to his efforts, therefore, that the Marburg Colloquy took place on the first three days of October, 1529. The main participants were Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon and Oecolampadius. While fourteen points of agreement were noted, differences concerning the crucial issue of the eucharistic presence could not be resolved. Philip of Hesse was disappointed, both for political and ecclesiological reasons. He considered the Zwinglians to be valuable potential military allies as well as co-religionists who should be embraced rather than rejected. Therefore he continued his efforts to achieve unity with the Swiss, though his efforts proved to be unsuccessful. While those efforts indicated a willingness to compromise theologically and a limited understanding of theological intricacies, they should not be viewed as a betrayal of the evangelical position or as purely politically motivated actions. He never reconciled himself to the division among the Protestants and lamented in later years: "O, Almighty God, what is the matter with people that they stir up such hurtful and angry disputes. It is not a true apostolic spirit that does this, but a spirit that seeks a quarrel, division and brawl."

Efforts at the Imperial Diets

The first Diet of Speyer convened in June, 1526. Although Philip had only joined the evangelical movement the previous year, the young Landgrave was

already recognized as an important political leader when the princes and estates of Germany assembled at Speyer. The Diet proved to be an auspicious one for the evangelicals, for the political situation clearly favored them. Renewed hostilities with the French, the threat of the Turks and disagreements with the papacy prevented the Emperor Charles from enforcing his religious preferences in Germany. When the Lutherans, including Philip, staunchly defended their faith, the estates represented at the Diet decided that every prince should deal with the religious question in his territories as he considered appropriate, knowing that he would be responsible to God and the Emperor for his actions. The Lutherans, of course, interpreted this decision as an opportunity to continue their reforms. Philip, for example, returned to Hesse and promoted the Reformation with much vigor.

The political situation had changed radically when the second Diet of Speyer began its sessions in March, 1529. The Emperor had resolved his differences with the pope, had defeated the French and was determined to deal with the religious question. In his message to the representatives at Speyer he lamented that "evil, grave, perilous and pernicious doctrines and errors" had caused "pitiful revolts, tumults, war, misery, and bloodshed." He announced, therefore, that the pope would summon a general council and that no one would be allowed to reject "the ancient usages and customs, or go over to any wrong or strange creed, or attach himself to any new sect."

Shortly before the Diet Philip of Hesse had weakened his own position and influence because of his involvement in the so-called Pack affair. Philip had allowed himself to be convinced by an adventurous diplomat, Otto von Pack, that a Catholic offensive alliance was in the making. The impetuous Philip immediately mobilized his troops, encouraged the Elector John of Saxony to do the same, and even attacked the bishoprics of Wuerzburg and Bamberg. The Catholics, however, declared Pack's information to be false, which it apparently was, and in turn persecuted Protestants in their territories. Philip's precipitous action, based on false information, left him open to the charges of treason and disturbing the peace.

Although embarrassed and politically weakened, Philip and the other Lutheran estates refused to compromise their faith and to submit to the Emperor's demands. When the Catholic majority followed the Emperor's dictates and declared that the agreement of the 1526 Diet of Speyer was abrogated and that all future reforms were forbidden, the Lutherans boldly protested. As a result, the evangelicals came to be called "Protestants." Philip participated in the drafting of the protest and affixed his signature to the document, even though the Pack affair had already placed him in a precarious position.

Charles imprisoned the Protestant representatives who brought a copy of the protest to the imperial court, but he was keenly aware that the Diet of Speyer had not resolved the pressing religious issues. For this reason, he summoned another Diet which was to meet in the city of Augsburg and which he intended to attend personally. That Diet began its sessions on June 15, 1530, and it provided the Lutherans with a glorious opportunity to explicate and defend their faith. Philip of Hesse took advantage of that opportunity.

A bitter attack on the Lutheran theological position, John Eck's *404 Articles*, had convinced the Lutheran representatives that they should prepare a

concise explication of their faith for the Diet. Philip Melanchthon was given the primary responsibility for preparing the Augsburg Confession. Although he intended it to be a catholic and irenic document, Melanchthon was also determined not to compromise essentials of the evangelical faith. In consultations with Melanchthon, the Landgrave Philip argued that the Confession espouse an irenic attitude over against the Zwinglians, whom he still hoped to include in an alliance against the Catholic party. He therefore suggested that Article X contain a milder statement of the eucharistic presence. When his suggestion was disregarded, Philip was clearly disappointed and apparently even debated whether he would sign the Augustana. Suspected by some of his fellow Lutherans of Zwinglian leanings, he finally reaffirmed his agreement with Lutheran eucharistic theology.

Philip was a staunch defender of the evangelical cause at the Diet of Augsburg. He steadfastly refused to compromise what he considered to be essentials, and he was not reluctant to make a public witness of his convictions. That fact became apparent already during the welcoming ceremonies for the Emperor, who arrived in Augsburg on June 15. When the papal legate, Campeggio, pronounced a blessing on the assembly, Philip and the Elector John of Saxony refused to kneel. Neither man wanted to give even the semblance of recognizing papal authority. Although they attended a *Te Deum* service on the evening of June 15, Philip and John did not uncover their heads throughout the ceremony, thereby making another public protest. Not surprisingly, the Emperor bitterly rebuked the Lutheran princes because of their audacity and demanded that they participate in a Corpus Christi procession. He also forbade any evangelical preaching. Philip and the other Lutheran princes did not participate in the procession, nor did they silence their preachers. Philip was cognizant of the possible consequences of such defiance, but he refused to compromise his faith at Augsburg. He also signed the Augsburg Confession, even though he had some misgivings about the Augustana's unflinching stand over against the Zwinglians.

The Augsburg Confession was presented to the Emperor and the estates on June 25, 1530. The Lutherans insisted on a public reading, and the Emperor consented. However, the Augustana did not convince the Emperor of the Lutherans' orthodoxy, and his acceptance of the Roman Catholic Confutation clearly demonstrated his unwillingness to compromise. Philip lost patience during the subsequent negotiations and left the city on August 6 without the Emperor's permission. Within a few months, he was a leader in the formation of the Smalcaldic League. (see above) Philip fully expected that the Protestants would have to take up arms to defend their faith and their reforms. He for one was ready and willing to do so.

That readiness was somewhat tempered by events in the last three decades of his life. Concerns for his personal welfare caused him to be less than exemplary in his witness to and defense of the evangelical faith. In 1540 Philip became a bigamist. He had been plagued by sexual promiscuity throughout his adult life, and he hoped that this fateful step would both curb his passions and salve his troubled conscience. The effects of the Landgrave's bigamy were far-reaching. Philip's reputation was severely tarnished, both among foes and friends. The prestige and honor of the Smalcaldic League and of the whole

evangelical movement were also compromised. European rulers were reluctant to forge alliances with the League, and Catholic polemicists were given new reasons for criticizing the Protestant movement. Philip, fearing legal and military actions against him, entered into negotiations with the Emperor. In return for amnesty, he promised to support the Emperor against all enemies except the Protestants.

Philip's negotiations with the Emperor ultimately came to naught. Because of this fact and also because he continued to view himself as a faithful evangelical, Philip did join the Protestant side during the Smalcaldic War. He was sorely grieved by the defeat of the League and by his own imprisonment, which lasted five years. In hopes of gaining an early release, he advocated compromises with the Catholics and promoted the Augsburg Interim, a theological document imposed by Charles V in 1548. The Lutheran Church in Hesse now made a more faithful witness than its sovereign by opposing the enforcement of the Interim. Philip, depressed by his personal fate, castigated his pastors and congregations from prison. When he was finally given his freedom in 1552, however, he continued to support the Reformation in Hesse and carefully monitored the organization of the Lutheran Church in his territory. He also gave assistance to Protestants in other parts of Europe and continued to advocate unity discussions among Protestants and also with the Catholics.

Philip of Hesse was a complex personality whose motivations are not always readily apparent or easily identified, and whose religious politics were influenced by political considerations. At a time when confessional loyalty was measured by the degree of one's confessional conformity, Philip did not always meet the standards of his contemporaries. He defended his faith boldly at the Diets of Speyer and the Diet of Augsburg. He militantly defied the Emperor, even in his presence, and was ready to take up arms in defense of the evangelical movement. Although he was displeased with some parts of the Augustana, he added his signature to this crucial document and considered it to be his personal confession of faith to the end of his life. In his will he urged his sons, who succeeded him as rulers of Hesse, to retain and promote the Augsburg Confession.

Book Reviews

ALTERNATIVE ALTARS: UNCONVENTIONAL AND EASTERN SPIRITUALITY IN AMERICA. By Robert S. Ellwood, Jr. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979. xiii and 192 pages. Cloth. $12.95.

This brief book covers a lot of ground. The first half contains an interesting reformulation of the "church" and "sect" typologies. Ellwood prefers the terms "establishment" and "emergent" religions. Although he never wanders far from Troeltsch's classic dichotomy, Ellwood does a good deal more than simply rename the categories. Emergent religions, as alternatives to established forms, require an excursion. It is the journey from establishment to emergent religion that receives the greatest attention in Part 1. The excursion is both individual and subjective, but is deeply rooted in social experience. The individuality and subjectivity of emergent religion are discussed with intelligence and grace. The discussion of social experience is less smooth. Leaning heavily on Mary Douglas' formulation of the relationship between social experience and cosmology, Ellwood asserts "that American society in the young republic was, as a whole, one of weak group and grid." Some discussion would be helpful. Part 2 contains well written brief historical analyses of three "emergent" religions: Shakers and Spiritualists, Theosophy, and Zen Buddhism.

Ellwood's general thesis — that emergent religion forms a coherent tradition in the United States — is as troublesome as it is provocative. The three historical essays demonstrate a strong connection between Spiritualism and Theosophy, but the relationship between Theosophy and Zen is tenuous, at best. It is never made clear why these three forms of emergent religion were chosen for investigation rather than others. The tradition in which they are alleged to exist is invoked, not demonstrated. Nevertheless, Ellwood is certainly correct to dismiss the standard framework which relegates all members of non-normative religion to an anomic category. The freshness of the unproven thesis, Ellwood's familiarity with his sources, and considerable insights into the psychology of emergent religion make this a useful book, in spite of its shortcomings as social history.

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INVASION FROM THE EAST. By Howard A. Wilson. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978. 160 pages. Paper. $3.95.

Howard Wilson describes the new wave of religiosity that has recently swept our country and chooses to focus on one of its manifestations — participation in religious traditions developed in South and East Asia. He presents easily understandable and generally accurate descriptions of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Zen religious traditions. What is most helpful about the book, however, is his listing of eleven reasons why these Eastern religious traditions have been so attractive to Americans in recent years: a unitary view of and a mystical relationship with the world, freedom from modern Western materialism, many paths to the truth, the promise of altering human consciousness, direct rather than secondary experience, a specific program of spiritual discipline, meditative prayer, cultivating the bodily dimension of life, a guide to the realm of the spirit, and living harmoniously with nature. The book concludes with two chapters that discuss concerns Christians might raise about these eleven features and lessons that Christians can learn from them.

Why is it that religious traditions from the East are so attractive to many people, when many, if not all, of their appealing features can be found within the Christian tradition? Is it that we Christians have lost touch with those features of our tradition that are now newly appealing? Is it because our

tradition has a primarily verbal focus, whereas people today prefer the more experiential focus of the Eastern traditions? Is it because many people have become disillusioned with Western technological society — and also with the religious traditions that have been associated with it? Or is it because people are simply jaded and seek something new? Wilson doesn't provide answers to all these questions, but he definitely provides a wealth of material for discussing them.

I have space to mention only two of the objections I would raise to Wilson's book. First, I believe he makes overly-simple and false dichotomies between the Christian and Eastern religious traditions. The author, for example, suggests that Christians view God as beyond this world whereas Hindus and Buddhists, when they speak of God, view God as the "creativity at the root of this world." Yet Christians often share such a view of God, not as beyond this world, but as part of this world: think of Paul's "In him we live and move and have our being"; think of Luther's "the only God we know is Jesus in the manger." Wilson also claims that from the Christian point of view direct experience with God is not possible. What, then, is meant by the Lutheran teaching of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist? And what did Jesus mean when he said that whoever has seen him has seen the Father? Is there no direct experience there? Finally, Wilson suggests that the God of mystical experience is a passive object, while the Christian God is an active subject. Not only might mystics dispute this, but it seems clear to me that the God of the Bible is not only an active subject but also a God who interacts with people and therefore is affected by such interactions. If we can say that in the crucified Jesus we see God dead, then surely our God is one who is acted upon.

This leads me to my second concern. In his description of the view of God in the Christian tradition Wilson selects the view of God of classical, philosophical Christian theism. There are other options, including the view of God in process theology. This view of God, emphasizing the interactions and interrelationships of God with the world and humanity, is faithful to the Bible itself and able to satisfy the current desires for features found appealing in the Eastern traditions.

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EVANGELICALS AT AN IMPASSE. By Robert K. Johnston. Atlanta: John Knox, 1979. ix and 178 pages. Paper. $6.95.

Johnston analyzes the current debates among evangelicals over inspiration, women's role in the church and family, social ethics, and homosexuality. He defines "evangelicals" as "that group . . . who believe in (1) the need for personal relationship with God through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, and (2) the sole and binding authority of the Bible as God's revelation."

In his discussion of the debate over inspiration, the author maintains that within contemporary evangelicalism there are four distinct positions (with permutations within these basic categories): (1) detailed inerrancy; (2) partial infallibility; (3) irenic inerrancy; and (4) complete infallibility. He gives one or two representative examples of each and points out his own feelings about each. His complete failure to refer to Martin Luther when discussing the position of the Reformers seems to be an inexplicably glaring omission.

Behind the apparent differences in approach and opinion regarding the role of women in the church, the author feels there are opposing principles for interpreting Scripture, i.e., different hermeneutics. These he enunciates. In discussing social ethics, he considers evangelism and social justice, political power and the power of servanthood, the individual and the community, love and justice as the polarities that the evangelical church must address.

Homosexuality and the evangelical

is discussed on the basis of four different views: (1) a rejecting-punitive approach; (2) a rejecting-nonpunitive stance; (3) qualified acceptance; and (4) full acceptance. Representatives of each position are presented. Important questions that need further exploration are mentioned.

The strength of this book is its effort to identify different positions today in the areas discussed. The author does not insist on one position that everyone must hold, and so the book is thought-provoking and helpful.

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AN ECUMENICAL CONFESSION OF FAITH? Edited by Hans Kueng and Juergen Moltmann. No. 118 in *Concilium: Religion in the Seventies.* New York: Seabury Press, 1979. xi and 121 pages. Paper. $4.95.

A panel of highly qualified theologians presents significant perspectives on the nature of confessing (especially Modras, "The Function and Limitations of Creedal Statements" and Moltmann, "The Confession of Jesus Christ: A Biblical Theological Consideration"), the background of ancient creeds, and examples of modern attempts to formulate confessions. Most interesting and insightful is the series of essays from each of the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Free, Roman Catholic) reacting to the thought of a new ecumenical confession.

As helpful as this book is, it has limitations. The nature of the book allowed only short (an average of seven pages) essays, which consequently do not attain depth or even coordinated discussion; some authors discuss basics while others focus on content or even techniques of confessional statements. Further, there is an inherent contradiction in a title which describes itself as "ecumenical" but includes input from only one Asian and one Latin American. These limitations only suggest that the conversation begun here be continued in forums that allow a deeper and broader dialog.

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JUSTIFICATION BY SUCCESS (The Invisible Captivity of the Church). By John Stanley Glen. Atlanta: John Knox, 1979. 117 pages, plus bibliographical notes. Cloth. $6.95.

This is an important book! J. Stanley Glen, a retired president of a church college in Canada, describes with unusual maturity and incisiveness the extent to which the power and success ideologies of modern corporate America have influenced the church and eroded our allegiance to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel of costly grace.

Glen traces how success and power ideologies have been systematically fostered in corporate America. By managing to remain fairly well hidden as a political force and totally unrecognized by the organized church as a religious force, an "invisible religion" has wooed us and, to an alarming extent, turned us away to false gods.

This is not, however, just another book knocking the organized church. It is much more about North American Christian people and their commitments. The devotees of power and success gods have warped people's commitments. A hidden religious force holds the church captive. In the interest of furthering its own power, this religion of power and success has succeeded in neutralizing the language of faith. It has developed its own ritual and "liturgies," and has either turned traditional sins into modern "virtues" or limited our ability to expose sins as sin, except when we're dealing with the poor and the unsuccessful in society.

It may be a truism that the massive growth of monopolistic corporate power in our era with its all-pervasive ability to effect change through technology, beats anything in history. It is less obvious that such huge mo-

nopolies could thrive so well only where power *per se* is seen as something inherently good — where devotion to the gods of success and power has been persistently and effectively cultivated!

Observing the religious fervor with which a whole people appeared to dedicate themselves to power and success, the author asked a basic theological question: Is there some special affinity between the Judeo-Christian tradition and this "invisible religion" of power, technology and technique? What, if any, elements in the Judeo-Christian tradition furnish fallow ground for such singular devotion to power and confidence in justification by success? Given numerous examples (since the 4th century) of the Western Church's willingness (and sometimes lust?) to be allied with the side of power, we dare not ignore the question.

In relatively concrete detail, Glen exposes the commitments of this hidden religion of power. He explains how it operates and how it has managed to co-opt the church. If Glen's comparisons between corporate monopoly "religion" and the organized church are a bit contrived at points, he nonetheless makes it painfully clear how and to what extent we have been "conned" into giving allegiance to an alien faith — and often in the name of Jesus at that!

Glen is fully aware that justification by grace calls us to a more costly discipleship. He knows especially that it is the only kind of justification that can liberate us from alien success gods and renew us to follow in the way of Jesus of Nazareth.

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WRESTLIN' JACOB. By Erskine Clarke. Atlanta: John Knox, 1979. xv and 197 pages. Paper. $6.95.

Erskine Clarke's portrait of the rural plantation ministry spearheaded by Charles C. Jones is informative and enthralling. A specialist in Southern church history and Dean of Students at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, Clarke "knows the territory" and has a special gift for articulating the dilemmas plantation missionaries wrestled with in attempting to fit a gospel of freedom into the narrow confines of the "peculiar institution." That black slaves should take the gospel, received at the hands of those who promised to replace guards and guns with preaching stations and oral instruction, and turn it into a message of liberation, is "perhaps the most astounding chapter in the history of American religious life."

Part II of this book gives special attention to the intermeshing of black and white religious life in Charleston. City-life afforded blacks more psychic space, and in their churches they developed a "secret institution," hidden within the very structures of the white church. To know their story, with all the richness and freshness of detail found in Clarke's narrative, is to know a good deal about the tap-roots of the contemporary Black Church.

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THE LOGIC OF PROMISE IN MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY. By Christopher Morse. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979. xi and 179 pages. Cloth. $11.95.

Juergen Moltmann's theology has had a significant impact on the American theological scene. No other contemporary continental theologian has been as widely read or as favorably cited as Moltmann. Despite this warm reception, however, Moltmann's thought has not been subjected to the rigorous, critical, logical investigation characteristic of the Anglo-American philosophical tradition of language analysis. That lacuna in Moltmann scholarship has been admirably filled by this carefully crafted and superbly argued monograph by Christopher Morse. Wisely, Morse does not attempt

to subject the entire Moltmann corpus to logical analysis; rather, he offers in this volume an examination of the logical coherence of two crucial and related notions in Moltmann's works, viz. "the language of promise" and the "experience of history."

Morse's thesis is briefly and sharply posed. "I shall contend that the case which Moltmann offers for understanding revelation as promise lacks conceptual coherence. There is a logical inconsistency between the biblical view of revelation in the mode of promise which Moltmann adopts and the thought forms he uses to explicate its contemporary theological meaning." (p. 2) Those "thought forms" are adopted from the neo-Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch and the phenomenologist Georg Picht. Morse demonstrates that Moltmann's analysis of promise is heavily dependent upon Picht's analysis of the concept of time. Indeed, Moltmann occasionally incorporates Picht's phrases and sentences *verbatim* into his own writing. Morse clearly shows that Moltmann's adoption of such philosophical resources is both uncritical and self-defeating, because the borrowed concepts do not allow a satisfactorily consistent account of the Biblical notion of promise upon which the whole of Moltmann's theology rests.

As an alternative to the continental philosophical positions Moltmann utilizes, Morse suggests that Anglo-American language analysis provides a more apt philosophical conceptuality for a theology of promise. Through an exposition of the notion of an "illocutionary performative utterance" as developed by J. L. Austin and refined by Donald Evans and John Searle, Morse shows how the difficulties he has isolated in Moltmann's "language of promise" can be overcome and its insights clarified and expanded. A similar kind of analysis of Moltmann's understanding of the "experience of history" is offered in the following chapter, using the resources of the analytical philosophers of history, W. B. Gallie and Arthur C. Danto. In an especially skillful discussion, Morse argues that Moltmann has overlooked the possibilities of the logic of narrative as a means of connecting his claims regarding promise and history. In those sections of the book in which Morse applies his philosophical tools to theological puzzles, the reader sees a first-rate mind at work. His analysis is critical in the best sense of the word, because he recognizes that the isolation of logical difficulties is but the first step toward the more important therapeutic work of resolving them. Morse's work is a model of careful constructive theological criticism. The reader should be warned that the meatiest portions of this book are also its most difficult.

Two minor reservations should be noted in conclusion. The final chapter "The Question of an Eschatological Ontology" is somewhat disappointing. Morse tackles an issue — the relation between the being and revelation of God — much too complex to be treated in twenty-four pages. Consequently his discussion lacks the crispness and rigor characteristic of the preceding three chapters. One would hope that Morse would apply his considerable ability to a more thorough discussion of this crucial problem in his later work. Finally, despite the admirable clarity which language analysis introduces into the discussion of the theological issues, this reviewer would urge that such borrowings be used with caution. The philosophical works Morse cites are from fifteen to twenty-five years old and, as he acknowledges, have produced a spate of highly technical critical literature. The danger here is obvious: that by the time the theologian has read, digested, and attempted to apply a set of philosophical insights those insights have become so thoroughly criticized and reworked as to be outmoded. That is a problem which affects all theological borrowings from philosophy and certainly is not unique to Morse's work. It is a problem which bears further reflection but should in no way detract from one's appreciation of this superb example of theological analysis.

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Briefly Noted

Concilium — Religion in the Seventies is a library of contemporary religious thought published in ten volumes annually. **The Finances of the Church,** edited by William Bassett and Peter Huizing, contains fourteen essays and discusses, among other things, the finances of the Vatican, the European church tax system, and the support of the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S.A. by freewill offerings. **Discernment of the Spirit and of Spirits,** edited by Casiano Floristan and Christian Duquoc, deals with issues like true and false prophets in Israel, the challenge of Freud and Marx, and Archbishop Lefebvre ("It is sad that a fidelity that is obviously so sincere ... can be so mistaken in its application!"). Finally, Franz Bockle and Jacques Pohier are editors of **The Death Penalty and Torture.** It begins with a survey of the present use of torture and of the attitudes of Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Muslims to the death penalty and torture. Discussions of socio-psychological aspects and of recent ecclesiastical pronouncements against capital punishment round out the book. Each paper-back volume sells for $4.95; they are published by Seabury.

Understanding Church Growth and Decline, edited by Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen (Pilgrim, $8.95) is a systematic review, reevaluation, and extension of existing research on the ups and (mostly) downs of church numbers by sociologists, denominational researchers, theologians, and historians. In a final chapter Lyle E. Schaller lists components for a denominational strategy for church growth.

The Whole Lay Ministry Catalog (Seabury, $8.95) is a "how to" guide for various kinds of lay ministries. The author writes from the perspective of charismatic, evangelical-conservative Christianity. (Herbert T. Mayer)

In **Byzantine Trisagia and Cheroubika of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries** (Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies), Dimitri E. Conomos presents an important study of late Byzantine liturgical chant. The Trisagion is a Trinitarian hymn (Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us), while the Cheroubika are hymns used by the faithful when the Holy Gifts are carried to the altar (We who mystically represent the Cherubim ... let us now lay aside all earthly cares that we may receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by the angelic orders. Allelujah).

Workaholics, Make Laziness Work For You! (Abingdon, $1.50) begins with a "right to laziness" pre-test (If you answer seven or more of the twenty-one questions with "Yes," you need to read the book) and it concludes with a lazy person's post-test guide. In between Wayne E. Oates talks about creative laziness, being lazy in all good conscience, and other cures for all those of us who ought to "slow down already."

In **Leading Churches Through Change** (Abingdon, $4.95), Douglas Alan Walrath describes sociologically six congregations and a cluster arrangement that faced change either successfully or unsuccessfully. At the end of each chapter he points out the lessons church leaders can learn from these experiences. A final chapter offers general principles for leadership (Begin well, honor the context, establish good communication, etc.) and specific counsel for times of change (No congregation is self-sufficient, avoid fostering strong personal dependencies, there is a limit to the social diversity a congregation can contain, etc.). O.K. But how does all this square with the church as the Body of Christ, with Christians as a group of sheep who hear the voice of the Shepherd, or with any other theological concept? Walrath: "When a congregation develops the image of a loser, it is no longer attractive to many people, especially strong people." But what about the One who was friend of sinners and offered rest to the weary?

Hershel Shanks has proven to be a brilliant popularizer of biblical archaeology. The **Biblical Archaeology Review,** which he edits, counts nearly 50,000 subscribers! Now he uses these outstanding writing skills and a lavish array of pictures to update our knowledge of ancient synagogues as revealed by archaeology. In **Judaism in Stone** (Harper, $27.95), one can read of the synagogue as a place for reading the law and praying, for depositing money, dispensing justice, baking unleavened bread, and housing travelers. The large number of paintings, mosaics, and images unearthed in synagogues in the last fifty years have forced scholars to reassess their view of Judaism as aniconic and unartistic. Once the dangers of crass idolatry had passed, it seems, some of the rabbis took a more liberal view: images could be used as long as they were not worshipped. Shanks prints four-color photographs of the wall paintings at Dura Europos and of the mosaic floors at places like Beth Alpha that are remarkable both artistically and theologically. To read how Dura Europos was first buried or of the excitement of its 20th century excavators is high adventure indeed. Recommended for all who love the past.

Karl Honemeyer's **Thomas Muentzer und Martin Luther** (Verlag Merseburger, DM 28) is an important study of a liturgical reform initiated by Muentzer in 1523. He brought the liturgy completely into German instead of Latin, and favored the Gregorian choral as the backbone of the new people's liturgy. Luther was to contest Muentzer on both points, and the book focuses especially on their debate over musical style. Honemeyer regrets Luther's victory on this issue and attributes his posture to political (Muentzer was a leader in the Peasants' War) and other non-theological reasons.

The Jewish Publication Society of America recently released **The Prophets (NEVI'M),** a completely new translation of the second section of the Hebrew canon ($9.00). This translation is significant because of the caliber of its chief editors (H.L. Ginsberg and Harry Orlinsky) and because its readings depend in part on gleanings from Talmudic and Midrashic research in addition to the (by now) standard forays into Ugaritic, Akkadian, and the like. Since every translation is an interpretation, and since all other modern English versions are Christian, this handsome volume makes available a translation based on a different exegetical tradition. The editors claim to present an unemended text. While this is not entirely true (in 1 Sam. 17:12 the Hebrew reads "men" not "years," and many emendations are hidden in the text with a footnote saying, "Meaning of Hebrew uncertain"), their close following of the Masoretic Text is balanced by a great abundance of text critical notes, telling what the versions or modern conjectures suggest. These notes surpass in both number and quality those in any other English version. The traditional messianic name at Isa. 9:5 (Wonderful, Counselor, etc.) is rendered (correctly, I feel): "The Mighty God is planning grace; The Eternal Father, a peaceable ruler." To "know" the Lord in the sense of obeying (Jer. 22:16; 31:34) becomes, sensibly, "heeding." Jeremiah's scream at God in 20:8, however, is rendered uncolloquially by "Lawlessness and rapine!" But such obscurity is rare. Capitalization is used too frequently for my taste and somewhat inconsistently at that. Why "teaching" in Isa. 42:4, but "Teaching" in Jer. 31:33? All quibbling aside, this is a major new tool for understanding the Bible in today's world. Read a few chapters in Isaiah, the territory where Ginsberg has long excelled!

The steady progress on the **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** continues with the publication of Vol. III, *gillulim-haras* (Eerdmans, $18.50). Scheduled for twelve volumes overall, *TDOT* starts with the everyday senses and moves on to the theological connotations of each word. The contributors come from an ecumenical spectrum, though the majority hail from Europe. The longest entry in this volume, 42 pages, deals with the words "speak" and "word." The

average article for the 57 words or word clusters treated runs eight pages.

The Psalms: 1981 Engagement Calendar (Paulist, $6.95) has pages for one's weekly schedule opposite pages containing quotations from a Psalm (calligraphy by Emil Antonucci). A super gift idea for a person who works at a desk! When 1981 is over, one can rip out the spent schedule and have left a nice, spiral-bound copy of selected Psalms.

Its expense, technical orientation, and composition in German are probably enough to discourage the average person from reading Oswald Loretz, **Die Psalmen, Teil II**, AOAT 207/2 (Neukirchener Verlag, DM 138). Equally discouraging to repeated use is a view of the Psalms' composition that makes line after line a gloss, citation from another Psalm, or the like. The more wholistic understanding common to form criticism, to the structuralists, and to those (primarily American) scholars who have investigated the character of ancient and modern oral poetry is sadly lacking. The subtitle tells us that the book shows the use of the Ugaritic texts for the Psalms; actually it shows how to abuse great literature by smashing it to fragments or by proposing arbitrary "original" readings. Perhaps its most useful feature is a 90-page essay at the end that evaluates a number of alleged parallels betwen the Ugaritic texts and the Psalms.

Enrich your devotional life some month soon by using John Baillie's **A Diary of Private Prayer** (Scribner's, $2.25) for morning and evening prayer. You'll emerge from the month with a deeper doctrine of creation and a broader perspective on the Christian mission. The million who bought this gem before you were not wrong!

The Psalms (Paulist, $7.50) is a new translation of the Psalter, done originally for the Mount Angel Abbey in St. Benedict, Oregon, by one of its monks, Bonaventure Zerr. Contemporary language and brief introductions to each psalm make the book attractive. The translator, however, confesses his indebtedness to Mitchell Dahood's commentary on Psalms in the Anchor Bible, and this often misleads him. Ps. 74:12 in fact is a ringing confession of God's kingship, but Zerr, following Dahood, reads: "O God, destroy the kings from the East."Ps. 90:3 in the usual understanding ascribes our mortality to God. With Zerr and Dahood the verse is reversed: "Do not change man back into dust — Do not say: 'Return, sons of Adam.' "

The 26th edition of Nestle-Aland **Novum Testamentum Graece** (Deutsche Bibelstiftung, $5.85) marks a major change over the 25th edition published in 1963. The reader will immediately note the vastly larger number of manuscripts cited and the fact that Old Testament quotations are now in italics instead of bold face. More importantly, the Greek text has been selected according to rigorous modern standards (local-genealogical method); previous editions had a text derived from a mechanical comparison of three nineteenth century editions. Reading four pages in the introduction will make available an enormous amount of information cited in the outer (primarily parallel passages) and inner margins. If the reader takes the excellent, if somewhat defensive, advice on p. 45 of the introduction, he or she will soon read the apparatus of variant readings with skill and profit.

On a Friday Noon: Meditations under the Cross (Eerdmans, $12.95) is a collection of artistic depictions of the crucifixion from the last 1,500 years or so, accompanied by a meditative text appropriate to the artist's particular century. Editor Hans-Ruedi Weber fills the second part of the book with a histoy of the cross as symbol, also in the Third World, and asks what constitutes a true artistic interpretation of what happened that Friday noon at Golgotha. A gorgeous and profound gift item.

The New English Bible: Companion to the New Testament (Oxford and Cambridge, $12.95) is a paperback, one volume commentary on the New Testament by A.E. Harvey. First published in 1970, this 850 page book answers questions anyone might be expected

to ask who approaches the New Testament *without* seminary training.

The Book of Leviticus (Eerdmans, $9.95) is G.J. Wenham's contribution to The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Wenham tries to establish the "plain original meaning" and an "abiding theological value," that is, the significance of Leviticus for Christians. He dodges a decision about the book's date or authorship (though he clearly favors a fairly early date), turning instead to three other resources: a comparison of the OT ritual with customs known from the Ancient Near East; the works of social anthropologists and their understanding of the meaning of symbolism, and the methods of the new literary criticisms, with its concern for structure, key words, repetitions, and summaries. While the avoidance of historical questions can make it difficult to correlate Leviticus with other aspects of OT theology (such as P), and while the old problem of sources and redaction that intrigues every careful reader, is not elucidated by this commentary, it must be admitted that the critical efforts on Leviticus have been confusing and often of little help to the interpreter in the church. Hence this new approach, transcending in part old stalemates, is heartily welcomed.

James D. Smart, a senior member of the exegetical guild, takes on Brevard Childs and James Barr and their notion of the demise of biblical theology in **The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology** (Westminster, $7.95). Smart bristles at the epithet "neo-orthodox" applied to many of his favorite theologians and insists rightly that theology is an inescapable aspect of any biblical science that recognizes the full character of Scripture. While he does a right smart (sorry about that) defense of Karl Barth, his own vision of the present and the future feathers off into vague generalities.

Updating is perhaps not possible or even desirable for B.F. Westcott's **Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: The Greek Text with Notes** (Baker, $5.95), a reprint of a classic first published, posthumously, in 1906. The work of the philologists and text critics, especially the great ones like Bishop Westcott, has its way of enduring.

The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology (Baker, $10.95) contains essays on personal salvation, the church, and eschatology by thirty-six scholars, living and dead, with a range wide enough for almost anyone's palate. Among the authors whose essays are reprinted: Martin Luther, Franz Pieper, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Rudolf Bultmann, and William Hordern (the only living Lutheran I noted).

In **Religious Innovation in Africa** (G.K. Hall, $25.00) Harold W. Turner presents twenty-seven essays dealing with that continent's religious movements. The interaction of native African religions with the Christian tradition has produced an outburst of religious creativity. Some of the essays deal with the relationship of these movements to Pentecostal Protestantism, to Roman Catholicism, to colonial governments, and to the role of the outstanding religious individual in the historical process. While the essays are primarily academic in nature, they also deal with such life and death issues as how one decides whether a new religious movement is, in fact, Christian, or with the implications of this phenomenon for the Christian missionary.

The **Concordia Self-Study Commentary** (Concordia, $17.95) is a one-volume commentary by Walter R. Roehrs and the late Martin H. Franzmann. Franzmann's work on the New Testament appeared as a separate volume in 1971 (**Concordia Bible with Notes, New Testament**). That work has now been incorporated in the new volume, though, wisely, the English text of the Bible is not reprinted. Franzmann also prepared the comments on the Minor Prophets. Many a difficult word or geographic reference receives here a clear, non-technical definition, but the work on the Old Testament, at least, could have been written a century ago without much change. There is no evidence of the enormous gains of form criticism or little recognition of

the meaning the text had for its original audience. Partly that stems from the dogmatic decision to eschew all vestiges of biblical criticism; but partly it reflects a paternalistic attitude toward the laity that invites them to read the Bible, but defends them both from its problems and its deepest, original message. Take Hosea 11, for example. NT references are piled up in v. 1 (Out of Egypt I called my son), but v. 2 goes without comment. Its references to "my son's" idolatry, of course, preclude taking either v. 1 or v. 2 as a direct reference to Jesus. Sadly, the verse with the real evangelical content, v. 9, also escapes all comments.

John Lightfoot's **A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica** has recently been reprinted by Baker ($45.00, 4-vol. set). Despite its obvious limitations (it comments only on Matthew — 1 Corinthians, and it was first published in 1658), there is valuable information stored in this four-volume work. But any user must exercise great caution. Are the materials in the Talmud, redacted about 500 C.E., really as ancient as the New Testament? Are the alleged parallels really parallels, or are they phenomena that appeared independently in Judaism and early Christianity? What effect would a critical reading of the Talmud or of the New Testament have on these parallels or other background data? A few of these concerns apply to the somewhat similar German commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash by Strack and Billerbeck though the latter is a 20th-century product and is cognizant of the gains of modern biblical studies. The Lightfoot volumes can be easily used *and* easily abused.

(Ralph W. Klein)

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