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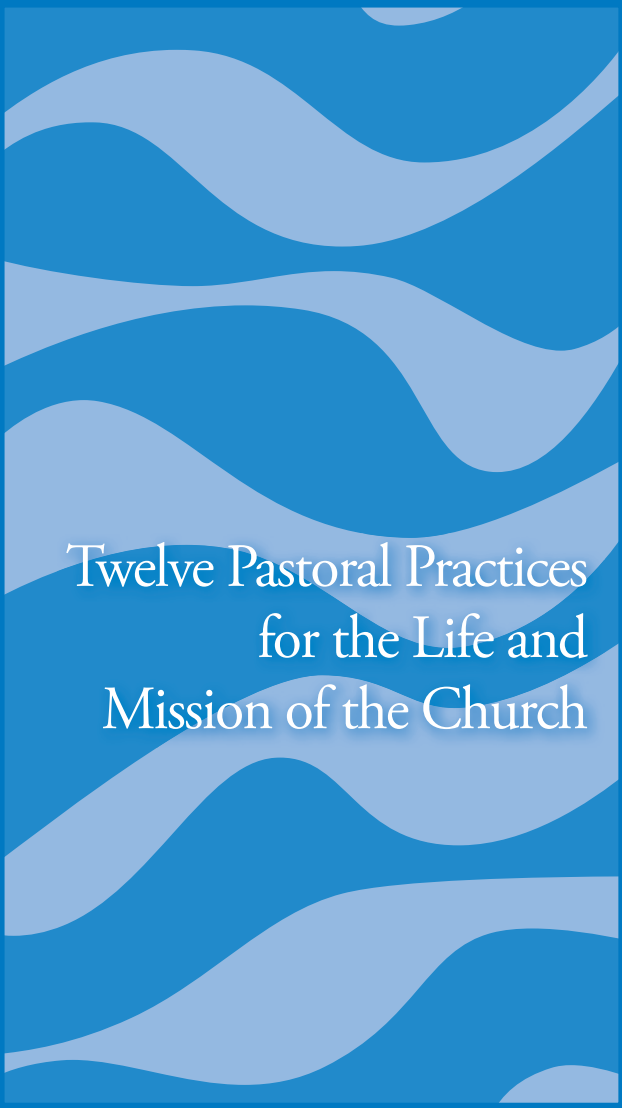

Twelve Pastoral Practices for the Life and Mission of the Church

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Twelve Pastoral Practices for the Life and Mission of the Church

Wartburg Theological Seminary's Mission Statement states well the fundamental purpose of the school: "Wartburg Theological Seminary serves the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by being a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning. Within this community, Wartburg educates women and men to serve the church's mission as ordained and lay leaders. This mission is to proclaim and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to a world created for communion with God and in need of personal and social healing."

Over the course of the last decade, the outcomes of the formation process at Wartburg Theological Seminary have been articulated as the Twelve Pastoral Practices, the theme for this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*. The seminary curriculum in which students are prepared for church leadership includes not only the formal curriculum of courses taken to meet academic requirements, but even more the worship and community life of the school. Thereby the Twelve Pastoral Practices have become instrumental to both qualitative and quantitative assessment processes as we measure the vigor of our curriculum outcomes.

Some brief comments on the origins of the Twelve Pastoral Practices. The faculty of Wartburg Theological Seminary sought to learn from graduates in their various ministry settings for ongoing curriculum development and evaluation. As a form of qualitative assessment, we designed a process by which each professor spent a weekend in the ministry setting of a graduate: seeing that context through their eyes, conversing with graduates and the leaders of their faith communities (for example, a pastor in a congregation, diaconal minister on a college campus, or an associate in ministry at a camp), and meeting with leaders from the local community (for example, a mayor, librarian, or school teacher). Faculty shared their reflections from the visits with one another, listening and learning from our graduates, the people among whom they ministered, and from one another as faculty.

As a result of this process the Wartburg Theological Seminary faculty adopted the Twelve Pastoral Practices as a description of what we intend to instill in our graduates based on our mission. Although labeled as "pastoral" practices, they are by design inclusive of candidates in all degree programs. Here the term "pastoral" encompasses the ministry practiced by ordained pastors, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, associates in ministry, and other lay leaders. In many ways these pastoral practices belong to the entire church and also can describe the ministry of the priesthood of all believers.

By "practices" we do not mean mere actions that are performed. Rather, these practices are understood to be incarnated and embodied in "being" as well as in "doing," so as to achieve coherence between who we are called to be in Christ and how we serve. According to the recent use of "practices" to describe the art of ministry, these are habits of the heart that manifest themselves in a concrete way of doing ministry. They subsume both theory and practice in a thoroughgoing action-reflection method. The stories and examples in this collection of articles provide demonstration of this "way."

With the publication of this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*, we hope to extend the conversation beyond Wartburg Theological Seminary by engaging readers to reflect upon and examine the core questions about what makes for excellent ministry in our time. Each generation is called upon to engage faithfully and creatively to correlate the faith of the church with the mission challenges of the age. We live in an era marked by several distinct and ambiguous characteristics: intense individualism, heightened polarization of opinions, post-modern sensibilities, the disintegration of Christendom, rich cultural diversity, and religious pluralism, to name some chief markers. What should the mission of the church look like in such an age? We boldly propose that it looks like these Twelve Pastoral Practices.

We are a diverse and collaborative faculty. We represent the full range of theological academic disciplines, while also working intentionally across disciplines to team teach courses. The articles in this collection reflect the rich variety of our theological faculty in both content and style. Each article incorporates the description of a particular pastoral practice and explicates its importance for the mission and ministry of the church. The practices are biblically and theologically based and connect deeply with the lives of real people in communities of faith as they live out that faith in the world. Several of the authors illustrate what the practices look like in the lives of seminary graduates.

While each of the Twelve Pastoral Practices is distinctive, the first three are foundational for all the rest. There are common threads among the twelve and they build on one another. The authors chose to write on a specific practice somewhat by discipline and interest, but also in the collaboration with other faculty members. Thus, for example, Ann Fritschel could have written on "Biblical and Theological Wisdom" rather than "Complex Analysis," or Dan Olson might have written on "Pastoral Concern," rather than "Curiosity." That makes us curious as editors about how other authors might have construed differently the various practices. Whatever the case, we offer for your reflection these particular articles from members of a faculty in which these practices belong to all and are practiced by all in a highly integrated curriculum.

Readers are invited to use these articles both for individual reflection and

group discussion. We have provided questions for discussion, as well as key words, at the end of each article for use in your own context—in colleague groups, adult forums, or retreat settings. We encourage a wide ranging discussion about what the church needs from its leadership in our time. We propose for your consideration that the ministry and mission of the church will be enhanced wherever women and men engage in the practice of ministry according to the shape of Twelve Pastoral Practices such as these.

Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nessan
Issue Editors

Practice of Being Rooted in the Gospel

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> Articulates the Gospel in a way that is heard as Gospel. Is publically Lutheran and Gospel-centered.

The first pastoral practice, and the one that centers all others, is the practice of "being rooted in the gospel."[1] We at Wartburg Theological Seminary suggest that this is marked in two specific ways: (1) that the pastoral leader "articulates the Gospel in a way that is heard as Gospel," and (2) that the gospel-rooted pastoral leadership within and for which Wartburg forms its students "is publicly Lutheran and Gospel-centered." This article exegetes four particular foci of this pastoral practice: the *Gospel* itself, the notion of being *rooted*, that the Gospel is meant to be *articulated*, and the *public* nature of the Gospel.

The Gospel

It may be counterintuitive to begin a discussion of the Gospel in the chaos that arises between the death of King Saul and the enthronement of David as king of Israel, but I ask that you buckle up and hold on for a wee bit.

As with all political power vacuums (something we are not unfamiliar with in global politics of recent history) there is more than enough struggle, betrayal, murder, and misfortune to go around. Who shall succeed Saul as king? In 2 Samuel 4 the story of the power vacuum left in the wake of Saul's death gets particularly crazed and bloody. The crescendo of this narrative comes with the beheading of Saul's son Ishbaal at the hands of Rechab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite. Bringing the head of Ishbaal to David in triumph, the killers proclaim, "Here is the head of Ishbaal, son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; the Lord has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring" (2 Sam 4:8b).

David responds to their righteous claim: "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, when the one who told me, 'See, Saul is dead,' thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag—this was the reward I gave him for his [good] news."[2]

In short, the message Rechab and Baanah thought would be welcomed as good news was not received by David as such. In the last great act of David before ascending

1. I extend my gratitude to the Wartburg students and alumni who have provided helpful insight and encouragement with this article: Jennifer Agee, Kalen Barkholtz, Amy Current, Mark Griffith, Seth Nelson, Scott Piper, and Gunnar Sigurjónsson.

2. In the Greek, 2 Sam 4:9b–10 (LXX 2 Kingdoms 4:9b–10) includes "good news" in both its verbal and nominal forms. "The Lord lives, who redeemed my life out of every adversity, for the one who told me that Saoul had died—and he was as one bringing good news (εὐαγγελιζόμενος) before me—and I seized and killed him at Sekelak, to whom I ought to have given reward for good tidings (εὐαγγέλια)." *The New English Translation of the Septuagint* A. Piertesma & B. G. Wright, eds. (Oxford: Oxford and International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, 2007) *ad loc*.

the throne of Israel, he rewards Rechab and Baanah, just as he had the young Amalekite at Ziklag, with death.[3] Is it not the case that in the name of righteousness we do that which is really destructive and evil? And is it not frequently the case that at the heart of this is mistaking and misrepresenting that which is not good news for good news?

This story functions as a type of our individual stories and of the church's story. When we try to understand good news—the Gospel—from the standpoint of our own power, prestige, prominence, or righteousness, we are bound to fail. We replace Christ's righteousness with our own. We depose the Gospel of Jesus Christ and enthrone some warped "good" news of our own.

Luther is instructive here:

> There is only one article and one rule of theology, and this is true faith or trust in Christ. Whoever doesn't hold this article and this rule is no theologian. All other articles flow into and out of this one; without it the others are meaningless. The devil has tried from the very beginning to deride this article and to put his own wisdom in its place. However, this article has a good savor for all who are afflicted, downcast, troubled, and tempted, and these are the ones who understand the gospel.[4]

The good news proper is the work and righteousness of Jesus Christ. The content of the gospel is its speaker, the eternal Word incarnate, crucified, and risen, who is keen to eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners. And, as Luther says, the "afflicted, downcast, troubled, and tempted" are best able to understand the Gospel, for it is they who understand our true helplessness and need for both the balm and the transformative power of the Gospel, the truly good news of Jesus Christ.

Consider how Paul speaks of the content of proclamation in the Corinthian correspondence.

> For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:5–6 RSV).

The good news is not to be equated with just any good news. There are many things that we might categorize as good. We know, however, that what we classify as good is not always truly good (cf. Luke 18:19). Recall David's reception of Rechab and Baanah. Recall Paul's injunction that we "do not proclaim ourselves." Rather, it is Christ that we proclaim, for it is only Christ and his righteousness that is the power of God's justifying love toward sinners. The gospel, then, is this incarnate good news that the one who created light by speaking it into existence and the one whose glory is the source of all that is holy is the one who died for the sake of the world and whose resurrection has taken away death's sting. In the Gospel we come to know the "glory of God in the face of Christ."

As we think about "being rooted in the Gospel," it is important to state clearly that the Gospel cannot be equated with any particular party or ideology or confession or denomination. It is the good news of Jesus Christ, which ontologically transcends every boundary and engages every here and now. It is the good news of Jesus Christ that unmasks our sin and idolatry and unrighteousness, that meets us in our affliction, despair, trouble, temptation, and fear of death, and gives freely of Christ's own righteousness and life.

3. The young Amalekite, of course, had at Saul's own request slain the king and brought the news of Saul's death together with the crown and armlet to David, cf. 2 Sam 1:1–16.

4. LW 54.157.

Rooted

It matters where the good news is located, where it is rooted. Ultimately, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is rooted on this earth where Christ's cross was planted in the soil outside the walls of Jerusalem.

While the cross is akin to the image of the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:18; Rev 2:7; 22:14), I want to expand our image of this cruciform rootedness to something more akin to Ezekiel's great cedar (Ezek 31:1–18) or even more expansively to Yggdrasil, the great world-tree of Norse mythology.[5] In a real sense, with Christ's death on the cross, this "tree" rooted at Golgotha takes all the world into its branches, into Christ's outstretched arms, and its roots extend even to the depths of hell (1 Pet 3:19–20). There is nothing outside of the scope of this cruciform world-tree.

Recall the Christ Hymn in Colossians, especially the ubiquitous scope of its conclusion:

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers —all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross (Col 1:15–20).

The cross of Christ, then, is transformed from a means of execution into the world-tree whereby God reconciles all things on heaven and earth to God's self.

When thinking about "rootedness," then, we begin not with the pastoral practice of leaders but with the action of God in Christ for the whole world. For it is only in this cosmic reconciliation uniquely rooted in the cross of Christ that any imitative pastoral practice of "being rooted in the Gospel" can itself properly take root. Like Yggdrasil,[6] the cross of Christ frames the whole of reality for Christians. There is nothing outside of Christ's world-tree, and all reality—people, places, histories, the visible and invisible, earthly and heavenly—is framed and supported by God's all-encompassing act of reconciliation.

When thinking about 'rootedness,' we begin not with the pastoral practice of leaders but with the action of God in Christ for the whole world.

5. Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* XV. With Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel* (BCTB; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 242, I point to the acknowledgement of this image of the world-tree in the great traditions of the world's religions as named by Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary,* C. Quin, trans. (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 425.

6. On the parallels between Odin and Yggdrasil and Jesus Christ and the cross, see Kevin Crossley-Holland, *The Norse Myths* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 187.

As the church considers formation for pastoral leadership in today's world where cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, and religious pluralisms are the reality—whether one serves in Bangalore, Baltimore, or Badger, Minnesota—where better to begin than with the Gospel itself and being rooted therein? It is in such a scriptural vision of the cruciform rootedness of the Gospel itself that pastoral leadership is essentially rooted.

Articulates

Human leadership, generally speaking, has great potential for both good and ill. Pastoral leadership is no exception. The apostle Paul at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians moves headlong into the divisions within the community around questions of leadership and allegiance with the formula, "I belong to…" (1 Cor 1:12). Paul's probing question cuts to the heart of the matter: "Has Christ been divided?" (1 Cor 1:13a) The apostle's view of leadership in the church, whether ancient Corinthian or contemporary, is rooted in the content and articulation of the Gospel. The question of baptism aside, he writes:

> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor 1:17–18).

The good news of Jesus Christ and him crucified is foolishness by any logical, rhetorical, reasonable measure outside of the power of God. To borrow a great word from Scots, the Gospel turns the world tapsalteerie.[7] With the action of God in Jesus Christ most clearly revealed in the all-encompassing cruciform world-tree, the world as we know it is turned upside down and the absurdity of the paradox becomes the rule. God's wisdom appears foolish and God's strength appears weak. Such is the "message of the cross," which cannot simply be conveyed with "eloquent" wisdom. The articulation of the Gospel cannot have as its primary purpose winning the admiration of hearers, for by nature the articulation of the Gospel—the wisdom of God—turns our world all tapsalteerie.

The nature of the proclamation of the Gospel and the Gospel itself are not at odds. Rather, the nature of the proclamation of the Gospel and the Gospel itself reshape our vision of ourselves, one another, and the whole world based on the very foolishness of God.

A natural outgrowth of "being rooted in the Gospel" is articulating the Gospel in ways that are heard as Gospel. In traditional and still relevant Lutheran terms, this is understood as discerning Law and Gospel.[8] Perhaps in Pauline terms this is discerning the work of God in Christ and him crucified… discerning the foolishness and weakness of God in and for the world…rightly discerning news of Ishbaal's head from that which is truly good, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Public

"Hide it under a bushel? No! I'm going to let it shine!"

On a cross-cultural immersion with students in Iceland, our group was invited to a children's church worship at Lindakirkja in Kópavagur, a city that neighbors Reykjavik. While Pastor Guðmundur Karl Brynjarsson strummed his guitar, young and old alike sang "This Little Light of Mine."

7. Roughly "topsy turvy," but thinking here in particular of Scots poet Robert Burns' (1759–1796) song "Green Grow the Rashes."

8. For example, C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel,* W.H.T. Dau, trans. (St Louis: Concordia, 1928); Herman G. Stuempfle Jr., *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Ramsey, N.J.: Sigler Press, 1990).

It was of course in Icelandic, but there was no mistaking it. The tune, the actions, and most importantly the message…the Light… Christ himself translates[9] into any language and into any public.

In his classic work, *The Living Word,* Gustaf Wingren works with a simple and profound thesis: "The Word [sic] exists to be made known; only when it is preached is its objective content fully disclosed."[10] Central to the practice of "being rooted in the Gospel" is the nature of the Word himself. This Word, eternal, incarnate, crucified, and risen, exists to be made known. Such is the missional heart of the church and, as such, of the pastoral leader.

The Word by which the world was spoken into existence, by which the world is sustained, by which the world is called to justice and peace, by which the world is saved is meant to be heralded, to be good *news!* All other pastoral practices flow from this foundational pastoral practice of "being rooted in the Gospel" with its own rootedness in the crucified Word which is meant to be heard.

For Discussion

1. Reflect upon your experience of proclamation within the church, whether as preacher or hearer. What did you hear as news of "Ishbaal's head"? What did you hear as "good news" of Jesus Christ?
2. Imagine the whole of reality and history encompassed by the roots and branches of Christ's cross. How could this vision impact your ministry and the ministry of the church?

Key words: Gospel, Word, preaching, practice, pastoral, Yggdrasil

9. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989).

10. Gustaf Wingren, *The Living Word: A Theological Study of Preaching and the Church*, trans. V.C. Pogue (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960). 13.

Practice of *Missio Dei* in Word and Sacrament

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> Is grounded in Word and Sacrament as the means by which God creates faith in Christ and a community (*koinonia*) for God's mission (*martyria* and *diakonia*) in the world. The ordained exercise faithful worship preparation, evangelical preaching, and sacramental leadership. The consecrated serve as a strategic bridge between church and world. Associates in ministry serve faithfully in their areas of call in relationship to the worshipping community. All the baptized are sent by the Spirit to employ their gifts in God's mission for the life of the world.

The second pastoral practice describes the primary way that we become rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ: through word and sacrament, what Lutherans have called the means of grace. In our time we are coming to a clearer understanding about how these means of grace are the indispensable starting point for God's mission (*missio Dei*) to redeem and restore the whole world in Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, word and sacrament create faith in us; word and sacrament gather the church as a community or fellowship (*koinonia*) in faith and direct its witness (*martyria*) and service (*diakonia*) in the world; word and sacrament encompass the life-giving purpose of God for the whole world. The practice of word and sacrament at the heart of the worshiping assembly of Christians is the orienting center of God's mission as it unfolds in the course of human life and history.

For those who teach and study at Wartburg Seminary, this pastoral practice is much more than a learning outcome for those who will give leadership in congregations. The mission of God as it unfolds in word and sacrament is a practice that defines the church as it gathers in every local place. It is a practice that orients all Christians to the purpose of God in their daily living and many vocations. It is a practice that shows forth the world-encompassing embrace of God: no one and no thing lie outside God's life-giving purpose. Because it is such a central and orienting practice, the seminary understands itself as "a worship-centered community of critical theological reflection where learning leads to mission and mission informs learning."[1] Worship, community, theological study, and mission are all part of the mix of life and work at the seminary. Daily worship in the chapel and the human fellowship around tables in the refectory shape a rich environment for learning and theological growth and for discerning one's calling to serve the mission of God among God's people throughout the world.

Word and Sacrament

The phrases "word and sacrament" and "means of grace" are part of a theological and doctrinal discourse that helps us to reflect upon and conceptualize how it is that we are drawn into a relationship with God. What

1. Wartburg Theological Seminary, *Mission Statement.*

these concepts point to, however, is nothing less than life before God (*coram Deo*)—life in relation to the living God and God's life-giving purpose for us and for our world. That is what we enact in our worship: God's living presence for us in Christ and the life-giving purpose of the triune God for you and me, for us, for all. That is what it means to say that these things, word and sacrament, the means of grace, are central to our worship. In fact, these "things" are not things at all, but the way the Spirit of God sets our lives in relation to God in Christ, the way that we come to enjoy God's abundant life, and the way our lives are directed toward God's own life-giving purpose for all. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's *Use of the Means of Grace* puts it this way:

> Jesus Christ is the living and abiding Word of God. By the power of the Spirit, this very Word of God, which is Jesus Christ, is read in the Scriptures, proclaimed in preaching, announced in the forgiveness of sins, eaten and drunk in the Holy Communion, and encountered in the bodily presence of the Christian community. By the power of the Spirit active in Holy Baptism, this Word washes a people to be Christ's own Body in the world. We have called this gift of Word and Sacrament by the name "the means of grace." The living heart of all these means is the presence of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit as the gift of the Father.[2]

These things are the heart of Christian worship: Jesus Christ himself present through the power of the Spirit in word and sacrament; a Christian assembly gathered by the Spirit around these things with songs of praise and prayers for all.

2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament*, principle 1.

Missio Dei

The new thing for us is this: to grasp in understanding and in practice the full scope of God's mission toward the whole world enacted at such worship in word and sacrament.[3] Some years ago, Wolfhart Pannenberg suggested that worship in word and sacrament symbolically "anticipates the social destiny of all human life."[4] Even before that, Alexander Schmemann had used the phrase "for the life of the world" to characterize the all-encompassing significance of eucharistic worship.[5] These are biblical words found in Jesus' discourse on the bread of life in the Gospel of John (6:51) and quoted in the Byzantine liturgy. Another voice, that of Aidan Kavanagh, speaks of "church doing world" at its worship,[6] and so he writes:

> The liturgy presumes that the world is always present in the summoned assembly …What one witnesses in the liturgy is the world being done as the world's Creator and Redeemer will the world to be done. The liturgy does the world and does it at its very center, for it is here that the world's malaise and its cure well up together, inextricably entwined.[7]

3. For a helpful presentation of "worship in word and sacrament," see Gordon W. Lathrop, *Central Things: Worship in Word and Sacrament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

4. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality* (Philadephia: Westminster Press, 1983), 46; based on lectures given in 1977.

5. Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World: The Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 1973); first published in 1963.

6. Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology* (New York: Pueblo, 1984); see chapter 4.

7. Aidan Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo, 1982), 46.

The social destiny of all human life—for the life of the world—church doing world—these words offer us a very big picture of God's mission at work in the local assembly of Christians. The assembly around the things of Christ in word and sacrament points way beyond itself to the ultimate or eschatological unity of all human life, indeed to the communion of all created things.

Here is the deep connection between worship in word and sacrament and God's mission: Jesus Christ, the crucified one, who draws all people, all things to himself (John 12:32–33), stands at the center of the Christian assembly and directs us outward to the whole world as the object of God's life-giving purpose. Jesus Christ himself is the connection of worship and mission—inside out.[8]

Traditional or Contemporary?

Although these labels linger as descriptions of the practice of worship, we are beginning to move beyond the false dichotomy these terms represent. For many reasons the times are right for a richer and more integrative approach to worship that embraces both distinctive Christian claims and practices and seeks to communicate them faithfully within the cultural environment in which we live, always for the sake of God's mission.

Over the last century, there have been two sources for the renewal of Christian worship. Let's call them roots and relevance. The first source for renewal has been the search for roots, which focuses on the question of Christian identity. Christian identity has become a question in large part because of the dissolution of western Christendom. As the privileged place of Christianity in western society erodes, church and society are no longer understood to be a single, largely cohesive communal reality (Christendom). The church becomes a particular community among the many communities and relationships that make up the social world. The distinctive identity of the church as a community becomes an urgent question, and the exploration of the principle sources of Christianity in the scriptures and the early church—and for Lutherans, in Luther and the confessions—becomes an important way to construct and claim a distinctive ecclesial identity within this new social world. In matters of worship, the search for roots has resulted in a more vigorous practice of baptism, a Sunday assembly that gathers around word and meal, the celebration of the Easter Vigil and the Three Days as a unity at the center of the church year—and much more—and all of this joined to rich understandings of the church as a community and the eschatological horizon of the church's worship and its mission.

The second source for the renewal of Christian worship has been the impulse toward cultural relevance. This focuses on the question of Christian engagement and responsiveness to its social and cultural environment. According to the missiologist Lamin Sanneh, one of the distinctive features of Christianity from the beginning has been the conviction that the gospel message is translatable into other languages and forms

> Jesus Christ himself is the connection of worship and mission—inside out.

8. Thomas H. Schattauer, ed., *Inside Out: Worship in an Age of Mission* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

of cultural experience.[9] There is no Christian language, no Christian music, no Christian art and architecture. There is only a distinctive use of these things for the purpose of translating the gospel message, the gospel community, and the gospel mission in ways that communicate within each and every cultural context. Christendom tended to enforce a notion that there was a Christian culture. The demise of Christendom and with it the social support for a Christian culture have invigorated the question of Christian engagement with the contemporary cultural environment. In matters of worship, this has produced much ferment about the language of worship (the use of modern vernacular and inclusive ways of speaking) as well as music and the arts. It has also meant attention to how ethnicity and class bear upon the practice of worship and to how Christian engagement with the social and political dimensions of human life might be reflected in worship.

These twin sources for the renewal of worship—the roots of historic Christian practice and relevance to the contemporary cultural environment—for much of the twentieth century worked together and interacted with one another in a dynamic way toward the aim of fostering a distinctive and responsive Christian community for its mission in a world post-Christendom. As we all know, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the interaction between roots and relevance has not always been easy or fruitful. Instead "traditional" and "contemporary" have become labels for different, even opposing ways of worship.

9. Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture,* 2nd ed. (Mary Knoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009).

Local Assembly and God's Mission

What is needed at this juncture is not tinkering with the style of worship, something more "traditional" or more "contemporary," or some combination of the two. The way forward is a radical trust in God and God's ways among us, and because of that, a radical commitment to the local assembly of Christians around word and sacrament as the center of God's living presence and life-giving purpose for the world. This trust and this commitment is what we mean by the practice of God's mission in word and sacrament.

The commitment to God's mission in the local Christian assembly involves these four things:

First, it means that we commit ourselves to a practice of worship shaped around word and sacrament. The principle form of this practice is the Sunday assembly of the baptized people of God gathered in song and prayer around the living presence of Jesus Christ in word and meal. Such worship is the way of God's mission in Jesus Christ to us and for us and through us. It is the way we enact God's purpose for the whole world and become witnesses to and participants in God's mission.

Second, it means that we commit ourselves to a practice of worship that gathers and sends the people of God. The gospel is more than a message directed to individuals. The gospel is a word that gathers a gospel community for the sake of the world-encompassing gospel mission. The church as gospel community anticipates in its worship, indeed in its whole life, the communion with God, with others, and with all things that is the fulfillment of God's mission: the shalom of God's reign. Gospel message, gospel community, and gospel mission are the necessary and interrelated gospel materials of the local Christian assembly, gathered and sent.

Third, it means that we commit ourselves to a practice of worship that envisions and enacts

the world redeemed, the world made new in Jesus Christ, as the full scope God's mission. God's mission is always deeply personal and broadly ecclesial, but "saving souls" and "growing the church" are inadequate conceptions for the world-encompassing scope of God's mission, to which the local Christian assembly points.

Fourth, it means that we commit ourselves to a practice of worship that engages the contemporary cultural environment in a way "marked by both welcome and critique … by yes and no."[10] The restoration of all things in Jesus Christ allows us to affirm the goodness of the creation and the social ways that sustain life in human communities. These are gifts to be received and valued in our worship. This is the yes. But we are also aware of the reality of sin and its power to distort our relation to the creation and to one another. This is the basis for the no and the critique of cultural materials and values that distract from, distort, or displace the purpose of God in the Christian assembly.

For Discussion

What is God's mission? Where does it happen? What is our role in relation to that mission?

1. Reflect upon and discuss with others your own understanding and experience of worship centered on word and sacrament.
2. How does worship in the local congregation enact and serve God's purpose for the whole world? In what ways does this shape the practice of worship?

Key words: word and sacrament, God's mission, worship, assembly, culture

10. Gordon W. Lathrop, "A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Worship and Culture: Sorting Out the Critical Principles," in *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. S. Anita Stauffer (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), 142ff.

The Practice of Biblical and Theological Wisdom

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> Interprets reality theologically and biblically as a habit. Has a core set of theological concepts that are interpreted with flexibility in different contexts.

Knowledge and wisdom are not necessarily synonymous. While "knowledge" can imply the possession of specific information "about" something, "wisdom" entails understanding the nuances of that information and good judgment in the use of it. With this distinction in mind, the *practice of biblical and theological wisdom* seeks to form in learners and teachers the habit of interpreting reality theologically. Utilizing knowledge of specific core theological and biblical concepts, students are equipped to interpret those concepts flexibly in different contexts, faithful to Gospel proclamation.

From Head to Heart: Transition from "Knowledge about" to Wisdom

For many students, the transition from "knowledge about" to "wisdom" is a challenging part of the formation process. Recently, a young man preparing for a unit of clinical pastoral education approached me about his learning goals. When I queried why he thought learning more about eschatology and the bondage of the will would be appropriate goals, he replied, "Well, people in the crisis situations I will encounter will have questions and I will need to answer them." His response opened the door for a fruitful discussion of the need to transition from head-centered "knowledge about" to heart-centered wisdom.

This student has an excellent academic record. He knows the core theological concepts well. What frightens him, at this point in his formation process, is his own inner need to have "the answers" to the heart-wrenching questions which hurting people may have—questions with which he struggles mightily in his own heart. What does one say to the great "why" questions: why does God allow me to suffer like this; why did my beloved one die so young; why did I survive the car accident and my best friend did not? Knowledge seeks to give reasonable answers to these questions. Faithful to the Gospel proclamation, wisdom hears and acknowledges the anguished struggle underlying the questions and is able to reply: "I do not know—but I trust that God does not want you to suffer, that your suffering is not caused by your sin, that your loved one is with the Lord. The rest I do not know and I struggle to understand it too." Transitioning from the need for head-centered "knowledge about" to heart-centered biblical and theological wisdom—which allows for open questions and interprets theological concepts flexibly to address specific contexts—is essential for forming faithful, creative, and innovative leaders for mission in the twenty-first century.

Perhaps nowhere is this transition process more difficult than in the struggle to let go of head-centered "knowledge about" the

nature of God, in order to embrace heart-centered wisdom, with openness to experiencing the mystery of God. Many students arrive at seminary with a variety of pre-conceptions about God's nature. God is all-powerful and in control of everything. God is all-benevolent and has a play-by-play plan for every believer's daily life. God is not open to anger addressed to God by the believer. The list of pre-conceptions goes on and on, and with it a deep-seated reluctance to enter into the mystery of God's presence in creation. Equipping students to move from reluctance to a relaxed embrace of the mystery is integral to developing the habit of biblical and theological wisdom.

Wise leaders must be able and willing to interpret multi-faceted dimensions of reality theologically for the sake of the Gospel.

One of our graduates shares a ministry experience that illustrates well this habit. Several months earlier, her congregation had been shaken deeply by the death of a young mother who suffered an aneurysm, while her seven-year-old son, Aaron, sat beside her on the couch. Seeking to minister to the suffering child, the pastor took him out for pizza and conversation. The boy's father was trying hard to fulfill both parents' roles, but the strain was apparent in the boy's disheveled appearance and angry eyes. For a while, Aaron and his pastor sat in awkward silence. Finally, in a voice filled with defiance, Aaron blurted out, "Right now, I don't like God very much at all." Swallowing the impulse to try and defend God, his pastor simply replied, "You know, Aaron, right now I don't like God very much at all either." Her response was honest and wise, and it opened the door for an ongoing, heart-centered exploration with young Aaron regarding the biblical and theological mystery of God.

From Surface to Subterranean: Interpreting Reality Theologically

In addition to freeing the practitioner to understand and interpret key theological concepts flexibly in different contexts, the practice of biblical and theological wisdom equips ministers to see through surface manifestations of reality to subterranean dynamics underlying them and to respond faithfully to the Gospel proclamation. In these early years of the twenty-first century, competing and often conflicting religious and secular trends abound, proclaiming "gospels" other than those that Christians in the Lutheran tradition confess. In order to respond faithfully to this challenge, wise leaders must be able and willing to interpret multi-faceted dimensions of reality theologically for the sake of *the* Gospel by attending to the subterranean dynamics belonging to the appeal of these different gospels.

One religious trend that poses significant challenges for mainline churches in North America is the appeal of various manifestations of what is sometimes termed the "prosperity gospel." For example, while many Lutheran congregations struggle to fill half their pews, 43,000 people stream into Lakewood Church each week to be inspired by Joel Osteen's gospel of positive thinking and empowerment. One tempting surface response to this phenomenon is to cater to it—to meld Osteen's themes into the message proclaimed in local congrega-

tions, creating a hybrid that meets the goal of attracting more people to the church's pews. Another surface response is to simply deride Osteen's approach as wrong and then ignore it. Neither response is particularly helpful or faithful. What is needed instead is sustained attention to the subterranean dynamics underlying its appeal. To what basic needs does this "gospel" respond? How does its views of God and humanity function to give meaning to people torn and suffering, as well as to those doing well in life? What complex of social, economic, educational, and racial factors contribute to its appeal? Discerning the subterranean theological needs met by Osteen's gospel is a crucial first step in addressing its challenge to the Gospel we proclaim. The habit of thinking biblically and theologically is indispensible for leaders seeking to guide congregations in this crucial endeavor.

Another current North American religious trend involves consumer religion culture—what I like to call the "fast-foods" approach to church. More and more, people want to drive through, get the services they want, and quickly drive away. They understand the task of church leaders to be one of discerning the services members want and then providing those services in a quick, appealing way. One response, of course, is simply to cater to the demand. Yet another is to critique it without really addressing it. Neither approach is adequate or faithful. By contrast, what is called for is deep theological awareness of the complex cultural factors underlying the appeal of this gospel and theological wisdom in addressing them. Lambasting is easy; listening, loving, and responding faithfully and firmly is more challenging and requires leaders for whom the task of thinking theologically about all of life has become a habit. What underlying needs does the consumer religion approach seek to fill? What prompts the need for speed? What views of God and discipleship do this gospel's adherents hold? How can we as faithful leaders articulate the Gospel in a way that addresses these subterranean dynamics openly and lovingly, remaining aware of the complex demands twenty-first century life imposes on people, and yet refuse to let financial fears inhibit proclamation of the life-changing, life-sustaining, life-empowering call to discipleship in faithfulness to the Gospel that we trust? These questions demand leaders well-grounded in the practice of biblical and theological wisdom.

Current secular trends provide fertile ground for thinking theologically about the subterranean dynamics, which account for their great surface appeal. Popular movies, for example, are great resources. How is humanity portrayed and how is the human dilemma presented? How is the human dilemma addressed? Is there room within the movie world for God or some semblance of the divine? If so, how is the characterization developed? What can we learn from these portrayals that will equip us to speak the Gospel more clearly, comfortingly, and challengingly for the sake of the mission to which God's people are called?

Similar questions need to be addressed about Internet usage and social networking. From a theological perspective, what functions do these modes of communication serve in the lives of their practitioners? What can we learn from those functions that will equip us and our people to articulate more sharply the Gospel we claim? Responding to these and similar questions faithfully, creatively, and innovatively requires the practice of biblical and theological wisdom.

The language frequently used in contemporary political discourse is another example of a cultural trend crying out for interpretation by faith leaders equipped to look below the surface verbiage to the subterranean dynamics prompting it, in order to respond faithfully as disciples of the risen Christ. In the United States, catchy sound

bites fill the air, exhorting voters to make political choices based on a candidate's view of selected moral issues—usually some mixture of abortion, homosexuality, and gun control. Missing in this catchy sound bite approach is an appreciation of complexity and the importance of communal moral deliberation on the challenging topics of the day. Too often, a focus on the "moral issue du jour" functions to divert hearers' attention from more pressing and equally complex socio-economic inequalities and injustices affecting most directly the poor and vulnerable in society. In such a time as this, the church needs leaders who are able to reflect theologically on the dynamics that underlie the framing of the "issues" as well as the popular appeal of that framing. We need leaders who are able to see through smokescreens and equip their people to address theologically the complex issues masked by the smokescreens for the sake of the Gospel's call to discipleship. Needless to say, this can be a minefield. It requires leaders who are grounded in a process of formation that culminates not simply in "knowledge about" but in the practice of well-honed biblical and theological wisdom.

From Process to Practice: Principles Underlying Curriculum as Facilitators

Insofar as the Twelve Pastoral Practices represent the intended curriculum outcomes of Wartburg Theological Seminary, it is helpful to focus on principles underlying the curriculum that facilitate formation in the practice of biblical and theological wisdom.[1] Four principles are particularly significant:

Communal Worship: At Wartburg Theological Seminary, whether in residence or online, communal worship is the foundation upon which all of seminary life together rests. Without worship, education can lead to "knowledge about"; through worship, "knowledge about" transforms into wisdom for service.

Collaborative, Collegial Partnership in Teaching and Learning: Professors work collaboratively with each other to develop integrated approaches to the whole curriculum; students are able to see inter-connections between courses and appreciate the living conversation with the Scriptures and historical church traditions as each generation discerns how to respond faithfully to God's call in its time. Many courses are team-taught, modeling for students a collegial approach to leadership that is respectful of differing viewpoints and passions. Students work collaboratively and collegially with other students to facilitate learning and with faculty in shaping courses. Through this process, head-centered knowledge has opportunity to transition to heart-centered wisdom.

Contextual: No text, whether biblical, theological, or personal, develops in a vacuum. A contextual approach begins with de-centering the individual learner from her/his comfort zone. Amassing knowledge within a person's comfort zone is possible; transitioning from knowledge to wisdom requires a willingness to take risks in order to stretch and to grow. A contextual approach also requires setting texts within their contexts as an indispensable step in discerning what a text says to the hearer in a contemporary context. This involves entering the living conversation of the biblical witness and the church's developing historical witness, taking seriously the present context of the reader and, through the Spirit's power, integrating

1. Note that "curriculum" as it is used here refers not to specific classes, but to the integration of formal and informal ways in which pastoral formation takes place. Obviously, individual class titles and requirements change and adapt in response to changing needs and modes of delivery (for example, residential or online). The following paragraphs focus on principles underlying the formal curriculum, regardless of the actual course list in any given year.

the text with all these contexts to discern how the Spirit is calling hearers to faithful mission today.

Cross-cultural: It is easy for North Americans to assume that western (usually male) interpretations of texts are universal in scope—which of course they are not. The cross-cultural principle underlying the seminary curriculum opens students to the cross-cultural nature of the Bible itself, as well as to cultural factors impacting the church's theological traditions. Students also are exposed to contemporary interpretive lenses previously unfamiliar to many of them (for example, womanist, post-colonial, or feminist approaches), in order to realize that not everyone sees the world as they do. What may fit them well within their own comfort zone may in fact be oppressive to others. Global awareness, as fostered both through textual exposure and through global immersions, is essential to the process of wise pastoral formation.

Concluding Comments: From Head to Heart, Surface to Subterranean, Process to Practice

As the church transitions into the tumultuous twenty-first century, the need for wise, sensitive, creative, innovative, and forward-thinking leadership is great. By equipping leaders to think biblically and theologically about reality and to use biblical and theological concepts flexibly in different contexts, the practice of biblical and theological wisdom contributes to the pastoral formation of the next generation of leaders.

For Discussion:

How have your own experiences nurtured within you the process of transitioning from head-centered knowledge to heart-centered wisdom?

1. Within your cultural context, what challenges do you face in assisting people to move from surface interpretations of reality to deeper subterranean theological perspectives?
2. What intersections do you see between the practice of biblical and theological wisdom and the other pastoral practices described in this issue?

Key words: knowledge, wisdom, context, global, complexity

Practice of Ecclesial Partnership

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> Displays a healthy sense of connectedness with the whole church. Fosters partnership with the ELCA and ecumenical openness.

Why ecclesial partnerships? Why expend financial and other resources in pursuit of unity across the ecumenical spectrum? Are there not other, more essential missional challenges that must take precedence over the pursuit of the ever-elusive Christian unity? Is it strategically prudent to devote such energies to ecclesial partnerships that may threaten and even undermine our own viability in so many contexts? Should we not give due weight to self-interest? What do such pursuits have to do with the Gospel, God's mission?

These and other sobering, pressing questions continue to be raised in our increasingly fragmented, divided world and call for the unequivocal reminder: Ecumenical dialogue, conversation, and cooperation are not appendices to the identity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and any other churches; they are integral to the being and mission of the church in service of God's mission. In this article, we will draw upon insights both from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, USA (L-RC Dialogue), which began in 1965, and the seminary class, 'Readings in Theology."[1]

1. As the collection of essays in this issue indicates, both the formal and informal curricula of Wartburg Theological Seminary are infused with a positive orientation and attention to ecumenical and inter-religious questions.

The Source and Origin of Our Unity

It is instructive and sobering to remember the impetus and ground for the pursuit of unity from Jesus' high-priestly prayer in John 17:

> I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (vv. 20-23).

Lutheran teaching is that the church "is the assembly of believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel."[2] The Gospel is not the possession of any church, but every church by its very identity in Christ through the Spirit has the responsibility to guard against witnessing to another gospel which would displace the one Gospel of God's justifying grace in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Whenever and wherever another gospel displaces *the* Gospel, the message of the church—its mission—becomes a centrifugal force that promotes and furthers the disunity

2. Augsburg Confession, Article VII, in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42.

that marks and has marked the reality of the churches that bear the name of Jesus Christ.

Over the past three decades, I have found myself, as pastor-theologian-teacher of the church, increasingly emphasizing both in the seminary classroom and other formal and informal teaching settings in congregations and beyond—within the United States and in other global contexts—that the unity Christians share across the world and throughout the ages is a gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift presents a calling to churches and Christians to share in the mission of instantiating in concrete ways the reality for which Jesus prayed. The task arises out of God's gracious gift! Precisely because it is a gift, coercion, violence, and ways that enslave rather than conduce to human freedom are to be eschewed. A gift that is forced on another or a community brings into question the very nature of the gift as gift and its wholesomeness. This is true of the Spirit's gift of unity in Christ. Although history—including history of the church—is replete with incidents in which the Gospel and the unity in Christ that is intrinsic to the gospel were used as weapons to control, denigrate, damage, and even destroy people, that does not invalidate the promise that Jesus Christ frees and unites. Rooted in and nurtured by this message, God's mission calls us to ecclesial partnership in which we are reminded that no church has called itself into being or finds within itself its mission. The calling to be the church whose mission is grounded in God's mission is extrinsic: it is from the Spirit of unity who points us all to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Of course, that the church is truly the church means that it is Jesus Christ who is its foundation and life and the church is the body of Christ.

Teaching and Learning Ecclesial Partnership

For several years now, I have been offering a one-hour "Readings in Theology" course in which students read as one of the primary texts the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (*JDDJ*),[3] which was signed by the Roman Catholic Church and Lutheran World Federation, 31 October 1999. In fact, the full title of the course, offered each semester of the academic year, is *Readings in Theology I: A Critical, Meditative and Contemplative Approach.* In this approach, students read *JDDJ* first and consider primary points in the text: agreement, distinctive emphases, and outstanding differences which need to be addressed in ongoing dialogue and ecumenical engagements. Through the years of teaching,

God's mission calls us to ecclesial partnership in which we are reminded that no church has called itself into being or finds within itself its mission.

I have come to the realization that teaching a "way" of reading texts that combines the critical, meditative, and contemplative is greatly needed. Such an approach reminds the reader both that the text is not an object to be conquered and thereby subordinated to the reader-conqueror and that respecting the text does not mean desisting from ask-

3. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2000).

ing searching, challenging questions about veracity and how truth is expressed *in* or comes to be *as* the text.

In this approach, engaging students in reading and discussing selections from the texts of the L-RC Dialogue is one of the fruitful ways of preparing students for the task of building ecumenical partnerships in their ministry settings. To foster wholesome ecclesial partnerships in witness to the unity for which Jesus prayed, it is crucial that churches as "the other" are described in ways that they themselves recognize that they have been accurately presented. Thus being "other" will not mean that differences—for example, in doctrine or structures of authority and governance—are highlighted for denigration. To make this contextual and relevant, the foci on the readings and discussion ask students to consider ecumenical scenarios. Two examples of discussion questions are:

- As you consider the readings and conversations throughout the semester, what are the distinctive points of *Lutheran Identity* which stand out? How have fundamentals of Roman Catholic teachings helped you in clarifying Lutheran doctrinal emphases? Provide references to *JDDJ* and the other readings.
- Imagine that you have been asked to share in an ecumenical gathering the primary insights you have gained during this semester on the question of Lutheran and Roman Catholic emphases in *Scripture and Tradition* (vol. IX),[4] *Differing Attitudes Toward Papal Primacy* (vol. V),[5] and *Teaching Authority and Infallibility In the Church* (vol. VI).[6] What would you include in an outline? What would you quote from each of the texts we read: *JDDJ* and vols. V, VI, and IX in L-RC Dialogue? Give reasons for your choice. Close your posting with a prayer that is evoked by the readings.

In reading the documents from the L-RC Dialogue, it is important that due attention is given to the "convergences," the common and distinct emphases, as well as continuing differences which remain points of division. Let me highlight some critical points in *Teaching Authority and Infallibility In the Church* and *Papal Primary and the Universal Church*. The reader should note the emphases in the document of the one hope, "the truth," and "mission to humanity for the sake of the gospel."[7] Moreover, the two traditions proclaim "in preaching and the sacraments" the one Gospel. While "our two communions have sought to assure this transmission of the gospel along different lines," it is still the one Gospel of Jesus Christ that is proclaimed and transmitted.[8] The modes of transmission of the Gospel share commonalities; at the same time, there are differences which cannot and must not be ignored. But the ecclesial dialogue is premised on the incontrovertible fact that it is the one Gospel that both churches proclaim and transmit. "The ultimate source of authority is God revealed in Christ. The church is guided by the Spirit and is judged by the word of God. All its members share in this guidance and are subject to this judgment. They should recognize that the Spirit's

4. *Scripture and Tradition*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX, eds. Harold C. Skillrud, J. Francis Stafford, and Daniel F. Martensen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

5. *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V, eds. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974).

6. *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI, eds. Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978).

7. Ibid., 25.

8. Ibid., 26.

guidance may give rise to diverse forms in piety, liturgy, theology, custom, or law. Yet a variety of ecclesial types should never foster divisiveness."[9]

Insights from the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue

Attending to the modes of transmission of the Gospel is, however, intrinsic to serving God's mission, as form and content inherently belong together. It is necessary to ecclesial partnership that each partner in dialogue is self-critical about its own articulation of the Gospel that is proclaimed *de jure* and *de facto* in its preaching and teaching, on the one hand, and the structures of its life, ministry and exercise of authority, on the other hand.[10]

At the same time, maintaining the distinction between modes of proclamation and transmission of the Gospel and *the* Gospel itself is crucial. In this regard, it is instructive to note the "Common Ground and Divergences" between Lutherans and Catholics which were summarized thus:

> 40. There are notable differences in emphasis and in structure between Lutherans and Catholics. There is also a considerable common ground. Both communities have emphasized the authority of Christ, of the gospel, of Scripture; and of subsequent tradition, though in different ways and proportions. *Lutherans have stressed Christ's presence and power in the continuity of the Church as his body socially present and organized.* There have been correlative differences in institutional structures, especially relating to authoritative teachings. *Catholics have insisted on the authority of the Church's institutions, particularly of the structures of the ministry of bishops and priests under the primacy of the bishop of Rome.* But Lutherans have had to create other institutions, which, *though intended to be provisional, have become part of the contemporary Lutheran patrimony.* In both churches *the structures are intended as means to promote the gospel.* But as institutions become established, they tend to become ends rather than means. Each church has the responsibility of protecting its spiritual vitality against the weight of its institutions. *And the two churches together have the responsibility of seeking ways of convergence, both at the level of doctrinal emphasis and at that of institutional structure.*[11]

We cannot get around the fact that modes of transmission of the Gospel are historical constructs that have arisen in response to particular questions and circumstances. In the ensuing centuries to today and continuing into the future the historical 'conditionedness' of the interpreter—whether individual or communal—is a crucial, vital ingredient to serious, potentially decisive ecclesial partnership for the sake of the Gospel. In short, ecclesial partnership involves real, living communities. In the context of "Readings in Theology," one implication of this recognition is that the students are subjects, not objects, for each one comes with and, like every other human being, is constituted by a narrative.

Thus, it is well to ask: who are the students who are coming to seminary seeking to prepare for the ministry in service of God's mission in the world? It needs to be noted that increasingly students who are coming to the seminary are not only diverse in terms of ethnic-Lutheran roots and other Protestant upbringings, but Roman Catholic backgrounds. This diversity is welcomed in the classroom across the seminary curriculum. Given the nature of "Readings in

9. *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church,* paragraph 23.

10. Ibid.

11. *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, 30.

Theology," from the opening session and throughout the course, students are invited to share their understanding of the Christian faith and indicate how their religious narratives have shaped and continue to shape the hermeneutical framework they employ in interpreting the Christian faith in a Lutheran framework of justification: by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. Not surprisingly, stories are shared of Catholic upbringing, sometimes explicitly tied to ethnic identities. Also not surprising is to hear some say that they have not really known much about Roman Catholics. Naming stereotypes and recognizing their shaping power, including the power to divide, denigrate, and promote violence in the name of Jesus Christ, are essential for initiating and building wholesome ecclesial partnership. In the context of the class, we remind one another that we are called to listen to the "narratives" so that, with the backgrounds represented among us, we all are seen as subjects, not objects. It is an ongoing challenge to keep in mind that religious socialization is a "living" tradition. This framework is essential both to our engagement of the texts of the L-RC Dialogue and in many other situations as well.

We continue our commitment to the practice of ecclesial partnership always with Jesus' high-priestly prayer at the center and with the gift and challenge of *JDDJ* in mind: "Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches."[12]

For Discussion:

1. How does the practice of ecclesial partnership between Lutherans *and* Roman Catholics, congregations of full-communion churches (with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), and contemporary evangelicals reflect in concrete ways God's mission inherent in Jesus' prayer in John 17?
2. In what ways is the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* serving the practice of ecclesial partnership?
3. If you were asked to pray at a gathering of Christians of various denominations, for what would you give thanks and make petition to God?

Key words: doctrine of justification, Lutheran identity, gift, the other, unity

12. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, paragraph 43.

The Practice of Complex Analysis

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> Demonstrates the capacity to carefully examine complex social, economic, scientific, and religious issues without oversimplification; sees relationships from a systems perspective, remaining spiritually centered in the face of ambiguity.

We live in a beautiful, wonderfully complex world. In appreciating the images made by frost on a window or the wonders of the human body, one can experience the joy of the complexity of creation. Yet sometimes the complexities of life seem overwhelming and threatening. We seek simplicity; complex economic and social issues are reduced to sound bites. We seek patterns and meanings where none may exist in order to feel secure and safe. The longing for security and safety, however, may lead to simplistic answers and poor theology.

I interned in Tulsa, Oklahoma, not a typical Lutheran region. One of the ecumenical gifts of Lutheran theology that Lutherans brought to that community was the ability to live in ambiguity and not rush to simplistic theological explanations. People, who had been told their cancer, divorce, or problem child was God's punishment upon them for their sin, tried to repent of their sins. Still their problems did not go away. The simplistic, biblical doctrine of retribution as applied to their lives did not work. Some even experienced blame and shame for not "truly repenting" or "having enough faith." Their churches would give them no other answers; some of these suffering people eventually found their way to Lutheran congregations.

At Lutheran congregations they heard an acknowledgement of the complexity and ambiguity of life. They were not given easy explanations of their sufferings or solutions to their problems. Instead, they were given resources for living in the face of complexity and ambiguity. These resources focused above all on a gracious and loving God who seeks out and gathers the lost and straying to comfort and protect them, not to judge and punish. The power of grace was made real for them. Life did not become any less complex or ambiguous but it did become more livable. Indeed, Lutheran theology with its paradoxes and tensions—such as sinner and saint, the hidden and revealed God and the theology of the cross—seems inherently formulated to address the complexities and ambiguities of daily life.

Remaining Centered in the Gospel: Beyond the Pursuit of Easy Answers

The search for easy answers, a fragmented post-modern worldview and the complex realities of creation underscore the importance of the pastoral practice of complex analysis. Complex analysis embraces three related but distinct practices—that the minister: 1) demonstrates the capacity to carefully examine complex social, economic, scientific, and religious issues without over simplification; 2) sees relationships from a systems perspective; and 3) remains spiritually centered in the face of ambiguity.

Intrinsic to this practice is a theology of incarnation and incarnational ministry. Christians are embodied creatures who live

in a material world where they are engaged by economic, social, cultural, political, and scientific ideas and forces. Christians are called to engage this world in its fullness. They are not called to retreat from the world or focus only on the spiritual elements of life; Christian faith and discipleship is concerned with *all* of life. Christian leaders are called to help others think theologically about the social, economic, scientific, and religious issues of the day through the lens of the Gospel in order to do justice to both the Gospel message and the complexity of human life. Gifted by the Holy Spirit with human creativity, intellect, and wisdom, Christians are called to employ scientific findings and other human endeavors to better understand the world. Also implicit in this practice is a theology of creation that affirms the beauty of this complex creation as very good and a gift from God. Complexity can be treasured, not feared.

The longing for security and safety may lead to simplistic answers and poor theology.

The first component—the capacity to carefully examine complex social, economic, scientific, and religious issues without simplification—calls for the ministerial leader to resist the common cultural tendency to look for quick fixes or easy answers. She will draw upon a holistic approach to every issue, bringing all of her knowledge, as well as seeking the knowledge of others, to reflect upon an issue. She will actively collaborate with others, knowing that by working together, more possibilities and problems will be discerned. Proceeding in an organized, methodical way, there will also be room for synergistic creativity and unexpected, spontaneous insights.

The second component—seeing relationships from a systems perspective—embraces the complexity of life. Relational systems theories (such as developed by Murray Bowen) build upon complexity. They eschew simple linear or even multiple causations as an explanation for relational dynamics. Rather, in systems theory, the interaction of several interdependent and interrelated components is analyzed holistically.[1]

Using relational systems theory, Friedman lists five key elements useful in thinking about family and congregational issues: the identified patient, balance, self-differentiation, the extended family field, and the emotional triangle. Together these elements remind the leader that the presenting problem is usually not the real issue, that many of our behaviors and beliefs are shaped by our family of origins and transmitted across generations, and that systems seek stability and are resistant to change.[2] Using a systems perspective, ministers learn to understand the complex interactions of congregational systems and gain skills to seek out and deal with the real, but often hidden issues, behind conflict and change.

The third component—remaining spiritually centered in the face of ambiguity—is already advanced by acknowledging that ambiguity is a part of life that cannot be avoided. Thereby the leader does not then spend inordinate amounts of time trying to

1. Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc, 1993) reviews all Bowen's earlier works, summarizing his main theories.

2. Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 19.

control things that cannot be controlled.

Key faith resources will help a pastoral leader remain spiritually centered. Primary resources include keeping Christ at the center and acknowledging that God is God and we are not. Another helpful resource is the theology of the cross, understanding that God works in hidden ways, including through weakness and suffering. Others may find the promise of Christ to never abandon us—or a proleptic eschatology of living in the "already/not yet" time between the cross and the completion of God's kingdom—to be helpful.

Spiritual practices such as reading the Bible, communal worship, and prayer are crucially important. The theological curriculum at Wartburg Seminary allows students to explore a variety of spiritual practices, including using the Myers-Briggs personality types to develop those practices most meaningful to them.[3] Keeping in mind the incarnational aspects of this pastoral practice, students discover that a spiritually centered person is formed by paying attention to all aspects of their lives as described in the ELCA wellness wheel.

The Shape of Complex Analysis

So what might this pastoral practice look like at churchwide levels? ELCA social statements provide one instance. Consider the social statement on Health and Health Care adopted in 2003. The statement argues there is a health care crisis due to fragmented systems of care, high costs, and problems of accessibility to health care in the United States. Biblical and theological explorations of health and healing provide insights and goals, but do not prescribe solutions. The social statement encompasses economic, medical, and political information to think about how to discern solutions. The social statement demonstrates how piecemeal solutions are inadequate and calls for a comprehensive and systemic approach to dealing with health care issues.[4]

What might complex analysis look like in the local parish? Consider a pastor and congregation council looking at giving trends over the past few years in their congregation. Giving has remained stable or has begun to decline, even while costs are going up. It is clear that this trajectory is not sustainable. Some in the council believe an effort should be made to gain more members (under the assumption they will give). Others argue that the practice of tithing needs to be preached more. Someone complains that the young people are not doing their fair share. One suggests they publish what everyone gives in hopes of "encouraging" (i.e., shaming) people into giving more. Another suggests they keep telling people how difficult the financial situation is; surely people will respond to an appeal.[5]

Initial reflection suggests that some of these solutions may work over the short period, but they are all fraught with dangers. Evangelism simply to meet the budget does harm to the concepts of both evangelism and stewardship. No congregation will truly say, "What we want most is your money!" But we may assume that the good news should best be shared with those who can also help support the church financially. This approach tends to make those evangelized into objects rather than people in need of hope and healing. Tithing can become legalistic; encouraging people to tithe usually does not work because

3. Sandra Krebs Hirsch, *Soultypes: Matching Your Personality and Spiritual Path* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2006).

4. http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Social-Statements/Health-and-Healthcare.aspx

5. While not discussed here, relational systems theories could help discern the underlying motivation for some of these suggestions.

it does not address the forces that prevent people from giving more. Shaming is never a Gospel approach. Reminding people that the congregation is having difficulty paying its bills may only remind them of their own difficulties in paying bills. All of these solutions are problematic and address only surface rather than root causes.

Reclaiming Stewardship as Complex Analysis

The financial state of many mainline churches suggests that stewardship has been neglected for too long or relegated primarily to raising money for the church. The concept of stewardship as a key to Christian identity has often been minimized. While there are some solid books on the theology of stewardship,[6] one area just beginning to receive renewed interest involves the cultural context of money and stewardship in the United States. Why do people not give more money to the church? What prevents people from being generous with their money? Why do generous people give?

There are several core cultural issues around money and financial stewardship. The idolatry and power of money in our society is one issue. Money is seen as a private, individual matter. While people may talk freely about religion, politics, or sex, asking someone how much money they make is a taboo subject. The strong sense of individualism is another cultural issue. This can include a sense of entitlement, exceptionalism, and personal power: "It is all about me!" This individualism can result in either thinking about giving money in utilitarian terms ("What's in it for me?") or expressive terms ("How will this action bring me self-fulfillment or show people who I really am?").

Many of us also live in a culture of fear. Many people in the United States are among the wealthiest people who have ever lived. Yet we live with a strong sense of scarcity. Trust in God's abundance is both a cultural and theological problem. Another issue is the primacy of moralistic, therapeutic deism in the United States. This set of beliefs acknowledges that God exists and wants us to be nice to each other. The central goal in life is to be happy and feel good about one's self. God is around to solve problems but otherwise is pretty uninvolved. Good people go to heaven when they die.[7] Such a religion does little to promote concepts of financial stewardship and generous giving.

The greatest cultural issue, however, is the issue of consumerism. Consumerism is the belief that the possession and consumption of things can provide happiness, status, prestige, identity, and meaning to our lives. Fueled by advertising and marketing, it suggests shopping therapy will provide comfort to the anxious, depressed, or lonely. Moreover, consumerism instills the notion: "I own, therefore I am." One roadblock to people's generous giving is the lack of disposable income due to the influence of consumerism.

While many of us do not truly believe the promises of consumerism, our lifestyles may suggest otherwise. Why do people continue to act out a belief in consumerism, often in unhelpful or even harmful ways, even when they know that consumerism's promises are empty? Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists are beginning to more fully explore this question. One intriguing theory has been offered by Geoffrey Miller, an evolutionary psychologist. He suggests we use possessions and stuff to demonstrate

6. For example, Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (New York: Friendship Press, 1982), and Mark Alan Powell, *Giving to God: The Bible's Good News about Living a Generous Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

7. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 162–170.

personality traits in ways that can be quickly and easily noticed by others. Possessions give clues to our identity and being.[8] Church leaders will need to think theologically about these insights and develop Gospel proclamation that addresses issues of identity, being, value, and worth apart from possessions and money.

Conclusion

The practice of complex analysis has deep roots in Wartburg Seminary's history. The seminary faculty engaged the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in decades of arguments about ordination, the anti-Christ, and predestination among others issues. Wartburg Seminary followed the stance of its founder, William Loehe, in claiming the idea of "open questions." This means that wherever there is not a clear understanding from Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions, it is possible for Christians to have a variety of theological understandings.[9] The concept of "open questions" acknowledges the complexity of the world and biblical interpretation. It can even be seen as a prototype for complex analysis. The practice of complex analysis has deep roots, based upon the inherent paradoxes and ambiguities of Lutheran theology and the multi-faceted nature of the created world.

For Discussion:

1. What theological themes help you analyze trends/issues current in our society?
2. What resources keep you spiritually centered in the midst of ambiguity?
3. What other cultural trends do you see that might affect people's financial stewardship?

Key words: complex analysis, ambiguity, stewardship, consumerism, open questions

8. Geoffrey Miller, *Spent: Sex, Evolution and Consumer Behavior* (New York: Viking, 2009).

9. Craig L. Nessan, "William Loehe on the Christian Life, " *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 10 (2010). <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues/Journal-of-Lutheran-Ethics/Issues/February-2010/What-Does-Wilhelm-Loehe-Have-to-Say-to-Us-about-the-Christian-Life.aspx>. The "open questions" debate was raised around whether different theological viewpoints were or should be church dividing.

Practice of Curiosity

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> Is fundamentally curious, employing creativity in the use of language. Is open to grow beyond current perspectives and eager to pursue learning with intellectual depth.

Does curiosity deserve a place on the list of essential pastoral practices? You might not think so if you get your information about curiosity from standard reference works such as dictionaries and encyclopedias. I looked up "curious" and "curiosity" in the 1971 unabridged edition of the Random House Dictionary of the English Language and found myself reading a series of descriptions of rather unpleasant, even obnoxious people. The dictionary definition was an unusually long one. It included four meanings of curiosity, but only the first meaning was laudatory, and only partially so at that: (1) "Desirous of learning or knowing; inquisitive." It goes on to describe "inquisitive" as "taking an undue (and petty) interest in others' affairs." From there on, it is downhill all the way. "Prying, meddlesome" is the second meaning. The third meaning is "highly unusual, odd, strange." The fourth meaning is "indelicate, indecent, or obscene [regarding books]." The dictionary wraps up its treatment of "curious" with this line: "'curious' implies a desire to know what is not properly one's concern."

There are significant chapters in church history that do not speak well of human curiosity. Visit any of the countless web sites that are maintained by groups of militant atheists. If you are a Christian believer, you will find yourself taunted by Augustine's condemnation of curiosity as sin, and by the church's condemnation of Galileo for having been curious about the nature of the physical universe. The favorite quote from Augustine is this: "There is another form of temptation, even more fraught with danger. This is the disease of curiosity." When Augustine left home at age 17 to study in Carthage, he engaged in what he later came to regret as a misspent youth of drunkenness and sexual promiscuity. He attributed this to the curiosity that was awakened within him through his studies. Thus he consigned curiosity to a catalog of vices.

Curiosity in the Educational Process

Do you still believe that curiosity deserves a place in the mission statement of a theological seminary? I am convinced of it! And my conviction grows stronger with every day!

Perhaps it is a quirk of human nature, but all too often we do not value things until we are in danger of losing them. Much of the research into the nature of human curiosity as been conducted in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and it has been done in by educators in China and the United States. Several Chinese educators have publicly lamented an educational system that crushes the curiosity of its best students. In the days of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, it was dangerous to ask questions. Countless Chinese people lost their lives for the crime of being curious. But that was several decades ago. Now, these educators argue, China is changing with blinding speed in every aspect of its life as a nation. That kind of rapid change requires leaders in industry, education, and government who are curious and creative.

Meanwhile, China has adopted the American system of determining every student's future through a series of standardized multiple choice tests. This, they argue, puts pressure on students to acquire discrete information that is useful for passing standardized tests, while undermining the kind of curiosity and creative integration that is urgently needed in a time of rapid change.

In American education, the phrase "teaching to the test" has become common. Students who secure admission to the top schools are the ones who have acquired the skills of passing standardized tests, at the expense of nurturing curiosity, creativity, and integration. In the current issue of the educational journal *Encounter*, Necole Fabris begins her article, "Curiosity in Contemporary American Education" with this sentence: "People who have changed our world for the better have shared one common trait: curiosity." She emphasizes "the importance of encouraging students to be lifelong self-reliant learners who 'teach themselves' and who will never tire of their quest to learn." She states that, "if educational institutions truly wish to prepare students for the twenty-first century workplace, colleges must create teacher preparation programs that inherently nurture curiosity." If this is important for those who teach in our twenty-first century schools, it is at least as important for those serve in our twenty-first century churches.

So, what exactly is curiosity? What are the threats that could make it a candidate for the endangered species list? Why is it so important in the life of the church? How can we most effectively nurture curiosity in our students?

Curiosity: Four Perspectives

I do not think it would be particularly useful to attempt a formal definition of curiosity. Rather, curiosity can be compared to a many-faceted gemstone that can be validly viewed from as many different perspectives as it has facets. There are four perspectives from which I wish to view curiosity:

The perspective of brain science: Curiosity is innate to the human species, and it is evident from the day we are born. Do you want to learn about curiosity? Put your books back on the shelf and go for a long walk with a three-year-old. Point out to each other interesting things as you pass by them. Review together the things that are interesting enough that his parents would enjoy hearing about them when you get back home. Try to get a little lost so that finding your way back home can become part of an adventure. Let him set the pace. If he sees a stone that engages his curiosity and warrants further investigation stop to investigate and talk about it with him. I did that earlier this summer, and it was wonderful for both of us.

I saw a sign that said that there was a talking house in the neighborhood, boasting that talking houses sell more quickly than houses that are initially presented to potential buyers through other means. Although he could not yet read, he could recognize the logo on the talking house signs, so together we found it, and listened to a description of the house. When we got back to his paternal grandparents' house, we told our stories. Nobody had taught this little tyke to be curious. Curiosity came as basic equipment at no extra cost. It was there the day that he was born.

Brain science has given us a new view of infancy and early childhood. It is an exciting issue among neuroscientists and students of early childhood development. More than 100 years ago the great psychologist, William James, proclaimed the brain of the infant to be "a blooming, buzzing confusion." That description stuck—but it turned out to be completely wrong! The technology of neuroscience reveals that neonates are born with an instinctive knowledge that some things in their environment are more important to be curious about than others. By a few weeks old, they can maintain their attention on a

moving ceiling fan for a remarkable length of time. It is not a matter of teaching them to be curious; it is a matter of protecting them from the dangers that their boundless curiosity creates for them. An infant of eight months has become mobile. She cannot walk yet but she crawls and fast. She finds a paper clip buried in the shag carpet while spying a fascinating object in the nearest wall—an electric outlet. Curiosity surges within her. The paper clip just might fit in the electric outlet! Let's see what happens! What happens is that she gets electrocuted, badly burned, perhaps even fatally so.

Although the prophet Isaiah had no experience with paper clips and electric wall outlets, he was painfully aware of the phenomenon that I have just described. He watched with fondness and fascination as infants and toddlers played in the back yard. If there was a hole in the ground, it needed to be investigated. Sometimes it was the den of poisonous snakes. Sometimes there was great pain and sorrow. Isaiah yearned for the world to be different. But he did not yearn for toddlers to be less curious; he yearned for a world in which little ones could give free reign to the joy of being curious explorers without risking the grief that was brought when a tiny hand reached in to explore a hole in the yard. We come into this world as interested observers, curious explorers, fascinated participants. With the brain development of the fourth year of life, curiosity takes the form of relentless questioning. The sentences that they utter are likely to begin with the questions "why" and "how come?"

He was almost four years old when his parents celebrated their sixth wedding anniversary. He had seen their album of wedding pictures many times and could name everyone in every photo. But this time it was different. "Why wasn't I there?" he demanded to know. He was genuinely upset about it. They got to the pictures of the exchange of rings: "Why did you do that?" he asked. "As a sign that we promise to love each other for the rest of our lives." "Why don't I have a ring," he persisted, "I'm part of the family. Don't you love me?"

So what happens to that boundless curiosity? Albert Einstein said, "It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education." But why is that? A lecturer was talking about learning in the early school years. A little girl who had been adopted from another country as an infant was there. The speaker knew her well, and he knew that she had begun Chinese language lessons the day before. He picked her up and asked her, "How was the first Chinese class?" "Boring" was her answer. Not to be deterred, he persisted: "And what did you like best." "The snacks," she replied. People giggled. He put her down and went on to his next topic. I felt a genuine sadness. What happens between the eager excitement of the four-year-old and the blank-faced "borrrrinng" of the seven-year-old?

The perspective of motivation: There are many motives for learning: rewards and punishments, for example; or, scrutiny and evaluation. The threat of shame and embarrassment, or the vision of a lucrative career somewhere off in the future can motivate learning. But curiosity, interest, fascination, wonder, and awe are the motives that produce lifelong learning. These are the motives that promote integration of what is learned in one class with what is learned in another. These are the motives that promote making creative connections between what is being learned in school and what is being experienced outside of the school setting. These are the motives that produce persistence in the face of obstacles and failure. These are the motives that have no extrinsic reward—the engagement of curiosity is its own reward. Nurturing that kind of motive is a real challenge in a system of education based on the syndrome of demand, scrutiny, and evaluation.

There is an endless stream of evaluations and evaluators in the process of moving

through seminary toward professional ministry in the church. This is, of course, necessary. We have a responsibility to the church to send out leaders who will be faithful and effective stewards of the ministry entrusted to them. Nonetheless, when the evaluators come to the campus, the anxiety is so thick you could cut it with a knife. During those days, education takes on a different meaning. Education is transformed from curious and active engagement for its own sake, to "figuring out what they want me to say." That is not a pleasant analysis, but it is honest. Part of the challenge of seminary teaching is to meet that challenge so that the entire educational process is not controlled by extrinsic motives.

The perspective of emotion: As noted earlier, curiosity is one of a family of human responses that includes interest, fascination, wonder, and awe. Einstein was keenly aware of the kinship of these emotions. He defined awe as "a holy curiosity" and urged everyone who would listen to him not to lose that "holy curiosity." Is there a common factor in these five different emotions: curiosity, interest, wonder, fascination, and awe? With all their differences, they are each ways of attending. Attending to the beauty and majesty of the Grand Canyon is experienced as wonder and awe. Good worship is also experienced with awe and wonder. Awe and wonder are for the big things in life—the really important things. Attending to the details in assembling a puzzle is curiosity. Attending to the infinite complexity of another human being is experienced as wonder, and perhaps fascination. Todd Kashdan, a leading researcher in curiosity says, "The moment you think you've got someone or something figured out, you stop paying attention." Boredom, burnout, and disengagement are the inevitable consequences.

The perspective of relationships: Few things are as painful as being ignored—as being deemed unworthy of the attention, the curiosity, of others. One of the amazing things about Jesus was that it was precisely to such people, the seemingly "unworthy," that he gave his undivided attention. Artist Eva Leo has provided that reminder to us whenever we go through the seminary doors. There we see depicted the sick, the hungry, the naked, the imprisoned, and the strangers.

One of the things that I always stress in my loss and grief class is that we are called to be attentive to the invisible ones—the disenfranchised, those in grief—those whose very loss has made them pariahs in the community. So often people neglect to pay attention; even ministerial leaders do that: the one who reads a newspaper while someone else is giving a presentation; the student who sits in the back row studying for a different class; at social events, when one tries to strike up conversations with people but they make it clear that they want to spend their time with old friends.

In a mental health center, few things are as painful to a client as seeing the therapist look at his/her wristwatch. "Am I boring you?" they want to ask. On the other hand, it is the genuine interest of another person that is essential to healing. That's why self-help books and inspirational television shows will never replace the congregation as God's means of transformation and new life. Our word "curiosity" comes to us from the Latin word for "cure" or "care." It is in the gift of curiosity that we are blessed to enter each other's lives as finite vessels of God's infinite care.

For Discussion:

1. How has your sense of curiosity changed over the years?
2. How did the educational process affect your sense of curiosity?
3. What are the things that make you curious today?

Key words: Curiosity, educational process, brain science, motivation, relationships

Practice of Pastoral Concern

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> Loves God's people with the compassion of Christ, demonstrating a generous spirit in relating to others, teaching and modeling stewardship. Maintains a clear sense of pastoral identity and desire for excellence in pastoral ministry.

The church's practice of pastoral concern originates in God's pastoral care for us: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). God enters deeply into human experience and has been revealed among us as the God who cares, "the fellow-sufferer who understands" (A.N. Whitehead). While God's primordial nature lends God constancy throughout time, God's consequent nature reveals God as the one affected by the pathos of all things.

God's pastoral care for humanity and all of creation was revealed most unmistakably in the life and passion of Jesus Christ. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36). As the good shepherd Jesus welcomed the little ones, shared good news with the poor, fed the hungry, healed the sick, cast out demons, broke bread with outcasts, wept with the grieving, and washed weary feet. Sharing pastoral concern, Jesus defied the conventions of his religious world in order to do good to the one in need: "Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out?" (Matt 12:11). In the ultimate act of pastoral concern, Jesus died on the cross as the Lamb of God to reveal the immensity of divine love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). For the body of Christ the meaning of pastoral concern is the way of the cross. *Theologia crucis* is *via crucis.* As Jesus Christ assumed the mantle of service for others, ultimately laying down his life for the sake of his friends (John 15:13), the church of God is always "church for others" (Bonhoeffer). In order to serve all people, the body of Christ pays particular—even privileged—attention to "the least of these who are members of [Christ's] family" (Matt 25:40).

> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? (James 2:15–16)

The way of the cross means sharing bread with the hungry, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile, and showing compassion to every child of God.

Pastoral Concern in the Life of the Church

Grounded in God's pastoral concern for us in Jesus Christ, the church has been called and formed as the body of Christ to share pastoral concern with others, starting with

those most in need. The practice of pastoral concern entails loving "God's people with the compassion of Christ." Note how the practice of pastoral concern begins with God's own generous spirit poured out for us in Christ Jesus: "We love because [God] first loved us" (1 John 4:19). In thanksgiving for God's gracious love, we respond generously to others, especially to those who suffer and even to those who do not deserve it.

Thereby we teach and model the true meaning of stewardship. God's stewardship of creation, climaxing in the life of Jesus poured out on the cross, issues forth in the Great Thanksgiving and our participation in the Eucharist. Eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, we become Christ's own body in this world. We become "servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Cor 4:1). We become "little Christs" for others (Luther). Stewardship begins with God ministering to the ministers with the gospel in word, sacraments, and the Christian community. Recognizing themselves as fragile vessels (cf. 2 Cor 4:7–11), ministers attend to their own physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health in order to be sustained in their weariness and have their joy restored. We are and remain creatures—not gods—ourselves in need of healing and wholeness. Stewardship, as a response to God's mercy and generosity, becomes a way of life also in relation to possessions and wealth, which teaches and models God's own generosity.

Pastoral concern "does not insist on its own way" (1 Cor 13:5). The goal of pastoral concern is the well-being of others, not personal advantage or social control. In a society where the pursuit of one's own self-interest is commonplace, pastoral concern loves others not to relegate them to dependency but in order that they themselves become freed to live as people who care. A clear sense of pastoral identity involves neither indifference nor manipulation. While remaining a "wounded healer" (Nouwen), the minister allows the balm of Christ to relieve anxiety and soothe the soul, in order to pay attention to the voice and worth of another. This is what it means to be "centered" in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Excellence in pastoral ministry comes to expression as the love of Christ flows through the minister, no matter how challenging the circumstances, to work "the miracle of the empty hands" (Bernanos). "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Practicing Pastoral Concern in the Congregation

Pastor Stephanie Lorenz reflects on a transforming experience, where a member ministered to her and others through pastoral concern. "Virgil was parishioner, friend, and mentor, someone who believed in me and through his honesty helped to form me as a pastor. A year and a half into my pastorate the congregation was seriously divided with intense conflict. Virgil was deeply upset about this and wanted to do something. Virg was a beloved 'patriarch' in the congregation although not a lifelong member. When he spoke everyone turned to listen.

"Virg was also sick. His cancer was progressing and he was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. He was in and out of the hospital, but he did not always tell me; perhaps not to cause me worry. I was deeply concerned and feared he was dying. It broke my heart to think I would preside at the funeral of this beloved saint.

"One day the phone rang. 'Pastor Stephanie, I informed the council that I was submitting my name to run for congregation council president.' I protested; yet Virg insisted, 'Pastor Stephanie, I've been coaching my whole life.' Virgil's presidential goal was to unite pastor and people as a viable team for the sake of the gospel.

"I loved the idea of having Virgil as council president. I trusted him, knowing he would be brutally honest about what

was needed in the congregation. I also was deeply concerned the stress would be too much and Virgil would die. I tried to talk him out of it on four different occasions, but his mind was set.

"One could say that Virgil laid down his life for his friends. This beloved saint died on a Saturday night, five days after his first council meeting as president. The call from the funeral home came an hour before Sunday worship. My grief was immense. He embodied Christ's love and radiated Christ's unconditional compassion.

"While I knew Virgil for only a year and a half, God's people of Redeemer knew him for ten years. They would be shocked and heartbroken. Moreover, most congregation members would learn of Virgil's death during the announcements at worship. I was deeply concerned about them. I knew my emotions would be genuine and I also needed to exercise emotional restraint so I could maintain a clear sense of pastoral identity to lead God's people through their grief and anguish. I would need to emulate God's mercy and grace in Jesus Christ.

"I stood in front of the congregation and said, 'Just as I was leaving for church this morning, I received a call from the funeral home. Virgil died last night.' The congregation let out a gasp; I felt their immense sadness. I went on to say, 'That's how I feel. I don't know much more than that. He was sitting in a chair last night and Barb went to say goodnight and he had just gone to sleep.'

"What next? How would I lead? Jesus promises to send the Spirit to guide us especially in those moments when we are not certain how to envision what to do next. Jesus kept that promise as the Spirit led me to say, 'Does anybody have a Virgil story?'

"Gradually the Spirit interceded, enabling God's people to muster the courage to share Virgil stories. Collectively, the people of God expressed their deep love and concern for each other as they shared memories of their beloved and precious saint, Virgil. Communally, God's people lived into the cross and the empty tomb, radiating Christ's compassion, mercy, love, and grace."

Practicing Pastoral Concern in the World

The practice of pastoral concern is at the heart of an experience shared by Pastor Tim Koester, "Soon after I was called to serve in my rural parish, I began visiting a young man who had connections to the congregation who was in the local county jail. We would talk and pray. I came to his sentencing hearings to support him and his family. It was a difficult situation because he was a sex offender and shame runs deep in a small town. I was a bit surprised when I received word from his family that he desired to share in the Eucharist.

"I called the County Sheriff and asked how they handled these kinds of requests. 'I don't know,' was the reply. 'In my twenty years here we've never had a request for that before.' That comment still echoes in my head today! After some conversation, we solved the logistical problems. But right before the conversation ended, the sheriff added, 'If other inmates want to participate, would they be welcome too?' 'Umm... sure,' I said. 'Good!' and the conversation ended.

"The jail was small in the courthouse which was built at the turn of the twentieth century. Picture the Andy Griffith Show, except the jail was located in the basement of the building. When I arrived, the sheriff informed me that *all* the inmates wanted to receive communion; however, the total count was only four—three men and one woman. I went into the room holding the men first. There was a small area outside of the cell where I stood on one side of the bars while they stood on the other side. We had some conversation. It did not take long for strangers to share their stories. Most told of abuse and a long history of brokenness. One did not know whether he had been baptized

but talked about going to church when he was little and the faith he learned. It became clear that these were God's people who needed to be loved with the compassion of Christ. The iron prison where they sat was the easiest bondage from which to become freed. The deeper captivity that bound them was the reality of guilt and shame, the very things the church confesses each week.

"We began our worship together with that same confession of sins. When it came time for the Lord's Prayer, some gave voice to long forgotten words. Then we shared the meal. I stood on the side of freedom, they on the side of imprisonment. Iron bars separated our lives; an impenetrable wall divided our shared humanity—and yet the body and blood of Christ was present. We shared bread and wine (grape juice actually) through the space between those bars and, for an instant, their power to imprison disintegrated. The same kind of experience occurred when I shared the meal with the female inmate, except a solid door separated us instead of iron bars. Our only point of human contact was a six-inch square hole. Yet it was big enough for God to get through.

"I have not forgotten that day, nor will I likely ever forget it. The office to which I am called gives me hundreds of opportunities to love God's people with the compassion of Christ and for that I am grateful beyond words. It can sometimes be a heavy burden. But when I become weighed down, I recall that time. I remember that the practice of pastoral concern does not depend upon my power but rather upon the Spirit's power to transform the lives of both receiver and giver. As I am privileged to share in people's lives during their most sacred moments, I remember it is God's grace that joins us together, breaks down our dividing walls, and provides the creative power to heal our wounds. Pastoral care provides the opportunity to experience the love of God working not only in the lives of others, but also in myself. I didn't 'bring God to the jail' for God was already there. When my eyes were opened to that reality, I, too, felt loved with the compassion of Christ who was really present among us."

Conclusion

William Weiblen, former president of Wartburg Seminary, was well known for offering impromptu campus tours for those who showed up unexpectedly as guests. Many a time he spent an hour or more welcoming visitors, telling stories and showing them around. On numerous occasions, it was only after the fact that the guests came to realize that it had been the "seminary president" who had humbly dedicated so much time to their care.

Long time former seminary professor, William Streng, always told his students, "Let the people know that you trust the Lord, and then love your people; they will trust you." Still today one prominent motto at Wartburg Seminary is "Love and know your people!" Pastoral concern is the heartbeat of all ministry, originating in the heartbeat of God.

For Discussion:

1. How have you experienced pastoral concern from others in the church?
2. What is the relationship between pastoral concern and stewardship?
3. Tell a story about a time you witnessed the practice of pastoral concern in daily life.

Key words: pastoral concern, love, stewardship, Gospel, compassion

Practice of Personal Faith and Integrity

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> Lives as a person of faith, grounded in a life of prayer and study. Is self-aware in seeing the larger picture, proclaiming hope, leading courageously, and setting healthy boundaries.

One Sunday at the Presbyterian Church I attend, Henry, a retired pastor, shared about his mentor, Walter Soboleff, who died at the age of 102. Walter was one of the first Native Alaskans to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church. Henry remembers Walter as a person of faith and prayer. As he described Walter, Henry said, "You can't be a pastor if you don't pray!" Walter's life was grounded in prayer. While Henry spoke, I heard about someone who exemplified the practice of personal faith and integrity.

Later I was curious about Walter and did an Internet search. A Presbyterian News Service article based on an interview with Walter when he turned 100 ends with, "For 100 years that faith has propelled Walter Soboleff. 'It's Jesus that makes these things happen,' he says. 'And whatever Jesus has made me do makes me feel so good.'"[1] Jesus was the basis of Walter's faith. This God-given faith was the impetus for Walter's actions.

An article in the Juneau Empire newspaper mentioned Walter's love of learning. "Walter loved his four high school years as exciting learning, but was enthralled by college. 'Now that was exciting,' Walter said in a past interview. 'You have to study to produce; you just can't talk off the cuff all the time. A lot of people do that and it's like hot air.'"[2] Studying was important to Walter. He attended the University of Dubuque and the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in Iowa, earning a baccalaureate and graduate degree to prepare him for the ministry to which God had called him.

News articles and obituaries told of Walter's work in the church and his concern for Native Alaskan rights. Walter's first church after seminary was a mission church to the Tlingits, his own people. Under Walter's leadership it became an integrated church, bringing Native Alaskans and others together in worship. This was at a time when most churches in Alaska were racially segregated. His vision for the church included all peoples. Later, he became a "'traveling evangelist' on two small ships."[3] He visited villages that were not accessible by land, providing pastoral ministry in remote areas.

1. Jerry Van Marter, "Alaska Presbyterian icon Walter Soboleff dead at 102," May 27, 2011, http://www.pcusa.org/news/2011/5/27/alaska-presbyterian-icon-walter-soboleff-dead-102/, (accessed June 1, 2011).

2. Klas Stolpe, "Noted Tlingit elder Walter Soboleff dies | Juneau Empire - Alaska's Capital City Online Newspaper", May 25, 2011, http://juneauempire.com/state/2011-05-22/noted-tlingit-elder-walter-soboleff-dies, (accessed June 1, 2011).

3. Marter, "Alaska Presbyterian icon Walter Soboleff dead at 102."

"After overcoming segregation in his congregation, Walter trained his sights on the bigger problem, helping to found the Alaska Native Brotherhood, which eventually prodded the Alaska legislature to pass statewide anti-discrimination laws."[4] Walter was not just concerned about matters in the church but was also concerned about the wider community. He saw the larger picture of discrimination and racism and the effect it had on the Native Alaskan communities. "Walter questioned why races did not like each other and had experienced it in Alaska growing up and saw it through the world. 'People just can't grow up,' he once said. 'The world needs a good philosophy of life. My philosophy of life is tolerance, it doesn't hurt you.'"[5] Walter's voice of tolerance brought hope.

Walter lived as a person of faith. By looking at him we can see what the practice of personal faith and integrity looks like. He prayed and he studied but he was not inwardly focused. His life of prayer propelled him outward to selflessly see the larger picture, proclaim hope, and lead courageously. He saw the injustices that discrimination caused and brought the hope of justice and tolerance through his courageous actions.

Personal Faith and Integrity

Walter's example helps us see what the practice of personal faith and integrity is about. A closer look at the different aspects of our definition of this practice can help us fill out the picture.

Personal is sometimes understood as referring to something inside of us. We think of personal as being private. We keep what is private hidden. We do not necessarily talk about it. In our individualistic American mindset, we tend to think we have a right to be and do what we want. But personal faith is not just individual, it is communal as well. Those around us affect us and we affect those around us. Even though it is personal, others are involved.

Faith is a gift of God. It is not something we can create or increase. There is nothing we can do to earn it or lose it. Personal faith involves my relationship with God. It is God's gift of relationship to me. A person of faith does relate individually to God, but faith is not separate from the community of Christians. One way God allows us to grow in faith is through the body of Christ. A person of faith is one who understands and lives the faith which God has given both individually and communally.

Integrity is understood more clearly when we see it as a cognate of the word "integrate." When we integrate we take two things and put them together. They become a whole. Integrity involves bringing together our internal and external life. Our so-called spiritual self or personal faith becomes integrated with our outward life and our service in the church's mission.

Adib is an example of *integrity*. During that same Sunday when Henry spoke of Walter, John shared a short testimony of his personal encounter with Christ. John spoke very movingly about how he sees Christ in his Muslim friend, Adib. Adib is a doctor in town and leads the local mosque. His theology differs from John's, and mine, especially concerning the person of Christ. And yet Adib is gracious, prayerful, and deeply spiritual; a person of faith and integrity. He listens and tries to understand before speaking. Adib reaches out to Christians to try to break down the dividing walls of hostility that separate Christians from Muslims. He once met a young man who had recently returned from Iraq and hated Muslims. Adib reached out to this young man and brought healing. The same words of peace and tolerance that Walter spoke are echoed in Adib's words and

4. Ibid.

5. Stolpe, "Noted Tlingit elder Walter Soboleff dies | Juneau Empire - Alaska's Capital City Online Newspaper."

actions. Adib's deep faith is integrated with his pastoral ministry to those in his mosque and to non-Muslim friends.

Prayer and Study

The Pastoral Practice then describes the person of faith as *grounded in a life of prayer*. Prayer can be individual or corporate. We can pray by ourselves or we can pray with other people. The way we pray differs and difference is fine. Prayer and, more broadly speaking, spiritual practices are as different as we are different. One of the things taught in Wartburg Seminary's Spiritual Practices class is that how one practices one's personal faith is dependent, in part, on who one is. One way the class members explore their differences is by using the book *SoulTypes,*[6] which highlights Myers-Briggs personality types. What works in helping me to grow in my faith will differ from those things that help others of different personality types. In the small group for the class, it is always interesting to see the "ah ha" moment when students realize why some things really help them to grow while other spiritual practices do not. Prayer is important for all, but ways of praying differ from person to person.

In addition to being grounded in prayer, the person of faith and integrity is also *grounded in a life of study*. God can speak to us through prayer, people, and experiences. And God speaks to us through the Bible and other resources which require study. Walter's enthusiasm for study and learning is echoed here. "You have to study to produce," he said. Study is both individual and corporate. Bible studies, text study groups, and book clubs are all ways in which learning and study can take place with others. Study corrects our thinking and helps us change.

Self-aware

The person who is following the practice of personal faith and integrity is *self-aware* in four areas. To be self-aware is to be genuine. It is to understand one's self and to see how one's thoughts, feelings, and actions are involved in what one does. One knows the motivations for one's actions.

First, the person is self-aware *in seeing the larger picture*. The person of faith understands the larger context and sees how his or her life and actions fit into it. Walter saw the larger picture. He saw that the church needed to be racially integrated. He saw that discrimination needed to end.

The second area of self-awareness is *proclaiming hope*. The person of faith sees the importance of bringing hope to others as one who comes along side rather than objectifying those to whom one brings hope.

The third area is *leading courageously*. We can see *proclaiming hope* and *leading courageously* in the life of Ilah Weiblen. Ilah was a woman whose faith could be seen in her passions. Her obituary says, "She worked tirelessly to secure Namibia's independence from South Africa. For her years of dedicated service to this struggle and to the students and programs of Wartburg Seminary, she was honored with the Loehe Award in 1989."[7] Ilah helped organize protests and letter-writing campaigns in her passion for Namibia's fight for freedom. After Namibia won its independence, she still spent most days organizing the books, pamphlets, letters, and newsletters that had accumulated over the years. She wanted the Namibian struggle to be well documented for future research and historical preservation so that others would hear their own stories in the Namibian story. Her work with the

6. Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane Kise, *SoulTypes: Matching Your Personality and Spiritual Path* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2006).

7. "Ilah J. Weiblen," *TH Online*, May 9, 2011, http://www.thonline.com/obituaries/article_c4a02d27-a147-5611-9576-1c003dc672ac.html, (accessed June 14, 2011).

Namibian struggle stemmed in part from her love of and care for the international students who came to Wartburg Seminary. That love and care came from her deep spirituality. At her funeral service, I heard her characterized as a woman of strong faith and deep caring. Her personal faith could be seen in the way in which she proclaimed hope and lead courageously for the Namibian people. Ilah integrated her personal faith with her actions on behalf of others.

Setting healthy boundaries is the fourth area. When I think about healthy boundaries, I think of Adam. Although always a little outside, or at least on the edges, of the box, Adam has a clear sense of boundaries. When I talked with him about this Pastoral Practice, he zeroed in on the part about setting healthy boundaries. He had seen too many of his colleagues sacrifice their families for the sake of ministry. He does not think this is right and tries to set healthy boundaries in his life. To me, Adam is a person who has a zeal for God and understands that his family is a gift of God. He sees that loving his family is a way in which he shows his love for God. This does not mean that he ignores the significance of his pastoral ministry or the urgencies that it sometimes presents. Instead, he finds the balance between his pastoral ministry and his family.

At first, it might seem that Adam has compartmentalized his life, separating his family and his pastoral ministry by his clear boundary. However, we can also see this in another way. God is in the whole of one's life. If I think of God being a part of all of my life then God is in my time with my family as well as in my time in other ministries. Things that one does with one's family can be God's ministry. Rather than pitting ministry against family, a balance between different areas of ministry is appropriate. We balance our time and create healthy boundaries. Our work ministry does not take over our family ministry. Our family ministry does not take over our work ministry. In doing so, our lives find wholeness before God who is present in every aspect of our lives. Thus, in establishing a healthy boundary between his family and other aspects of his life, Adam is not compartmentalizing, but allowing God to work in each area of his life so that all of his relationships are healthy.

These different parts create the whole of the practice of personal faith and integrity. This practice is important for all Christians and not just those in public leadership in the church. Although this Pastoral Practice seems to be obviously important in any Christian's life, we often fall short. Sometimes we either are acting without the grounding of prayer and study or we are praying and studying without acting in the world. Sometimes because we are not self-reflective, our actions are self-serving or miss the mark. Personal Faith and Integrity takes practice.

The next morning after Henry's comments in church about Walter, I was having allergy problems with my eyes and felt most comfortable sitting with my eyes shut. I did not know what to do while I sat there with eyes closed. Henry's comments about prayer came to mind and I decided to pray. It is easy for me to teach about prayer but that morning I found it difficult to pray. I realized that sometimes the concept of prayer is easier than actually praying. Being a person of prayer is harder than it sounds. As odd as it may seem, that morning I had to practice praying. The practice of personal faith and integrity is just that. It is something that needs to be practiced.

For Discussion

1. What helps you to grow as a person of faith and integrity?
2. How is your internal and external life integrated?
3. How are you self-aware in your actions?

Key words: faith, integrity, self-awareness, prayer, practice

The Practice of Collegiality

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> Leads in a way that is responsive to the situation and promotes team building. Creates collegial groups within and beyond the church for promoting many forms of ministry.

To be collegial is to have eyes wide open to the gifts of all, knowing that we are part of the priesthood of all believers. Seminary students prepare together for rostered ministries, which in the ELCA means pastors, diaconal ministers, deaconesses, and associates in ministry. Together in the church, we practice collegiality with ecumenical and interfaith partners, forming leadership networks to raise critical issues, care for the vulnerable and work for justice.[1]

What Does This Look Like?

Gloria Stubitsch: "Pastors who try to do all the ministry do a disservice to their congregations and successors. I am choosing not to be that kind of pastor. This congregation is ready for new energy and direction. So, with projects I'm seeing, I'm being clear about my role. And I ask, 'What do you see?' 'What would you like to do?' 'How will we do it together?'"

Sandra Jones: "Rostered leaders, from young first-call folk to those with forty-plus years of ordained service, working in the center area of a small city meet weekly for worship, lunch, support, and planning. They have seen each other through cancer treatments, surgeries of various kinds, births, divorces and deaths of family members, and discernment about vocation. They read books together and argue. They study scripture and pray about their sermons. And they graciously invite the synod bishop and staff to their Christmas luncheon."

Clay Salmela: "I have seen collegiality at its best during my service in the Army. The Chaplain Corps of the Army stresses 'collegial service within a pluralistic environment.' Even though we have many different theological views, military chaplains work together to provide and perform the best possible ministry to soldiers within a widely pluralistic environment."

Steve Meysing: "A truly ecumenical board supports the work of an ecumenical ministry in the Canadian arctic. The meetings begin and end with Eucharist. At one service a Moravian presided at communion, a Roman Catholic nun preached, and an Anglican bishop led the liturgy created by an ELCA Lutheran. Also at the table are Baptists and Salvation Army members, all united by the call to collaborate in a ministry that empowers and equips arctic Christians."

Collegiality as Gospel Action

Some might say that leadership and collegiality run counter to one another, that to be a good leader means one demonstrates singular vision, is decisive, and able to clearly delegate work to others. Certainly personal vision is important but so, too, is ability to generate shared vision, lead toward communal decision-making, and foster mutual accountability. Ministry is neither a competitive sport nor a one-person show.

How one leads in ministry is as powerful an expression of the gospel as the words

1. See Nelson Granada, *Lending Your Leadership*. (Herndon, Va.: Alban, 2006).

one speaks about the gospel. The practice of collegiality, when rooted in the activity of the Triune God, *is* gospel action. We have a relational God who created human beings for interdependence. Core to human sin is our propensity to betray one another, break trust, refuse to labor together. Christ died betrayed, forsaken, and alone. As resurrection people, not only are we reconciled to God but also to one another. The Spirit re-creates us to live and work in community as partners in ministries of reconciliation in a hurting and hurtful world. Letty Russell describes how by grace we live into God's promised future, the God who is Creator, Liberator, and Advocate.[2] This is indeed good news.

Of course, the church and its ministries often do not look like places of harmony and peaceful collegiality. Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns against wish-dreaming.[3] We may hurt each other the most inside the church. Nevertheless, at that moment, when trust has totally broken down, we still have a trustworthy God and can dare to believe in the power of forgiveness. When we are most disillusioned, the resurrection becomes most real.[4]

How do we teach and learn partnership in the gospel? By being partners.[5] How does one teach collegiality? By being colleagues. Make no mistake! This does not mean people are unclear about who does what or who is accountable to whom. On the contrary, when our identities are deeply rooted in Christ, we are free to assume any number of roles for upbuiding the body. In contrast, when our identity is in our role, we often feel we must defend it at all costs. When we set a trustworthy environment, we teach and learn collegiality from one another in our specific roles through clear communication, meaningful exchange of ideas around a shared vision, and consistently following through on those ideas so that mission is put into action.

In the world's economy, power is limited: if you have more power, I will have less; if you grow in intelligence, skill, and ministerial ability, I fear I will become insignificant. However, the Spirit's power is unlimited. If the student grows in intellect, contributing more insight to the whole classroom, the teacher's knowledge increases as well. If the people, among whom the deaconess or diaconal minister serves, grow in their abilities to serve, network, and advocate for justice, ministry is multiplied. If the associate in ministry knows how to work well on a team, the atmosphere of the entire system becomes not only more efficient but more alive and creative. If the pastor genuinely appreciates the gifts of the laity as they carry out their ministries in daily life, walking with and supporting them, mission and ministry in the world beyond the church doors is Spirit-led in all directions.

Collegiality Tested

Within the ministry of all baptized Christians, the ELCA affirms and embraces collegial leadership. Historically and globally, the church has called forth many forms of ministry. What is needed for the gospel in this culture in this time?[6] There is Christ and there is the call of the church.

The lists of gifts and roles of ministry in the three great "body of Christ" passages[7] are not

2. Letty M. Russell, *The Future of Partnership* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 26–27, 32–33, 51.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 26–28.

4. Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nessan, *Transforming Leadership*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 14.

5. Russell, *The Future of Partnership,* 13–20.

6. *Together for Ministry*, Final Report and Recommendations of the Task Force on the Study of Ministry (Chicago: ELCA, 1993).

7. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

closed and not ranked. "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Rom 12: 4–5).

Collegiality, while sounding so agreeable, is not easy, as anyone who has worked in community for any length of time can attest. Nevertheless, Paul states unequivocally that "in the one spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free…"[8] He goes on with the haunting words: "If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body." In the midst of trying to be colleagues, there are many times when one might feel, "because I am not…I am not a part of the body," or "no longer a part of the body here." Even in the midst of such feelings, such reality, we are told that does not make one less a part of the body.

Yet the Epistle passage goes further, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'" However, of course, people do that. The church does commit such sins against individuals and entire groups of people.

Candace Adams: "No one predicted this battle; however, the damage caused by it would be felt for years to come. Although I was a child when the attack was waged, I live with its destructive results almost daily. It was supposed to be a routine vote, if there is such a thing. The church was growing by leaps and bounds and clearly more space was needed. A building committee labored for months to come up with a plan; they felt confident in what they were presenting to the congregation. However, things did not go as planned. Blindsided, the committee's proposal was defeated. That was the beginning of the end of the congregation. The death would be a slow one; but one-by-one families would leave. The body was torn apart limb by limb."

I have no need of you. Torn apart limb by limb. In Ephesians 4 the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4: 11–12). Working together collegially within and beyond the church we carry out the work of Christ and in so doing Christ builds the church. "Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love" (Eph 4:15–16).

Collegiality in Practice

In 1 Corinthians 12 we are asked, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (1 Cor 12:29a). Paul exhorts us to work together in a "still more excellent way." Collegiality looks like this: "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4–7).

Deborah Conner: "We too easily use the word collegiality to describe a kind of mere friendliness between people. True collegiality takes intentionality and time. You have to care about the work that the other person is doing and they have to care about yours. We often talk about team building, but don't spend time together outside of the 'to-do list' weekly meetings. As gifted people, we call ourselves a team, but we are really independent operators. Collegiality takes more time than we believe we have.

8. For this and the following cf. 1 Cor 12:13–16.

"I have experienced collegiality with clergy and lay leaders from other churches. I co-moderated a committee and it was a wonderful collegial experience. It took time, flexibility, patience, and trust. To work effectively as a team we had to commit to sharing the work and doing what we each said we would do. We equipped others and worked alongside them toward a common goal. For two years, the committee laughed a lot together, shared our joys and concerns. It was fun to go to meetings! Collegiality is enhanced when the people involved are aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses; are able to speak the truth in love to each other; and, are not in competition with one another for position or power."

Donitta Moeller: "Three of us female pastors not only formed an ongoing text study but we also lead retreats for women each year. The collegiality that we share strengthens our friendship, challenges our theological study, and encourages our creativity. The content of the retreats is richer because of the shared planning; the participants gain from presentations being done in three leadership styles. There's more balance in the theology and in the building of community."

Darin D. Easler: **"**For the past five years I have been working in the field of hospice care, providing spiritual and bereavement support to hospice patients and their families. The model of collegiality is built into hospice philosophy through a team of care providers who respond to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of patients and their families, bringing comfort, dignity, and quality of life. This interdisciplinary care team of physicians, nurses, certified nursing aids, social workers, chaplains, and volunteers collaborate with other community caregivers, such as the patient's pastor or faith community."

Juel Pierce: "In the hospital, we call collegiality interdisciplinary care. I was called to the emergency room where a physician had pronounced a woman dead. I met the family when they arrived. It was the physician's role to tell that news to them. With compassion she explained what had happened. The nurse and I were there and I was praying silently for God's love and presence to surround them. We stayed with them while they cried, and as they asked their questions. Then we made a circle (including nurse and doctor) and I led them in prayer, giving thanks for the life of their loved one and asking for God's presence with them now as they grieved.

"One of my roles as chaplain in the hospital is to lead in care at the time of death. The family asked if they might see their loved one's body, and the nurse went to prepare the woman after death. I stayed with the family, and then went with them to see their loved one. Then the nurse and I helped them with the next steps, including choosing a funeral home, calling other people who needed to be notified, and gathering up her belongings to take with them. This particular family did not have a pastor, but if they had, I would have notified that member of the team. None of us could have provided such care by ourselves, but together we helped to make this very hard time a holy time of compassionate care, and the busy emergency room a holy place."[9]

In the name of the resurrected Christ and by the power of the Spirit, we are created and re-created colleagues in ministry.

For Discussion:

1. How do you see the God who is Creator, Liberator and Advocate at work in team ministry?
2. How is the body broken and reconciliation realized in your place of ministry?
3. Tell some of your own stories about the practice of collegiality.

Key words: collegiality, body of Christ, partnership, collaboration, leadership

9. In a spirit of collegiality, I give thanks to former students whose voices of ministry are core content of this article.

Practice of Evangelical Listening and Speaking the Faith to Others

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> Listens in a way that leads people to deeper faith questions. Engages in thoughtful witness to the Christian message, especially to youth and those outside the faith.

Listening is important, profoundly important. It is increasingly significant at a time when so many people suffer from perpetual information overload.

> To listen is to pay attention, take an interest, care about, take to heart, validate, acknowledge, be moved…appreciate. Listening is in fact so central to human existence as to often escape notice; or, rather, it appears in so many guises that it is seldom grasped as the overarching need that it is.[1]

As the people of God we understand the practice of listening as a way to meet, honor and respect another person and her story, to foster a healthy and genuine relationship. Listening helps others discover and begin to use their gifts and passion in ministry. Essential to effective pastoral leadership is the ability to help others interpret their own experiences and stories within the context of the overarching story of God's redemptive history. Christian leaders (and that's all of the baptized) are able to tell God's grand story because they listen and are then able to make the connection between God's story and the stories of others.

1. Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 13.

At the turn of this new millennium I inhabited a cubicle at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, serving on the ELCA Youth Ministries/Gathering team. In the run-up to the ELCA Youth Gathering in St. Louis, I traveled from Chicago to St. Louis countless times. My favorite place to stay was the Omni Hotel—a quaint, historic downtown property.

My pattern was to fly into St. Louis late in the week, generally late afternoon or early evening, for a garden-variety long weekend-meeting marathon. I became acquainted with Leslie because our patterns overlapped. A mostly full-time community college student, she worked the second shift behind the front desk at the Omni and generally was working when I checked into the hotel.

For most of the year in advance of the Gathering, I had stayed at the hotel enough that we knew each other by name. Our conversation during the check-in process was fairly polite, brief and chatty. In late June, I checked in for a much longer stay that included both weeks of the Youth Gathering. Our chitchat quickly turned into a conversation. Leslie was aware that thousands of teenagers would soon be descending upon her city, and that somehow I was connected to this massive gathering.

So she began to ask questions. "Now, you work for a church, right?" "*Yes, I work for a large denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.*" "So these are church kids coming for this youth gathering?" "*Yep, mostly Lutheran church kids*

coming with adult leaders from all over the country and even some from around the world." "Yeah? I was Lutheran growing up. So…I know you've told me this, but why exactly are they coming here to St. Louis? What are they going to do?" "*As I've said, they are coming to St. Louis for a youth gathering…"*

I did my best to answer her questions. There was a pause, so I took a risk. I figured that she was curious and had asked me some questions, so I could do the same. "So what about you, Leslie? You said that you grew up Lutheran. What about now? Are you interested in God? Are you a part of a church community?"

She shut down, as if that was the last question in the world she had wanted someone to ask. I had obviously stepped over some intangible, invisible, but nonetheless real, boundary. So I quickly retreated. "No offense intended," I said, "merely curious. I figured we were having a conversation and I could ask questions too. Really…just curious."

The look that had galvanized on her face asked me if I was serious. Was I really curious? Did I really want to know that about her? My look in response said, yes. "I'm Wiccan," she said emphatically. My immediate, reflexive and hopefully genuine response was to say, "Really…" and before I could say anything else she said, "Really! You got a problem with that?" "No," I said, "no problem. It's just that I don't know much about what it means to be Wiccan, and I'm not sure that I've ever talked with someone who does. Most of what I do know is probably based on misconceptions and stereotypes. I'd like to hear your story and learn more about it, that's all."

Once again she looked at me, eyes blazing, jaw firmly set, as if to see if I was serious about wanting to learn more. I returned the look, a bit more kindly I'd like to think, as if to say that indeed I really would like to hear her story and learn more. "I'm finished here at 11:00 p.m.," she said, "If you're serious, be here at 11:05 p.m. and you can buy me a coffee. Then we'll see."

I returned to the hotel lobby shortly after 11:00 p.m. She was waiting. We took a table by the entryway to the hotel restaurant and ordered our coffee. There was an awkward silence at first, as if we didn't quite know how to pick up the conversation. I took a stab at it, at which point she said, quite directly, "Listen, I've been beat up (figuratively speaking) by Christians more than you can imagine over the years when I've talked about my religious preference. So I've stopped talking about it. Point is, I can smell manipulation a mile away, so don't even try." I assured her that I intended no manipulation. After a bit, she began to speak. Forty-five minutes later, she was still talking when she glanced at her watch. I had been listening, for which she was grateful, she said, quickly apologizing for talking so much. I didn't mind, I told her. I had learned a lot and thought her story was interesting, albeit painful from her perspective.

"What about you," she said? "What's your story? I like stories, so let's hear it." So I proceeded to tell her my story. I told her about my family and my work and my childhood and my friends. I told her about how the God whose face was set toward the world in Jesus had found me through the witness of some kindly people at a small country church in rural northeastern Ohio. Being found by God had made all the difference in my life, I said, and in the life of the world as well, I believed. It was her turn to listen, and listen she did. Soon it was close to 1:00 a.m. It was late; we were tired. This I know: I had participated in a safe, sane, respectful conversation with another human being that was, at its core, deeply evangelical.

Welcome and Hospitality

Although the practice of *martyreo* (bearing witness) is central to evangelical living, there is one important caveat: In our emerging cultural context today, one must earn the right to speak the good news of Jesus Christ.

Evangelical living begins with evangelical listening, that is, being present and attending to others in ways that build trust and lead people to deeper faith questions. This takes time and patience; there is no one model or magic formula. This is a challenge for us who live in the age of the quick fix.

The theological and ecclesiological correlates for the practice of evangelical listening and living, I believe, are *welcome* and *hospitality*. Though related, they are not synonymous. To be open to receive another and proactively welcome the other is a calling from God in Christ. Hospitality is a gift of the Spirit. In Christian life those who are committed to practicing God's hospitality are responsible for taking the initiative and reaching out to those individuals who are marginalized—particularly those whose life and faith perspective are easily and often misunderstood.

Within Christian communities as well as in daily life, to welcome is to receive another on behalf of God, in the name of Christ, with a generous Spirit. Any notion of welcoming must be resonate with and rooted in an understanding of God. In Jesus Christ God utterly identifies with a creation and its peoples that, albeit frail, fragile, and fractured to the core and desperately in need of healing, are loved deeply by God. In the cross and resurrection of Christ we see most clearly and decisively the extent to which God reaches out with a suffering love to join and embrace the suffering of the world and its people and to promise forgiveness, salvation and new life.

The Reformers spoke of the gospel message in terms of promise, not certainty; the trustworthiness of God's promise rather than the security of a guarantee—save the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph 1:3–14, particularly vss. 13–14). God's promise of "forgiveness, life and salvation," made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is not guaranteed in the populist and empirical, which is to say *realized* sense of the word. Rather, our faith clings in trust to the promise of God's reign as eschatological reality.

For Miroslav Volf, God's decisive activity through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ reflects a radical notion of welcome. "…God's reception of hostile humanity into divine communion is a model for how human beings should relate to the other."[2] Sadly, human beings and human communities tend to more easily emphasize the hostility vis-à-vis an exclusive "us and them" mentality rather than reception. God demonstrates through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ the desire *and* the will to embrace and receive in spite of hostility. God in Christ chose and continually chooses to reach outside of the boundary lines we draw in order to connect with all people, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages. God's vision of unity in diversity, of true and genuine community, is unsettling, even jarring to us precisely because of its inclusive breadth.

Having extended a welcome to all who are "other," God calls all of us to practice hospitality by standing with them, joining in their struggles and suffering. Christ's followers today, both individually and collectively, are called to reach out and embrace difference, welcoming and receiving others in a manner that reflects the way in which God in Christ welcomed and received us. Jesus Christ is the center of our life together and hospitality is a primary practice by which Christian communities embody and enact this divine welcome.

Evangelical Listening and Living

Hospitality in the name of Christ is committed to mutuality—particularly with those on the margins, those who are "other" and perhaps even considered "outsiders." What

2. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 100.

kind of hospitality is needed? Gospel hospitality is more interested in the needs of the guests than the preferences of the host. In her spiritual geography *Dakota,* Kathleen Norris contends, "True hospitality is marked by an open response to the dignity of each and every person."[3] Hospitality becomes the manner in which we relate with each and every person who comprise the whole of God's creation.

As such, Christian hospitality is characterized by dialogue with those who have different or even marginalized life and faith perspectives. It is critical that we talk in a manner that proclaims and embodies God's welcome so that our language and witness is intelligible to people who live in a world of great complexity and diversity; it is critical that we seek to live in a manner that proclaims and embodies God's welcome so that our words and our witness are authenticated. Christian communities and congregations truly committed to seeking out, engaging, welcoming, receiving, and integrating the voices of all people will reflect more fully the human textures of the world in which we live and, more importantly, God's vision for the churches and the entire creation.

Our calling as church in God's world is not to 'do" evangelism, but to follow the way of Jesus in the world—extending welcome, offering hospitality, practicing faith and serving the reign of God as disciples of Jesus—and *along the way* inviting others into living the same (cf. Acts 8:26–40). The notion perpetuated by the modern church (both in it's "mainline" and "evangelical" expressions) that evangelism is merely a task of the church, has led the church to expend critical missional energy going up a down staircase and in the out door—shouldering a burden church can not bear and a weight church cannot carry.

Trusting the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our evangelical living will free the church to venture "post-evangelism" into communal and individual participation in the *missio Dei*. When evangelism becomes something that one must "do" we risk losing touch with the evangelical impulse that is central to the Christian gospel. Thus many church communities have shifted the focus from *doing* evangelism toward *being* evangelical.

Christians as well as church communities are called to foster practices of evangelical living and forego any programmatic, modernist attempts at "doing" evangelism. Practices that cultivate a posture of evangelical living include: attending, or deeply listening to the stories of others; observing and paying attention to the embedded spirituality that exists in people's lives; and honoring and taking others seriously as individuals, understanding that each person's spiritual path is unique.

The birthing of Christians is a work of the Holy Spirit, to which the church community is midwife. As people are called by the Holy Spirit into a love relationship with God, the people of God are called to come alongside them as they journey and discern a calling to the Christian faith.

For Discussion:

1. How can the practice of evangelical listening strengthen and enhance our ability to "speak the faith"—to bear witness to Christ in word and deed?
2. We often think of hospitality as what we offer to those who come to visit us in our homes or congregations. How can we think about hospitality as a key aspect of our ministry in daily life?
3. What challenges and opportunities exist in your own life and community of faith for evangelical living? How might evangelical listening change how we think about Christian witness?

Key words: listening, evangelical, welcome, hospitality, witness

3. Kathleen Norris, *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993), 197.

Practice of Immersion in the Context

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> Shows awareness of the context through listening to, dialogue with and involvement in the local community. Has ability to interpret texts and contexts with insight.

"Things aren't the way they used to be" is a common phrase for a continually changing life. The reality we exist in today is not the same reality as ten years ago, ten months ago, or even ten hours ago. We live in a world of continual, and somewhat unpredictable, change. Take rural Iowa, for example. Just a few decades ago, towns like Storm Lake and Postville were populated by primarily Northern European descendants. Today one may find on their streets Buddhist monks on their way to temple, orthodox Jews preparing for Sabbath, Laotian refugees, and Somali workers.[1] A landscape that seems constant with cornfields and silos is in fact constantly changing.

Postville, a small town with a population of less than 2500 people, found itself changing over time, then drastically overnight. On May 12, 2008, the local Agriprocessors plant was raided by agents from Immigration and Custom Enforcement. In a period of twenty-four hours, 20 percent of the town's population had been apprehended.[2] The next day half of the school system's students (approximately 600) were absent because their parents had been arrested or were in hiding.[3]

How does an institution of theological education prepare a person for leadership in a community with that kind of change? It would have been easy for the people of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Postville to keep doing what they had always done, providing the same ministries and programs that had been going on for decades. But, instead they took seriously their call to participate in God's mission at that time and in that place, and enter more deeply into the relationship they have with the people of that community. They, with the courageous, wise guidance of their pastor, a first-call Wartburg graduate, listened, took risks, and ministered. And today they continue to minister to and with the people of the Postville community.

1. Paul Adams, "Immigrants in the Heartland." *BBC News*, November 4, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8339249.stm (accessed April 7, 2011).

2. Stacy Martin, "Postville, Iowa, One Year later: A Statement from LIRS and 16 Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Baltimore, Md., http://www.lirs.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=nhLPJ0PMKuG&b=5544305&ct=7672037 (accessed April 7, 2011).

3. Spencer Hsu, "Immigration Raid Jars a Small Town," *The Washington Post*, May 18, 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/17/AR2008051702474_pf.html (accessed April 7, 2011).

Participation in God's Mission in Changing Contexts

This is the call all God's people receive, to participate in God's mission of creating and redeeming for the sake of the world. This is the *missio Dei*, "God the Father, sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, and Father, Son and Holy Spirit, sending the church into the world."[4] In other words, "To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love toward people, since God is a fountain of sending love."[5] We are called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick and care for the broken in our own backyards and across the globe. The congregation provides the local place out of which this participation in God's mission takes place.

The relationship a local congregation has with the context or environment in which it finds itself has varied throughout history. In the early church, many local congregations existed in isolation, often facing persecution from the communities they had been a part of their whole lives. A few centuries later, these same geographic regions saw a fusion between church and culture, when Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. A new Christian culture emerged. Centuries turned into millennia and the one church began to divide into multiple forms and ecclesiologies.

Yet, even into the mid-twentieth century, a version of a churched culture existed in the United States. Within the dominant Christian culture, it was expected that a person went to church. Even if a person didn't go to church, they were at least familiar with what church was, where it was, and who else was going, despite the fact that Christianity was just one of many religions in what was always a pluralistic culture. Now in the twenty-first century we find ourselves in a post-Christendom era, postmodernism, post-Christian, depending on your term of choice. This is a time where perspectives have been relativized and a grand shared narrative has been lost. Lesslie Newbigin calls this "the most challenging missionary frontier of our time."[6] As a result, the church has a different location in the current culture. Its privileged position has been transformed. It can no longer claim a specific identity that has an assumed common understanding.

Living in An Open System

As the body of Christ, we are called to both live in the world and serve as a visible sign of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. This unique relationship of push and pull, of dependence on culture and living counter-culturally, is the place the church finds itself. This will look different in each culture and nation globally. One approach to understanding the relationship a church has with its context is to think about it in terms of open and closed systems. A closed system knows that it exists in a particular context and may even understand that context well, but its operations do not depend on that context, or the environment is not taken into consideration when the system operates. Historically speaking—and one could argue that these churches still do exist today—a church was a church, regardless of where it was. It looked like a church, acted like a church and could be airlifted to any place around the globe and not change.

An open system, on the other hand, not only takes its context into consideration, but depends on its environment for input and

4. David Jacobus Bosch. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New Ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 390.

5. Ibid.

6. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 20.

resources. An open system exists for the sake of that context. Understanding a congregation as an open system can help people shape their imaginations for what interaction with the larger community might look like. It helps them understand how a congregation might exist in, and together with, its context. As a community's culture or environment grows, changes, and evolves, the structures and leadership of a congregation must grow, evolve, and adapt. This is not an argument for a congregation to become the culture in which it exists; just the opposite. God is calling congregations to participate in a cultural transformation, involving reconciliation and healing in a very broken world. The challenge for congregations is to be contextual, which is to say, relevant. Understanding context is imperative. Too often, the temptation is to ignore the changes all around and resist the need for adaptation.

Teaching Immersion in Context

The pastoral practice of "Immersion in Context" is defined as "showing awareness of the context through listening to, dialogue with, and involvement in the local community." Leaders are expected to show the ability to "interpret texts and contexts with insight." Wartburg Theological Seminary is intentional in its efforts to equip students with these particular capacities and assists students in developing these practices. Students in all degree programs take the course, "Theology in Context," the very first week of each fall semester. During this intensive Prolog Week, students are asked to explore and reflect theologically upon the context of this seminary, to consider the interaction between theology and culture and to explore what a Lutheran Christian witness might look like to address this community. Skills of deep listening, reflecting upon artifacts and symbols, and analyzing demographic data are taught with the expectation that students will enter into this community and engage in these practices locally during their course of study. Attention to the history and rituals of a community help to create a frame of understanding. Understanding community and the multiple cultures present within any given community are not one-time events, but a never-ending process of inquiry.

The curriculum for Wartburg's distance programs, Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) and Distributed Learning (Hybrid/Residential), are both designed around students learning in and through context. Each student brings his or her respective context with them when they come to Wartburg for weekend or week-long intensive classes or study online. The context from which one comes is one of the many modes of interaction for a student.[7] Contextual focus areas are designed in the curriculum during each term requiring students to address specific contextual perspectives connected with coursework. Thereby online learning is enriched as insights and cultural contexts are multiplied.

One current distributed learning student from Kansas, while on campus for a week-long intensive, talked about the challenge of moving his traditional congregation into mission awareness in their context. His comments invited other students to reflect on the challenge of leadership for mission in their contexts. Several students have discussed conflict based on a particular denominational decision. Although the denominational decision was one and the same, the particular type

7. "Learner to Context" as a mode of interaction is Wartburg's addition to the three modes of interaction: Learner to Content, Leaner to Teacher, Learner to Learner, which are to be considered in designing curriculum. See John Hannon and Pam Atkins, "All About Interactivity," TAFE Frontiers, 2002 found at http://www.acebank.vic.edu.au/TAFEfrontiers/QuickPDFinal/Docs/interactivity.pdf, (accessed April 7, 2011).

of conflict varied in each context; therefore those contexts shaped the learning as students gained wisdom in how to lead through conflict.

Master's of Divinity students are expected in their coursework and particularly while on internship to integrate contextual practices including deep listening and discovery. Interns are sent into many varied contexts across the country, often one that is a sharp contrast to the student's own background. An important part of their learning is to adapt effectively and appropriately to that context. In the evaluative procedure, every criterion, such as preaching, teaching, and leadership, is judged as to whether it is contextually appropriate. An attitude of appreciation, creativity, and imagination are encouraged as students encounter, are immersed in, explore, and interact with their communities.

Master's of Arts students include those studying for the ELCA rostered ministries of diaconal minister, deaconess and associate in ministry as well as those preparing for further graduate studies and those who want to integrate theological reflection with their professions as they live out their vocations. The very essence of diaconal ministry is to be a bridge between church and world. Their roles continually change according to the needs of people in their context and the unhealed hurts in the world. Diaconal ministry gives flexibility for response to emerging needs. Associates in ministry serve in many ways; their ministries are shaped by the context and changing needs of their faith communities. The calling of all the baptized is to serve in ministry on a day-to-day basis and to carry out their vocations *in* context. Some seminary graduates go on to become college professors. Theological education for the laity equips them to reflect on their many and varied contexts and to see more clearly what their ministry is in that setting.

Engaging Texts and Context

The necessity to engage context comes from our understanding of who God is and what God is up to in the world. God has created, is creating and will continue to create. The kingdom of God is breaking into this world, in, with, and through the communities of faith that are called to participate in God's work. As partners on the journey of formation, Wartburg understands its responsibility to form students for leadership by stressing the need for reading contexts as well as equipping them with the tools to do that work.

Through a community's encounter with context, we gain new insights into the Gospel.

Biblical texts are crucial for gaining insight into context. In addition to biblical interpretation and hermeneutical framing, students are expected to listen to, dialogue with, and interpret a biblical text with insight, in light of the context in which it is interpreted. The gospel is both universal in that its message is for all, and particular in that it is relevant for those in a particular place and time. Through a community's encounter with context, we gain new insights into the gospel, who God is, and what God is doing in this place and time.

By engaging with context, one begins to live into the multiple cultures present, and form relationships with the people of those cultures. Only then do the people of any given community cease to be mere objects for "outreach." They then become human beings to encounter, to engage, and with

whom to learn. This sense of mutuality comes only from a base of respect and trust. Then and only then can we begin to see how the stories of our lives become interconnected, a part of the biblical narrative, God's story, of reconciliation and healing in a broken world.

Martin Luther King Jr., in one of his memorable sermons said,

> In a real sense, all life is interrelated. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.[8]

As communities of faith, we are called to be wholly present, to live in and with the people and cultures in our context and in the broader global context. Our calling is to participate in what God is up to in these places, in God's creating and redeeming work. This work is in a state of constant change because the world continues to change. We are not called to be separated from the world, living in isolation. We are called to live in the world, with all its challenges, together as a "network of mutuality."

For Discussion:

1. What are the cultures that one finds in your local community? How do they relate? Overlap? Which ones are present in your congregation?
2. What do non-members say about your congregation? How is it perceived in your community?
3. If your congregation were to disappear today, how would that affect your community?

Key words: context, *missio Dei,* mission, community, encounter

8. Martin Luther King Jr. *Strength to Love*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 69.

Engagement with Cross-Cultural and Global Dimensions

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Engages multicultural issues and religious pluralism in the context of globalization. Understands the inclusive character of the Christian gospel.

This practice is necessary because we live in an increasingly global, multi-cultural, and religiously plural world. Jesus commands us to proclaim the gospel among all the nations, and thus among people of all cultures and languages. According to John's Gospel, God sent God's Son out of love for the world, "not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16–17). Jesus sends his disciples into the world in the same way as the Father has sent him (John 20:21). If we are to bear effective witness to God's love in Christ, it is important that we value what is true in people's cultures, enter their world, and engage their contexts with sensitivity. We need to listen and learn from them and creatively interpret the gospel in a way that speaks to their dreams, struggles, and deepest longings.

This corresponds to the basic structure of the gospel. God meets people in Jesus Christ where they are; they do not have to become something else first. Paul speaks of becoming everything to everyone for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:19–23; see also Acts 17:2–31; Phil 4:8). The Christian message transforms what it receives from various cultures, and it is transformed by them. In going into all the world, the Christian message becomes multilingual, multicultural, and pluralistic.[1] The persuasive power of a religious tradition lies in its ability to assimilate the truth present in other cultures and religious traditions without losing its identity. If Jesus Christ is God's love for the world, and if he is the incarnation of the Word through whom God created all things and cultures, we will not fully understand the wonder of what God has done in Jesus Christ until we see all reality summed up into him.

God meets people in Jesus Christ where they are; they do not have to become something else first.

This is not new. Israel's religious traditions developed and the Bible was written in multicultural and religiously plural contexts.

1. See Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989; 2nd ed. rev. and expanded., 2009), 13–55.

Israel: Creation and Messianic Hope

Living in Palestine, Israel was distant from the great centers of civilization and power. But Palestine was also the place where the great empires battled for power and their cultures met and interacted. Here the ancient trade routes, many older than Israel, linking the great civilizations of China, India, Mesopotamia and Persia, and Egypt met, carrying stories and ideas from strange places as well as goods like silk and spices. William McNeill, in *The Rise of the West*, argues that the major early civilizations in China, India, Mesopotamia and Persia, and Egypt interacted and influenced each other from very early in their histories. He suggests, "The principal factor promoting historically significant social change is contact with strangers possessing new and unfamiliar skills."[2]

This is also true of Israel's religious traditions which developed in critical engagement with a wide variety of cultures and religious traditions throughout much of Asia. Some ideas and stories were assimilated and transformed; others rejected. Within Israel itself some made exclusive claims for Israel as God's people; others emphasized the promise that Israel will be a means of blessing for all the nations (Gen 12:1–3). Malachi 1:11, 14b even claims that every place among the nations where incense is offered it is offered to the name of Israel's God!

In light of this, we cannot properly understand Israel's religious traditions as the self-revelation of God, or the rise of Christianity apart from its context in the global history of religions. We will examine further the example of creation.

Creation

In Genesis 14:17–24, as Abram is returning from the defeat of the kings, Melchizedek, the king of Salem, the pre-Israelite city of Jerusalem, meets Abram and blesses him by God Most High (El Elyon, the manifestation of El at Salem), "the maker of heaven and earth," and Melchizedek ascribes Abram's victory to El Elyon. Abram then speaks of "Yhwh El Elyon, maker of heaven and earth." Israel's God is identified as the "maker of heaven and earth" by identifying Yhwh with the Canaanite deity El.

In Canaanite traditions, El, the ancestor of all the gods, is the "Creator of the creatures." Israel frequently used El as a name for Israel's God. El's children, the gods, played a more complex role in Israel's history. Ba'al and Anat, Ba'al's sister and wife, are associated with the order necessary for human life and agriculture, including rain, the earth, and fertility; Yamm, the Sea, symbolized destructive, chaotic powers; and Mot, Death and drought. Ba'al battles against both Yamm and Mot over who will rule as king over all things. These conflicts symbolize the reality that life in this world is caught between conflicting powers, whether powers necessary for life or destructive of life. Ba'al defeated Yamm, the Sea, and his palace, symbolizing the ordered agricultural world, was built in seven days. In the battle with Mot, Anat plays the leading role, delivering Ba'al from Death.

The Old Testament does not use the mythical imagery of the battle with Death. However, the frequently used imagery of God's victory over the sea is associated with God's rule as king and ordering the world (e.g., Ps 93; 74:12–17). It can also be used of the Exodus and deliverance from enemies in war (Ps 77:16–29; Isa 17:12–14), and in appeals for God's help in personal suffering (Ps 69; 130). Isaiah 51:9–11 uses this imagery to identify the defeat of the sea at the foundation of the world, deliverance from Egypt at the

2. William McNeill, *The Rise of the West: a History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963; 1991), xvi.

Red Sea and the promised future deliverance, as though they were a single event.

The Davidic dynasty assimilated earlier Canaanite ideas associated with Jerusalem and kingship. In the enthronement liturgy (Ps 2), the Davidic king was adopted as God's Son and declared "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110). In Psalm 89:5–29, God's rule and God's victory over the sea at the foundation of the world becomes a promise that the Davidic king will share in God's rule over the sea (esp. vv. 24–27). Thus, these older Canaanite traditions of Melchizedek, of divine kingship associated with the cosmic dimensions of God's victory over the destructive powers associated with the Sea, make a significant contribution to Judaism's messianic hope for the true king, whose rule is identical with God's rule. The enigmatic figure of Melchizedek plays an extensive role in Hebrews, where he serves as a type of Jesus as a priest who initiates a new covenant through his death, and of Jesus himself (7:2b–3!).

In the New Testament, death becomes the last enemy (1 Cor 15:25–26) and in the new creation, the sea will be no more (Rev 21:1). Jesus feeds the multitude in the desert, the domain of death; he stills the sea with a command (Matt 8:23–27) and raises Jarus' daughter from the dead (Matt 9:18–26); all of this is associated with the announcement of God's rule. Then the Pharisees say he casts out demons by the "prince of demons," (Matt 9:34; 10:25), Be-elzebul ("Prince Ba'al"), Ba'al's title of honor.

The Canaanite religious texts from Ugarit, from about the time of Abraham contain no story of creation. The widespread theme of conflict and victory at the foundation of the world occurs in a different way in the *Enuma elish*,[3] the Babylonian creation story. It centers on the conflict between Tiamat, the primordial salt waters, and her descendants, the gods. When Marduk killed Tiamat, he split her watery body in half, and placed one half above and the other below (see Gen 1:6–8). Then in the space between the waters, Marduk ordered the world of the gods, symbolized by the sun, moon, and stars (Gen 1:14–19). Finally, Marduk created human beings from the blood of Kingu, Tiamat's general, to be the slaves of the gods, and the gods celebrate Marduk's kingship.

Some Babylonian influences can be seen in Genesis 1:1—2:3, which was probably written during the Babylonian exile, though it may also include some older material. There also are significant differences. First, the mythical framework is gone, although you can still hear allusions to it. Second, in contrast to the *Enuma elish*, God creates by speaking. Third, Genesis is interested in God's creation of everything, including the earth, plants, and animals. While the *Enuma elish* may have included the creation of these things in parts that have been lost, the interest is in the gods. Fourth, the place of human beings is very different. Human beings in Genesis are created in God's image. In the *Enuma elish*, they are created to be the slaves of the gods. Isaiah 46 uses that contrast to characterize the difference between Israel's God and idols: idols require our service, while Israel's God made, carries, and saves us.

The interest in Genesis 1:1—2:3 in everything God created is similar to Psalm 104, a wisdom psalm praising God as the creator, who continues to care and provide for everything created. This interest in God's creation and care for everything is similar to the fourteenth-century Egyptian hymn to Aten, the sun God, during their brief

3. "Mesopotamian Cosmogony (*Enuma elish)*," in Mircea Eliade, *Essential Sacred Writings from Around the World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1967), 97–109. *http://www.mircea-eliade.com/from-primitives-to-zen/055.html*

monotheistic experiment.[4]

The overall structure of Genesis 1:12:3 has no clear analogy in the ancient Near East. It begins with the dark watery abyss, and the Spirit brooding over it's surface, followed by God speaking the diversity of creation into existence. The closest analogy is a Hindu tradition in which the Absolute begins by projecting "outside" the one word, Om, that belongs to the essence of the Absolute and contains all words and all knowledge. It is imaged as an infinite dark sea, with the cosmic egg, the source of life and all creation floating on the surface. After a period of time this word begins to differentiate into sounds and syllables, generating the universe in all its diversity. These words constitute the Vedas. Barbara Holdrege describes this process: "the cosmogonic process is…a two-stage process in which an unmanifest state of undifferentiated unity gives rise to a manifest state of differentiation through a series of discrete speech-acts."[5]

Israel developed their ideas of God creating the world by borrowing stories and ideas from the religious cultures of the world around them. They both assimilated these stories, and modified them in light of their traditions and understanding of God, just as these traditions, in turn contributed to Israel's understanding of God as the Creator. By borrowing creation stories and ideas from the religions of the nations around them, Israel said that the One of whom the nations and their traditions speak as the Creator of the world is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the One who led Israel out of bondage in Egypt. Israel's God is the source of the entire reality of the created world and the cultures of its peoples.

Multi-Culturalism Continues in Christianity

This process continued in Christianity for the same reasons. The early Christians engaged the ideas of Greek philosophy and Hellenistic culture. They rejected Plato's dualism, in which the Demiurge drew eternal, disordered matter into conformity with the eternal world of ideas or ideal forms. But the dynamic character of the Platonic tradition made it possible for Gregory of Nyssa in the late fourth century to interpret Genesis in a way that roughly parallels modern evolutionary big-bang cosmology. He understood Genesis 1:1 to be creation out of nothing. Everything God does after that is done through causes God created in the first moment. God creates plants by commanding the earth to do so, similarly, sea animals and birds, and land animals. He describes this as a necessary series of stages, in which each stage builds on and includes all that preceded. Human beings were created last, so that humans might include everything created within them, and nothing in all creation would be left without its share in the divine glory.

Conversation with other religious traditions can also widen our possibilities for interpreting biblical texts. In a lecture titled, "That Marvelous Mystery–the Trinity" (1882),[6] Kushub Chunder Sen, a Hindu fascinated by Christ, read Genesis 1:1—2:3 and biblical history in conversation with the Rig Veda X,129. It resulted in an evolutionary reading of creation and redemption. "What was creation but the wisdom of God going out of its secret chambers and taking visible

4. "Amenhotep IV and the *Hymn to Aten,"* Eliade, ibid., 27–31. http://www.mircea-eliade.com/from-primitives-to-zen/020.html

5. *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1996), 49. See the discussion of "Veda and Creation," 29–129.

6. David C. Scott, ed., *Keshub Chunder Sen: A Selection*, Library of Indian Christian Theology, Companion Series No. 1 (Bangalore: Christian Literature Society, 1979), 219–247.

shape, His potential energy asserting itself in unending activities?" (p. 225). The ultimate purpose of creation is universal redemption through Jesus Christ, in whom the primary creative force of God's Word, manifested in "endless varieties" in the evolutionary process, at last takes form. "God sent His only begotten Son in order to make all His children, one and all, sons and heirs of God" (pp. 226–227).

One sees the church's practice of awareness of multicultural issues and religious pluralism was in the small congregation I grew up in, where the pastor used his connections with missionaries in Papua New Guinea to bring a regular series of missionaries and their stories to our congregation and youth group, so that New Guinea mission became part of our lives . One also sees it in a small rural Iowa congregation that spent a substantial part of their income to help support a missionary in Senegal. Through his visits and letters, his family and the people there became part of the life of the congregation.

For Discussion:

1. If the other religions in Israel's world role-played a significant role in Israel's understanding of God and in the formation of Scripture, how might those religions be a vehicle for God's self-revelation?
2. What does the model of the way Israel and early Christianity developed their ideas of God as Creator suggest about how we should deal with modern evolutionary cosmology?
3. What do you think it would mean for how we think of others, if God in Jesus Christ fulfills the deepest longings of people in other religions like God does with regard to Melchizedek?

Key words: cosmology, creation, Messiah, hope, multicultural, pluralism

Conclusion: And Now, Reflect and Give Thanks

Stanley N. Olson
President, Wartburg Theological Seminary

Twelve Pastoral Practices

My ministry for the past sixteen years has been in oversight, first of a synod and then of the ELCA's links to its theological education network and network of candidacy committees. In those roles, I have sought to support and lead pastors, associates in ministry, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, and those who are preparing for such callings, as well as those who encourage, challenge, and approve potential servant leaders for the church. I have worked with leaders in outdoor ministry, campus ministry, youth ministry and young adult ministry. My work included many conversations with call committees and search committees and with many people pondering their vocations and/or a change in the locus of their vocations. The topic, in one way or another, was often servant leadership: What does the church need? What role might I/she/he/we play in servant leadership for the church?

Faithful and effective servant leaders have been my companions all these years, and my own callings have asked me to envision, call forth, and undergird such faithful and effective servant leadership. Because I was a leader, I had critics questioning my wisdom and faithfulness. Because I care about being faithful and about being effective, I have been introspective and reflective about my own ministry in its parts and as a whole.

At the beginning of 2011, I began a call as president of Wartburg Theological Seminary. Only then did I first consider the "Twelve Pastoral Practices" document. The statement was already well-used for shaping the Wartburg curriculum, courses, and outcomes assessment. I value this expression of pastoral practice and the way it can guide a seminary. These images of faithful service are a sound basis for planning how to prepare leaders and for assessing the seminary's work.

Given the background I mentioned above and because I was in transition to yet another vocation, I did not read these pastoral practices first as an educator or a planner. I read them as a ministry practitioner myself. They led me to reflection. I invite you to consider doing intentionally what I first did unintentionally. Let these twelve pieces of Christian wisdom lead you to reflection on your own ministries! In this slim volume you and I have been deepened, stretched, and warmed by the insights of my Wartburg colleagues. I suggest that each of us can also profit from their wisdom by stepping back now to the twelve careful formulations themselves, letting them be a means for God to speak to us about our own ministry.

Set aside the Wartburg Theological Seminary mission statement and any thoughts of courses and curricula. Set aside any use of this list as goals you should achieve. Instead, remember Dean Craig Nessan's suggestion that these are "habits of the heart." That, I think, speaks to what I did when I first read them. The statements themselves led me to reflect on the habits of my Christian life and ministry. I encourage you to enter your own heart for ministry through these words. As

I first read each practice, I thought of its embodiment in my ministry. I suppose I was subconsciously ready to critique—checking the relevance and truth of this list. But what I heard through my reflection on each practice was a godly reminder about how Christ works in and through me. And what I heard was a godly reminder about how I've resisted Christ's intent to form these habits in me.

I suggest to you that through your prayerful reflections, these twelve pastoral practices can be law and gospel for you. The law kills. There is pain in open reflection on a life of ministry. But the law's killing opens the way for gospel. I am confident that prayerful reflection here will lead you to gratitude for your life of servant leadership, and to greater openness for God's ministry. Death does not have the last word in your ministry. You will be astounded at what the Lord has done!

Through reflection on our ministries, each of us can say, in the company of all God's daughters and sons, "I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though…." (1 Tim 1:12) Yes, God enables our service… even though….

What is a sense of vocation but confidence that God is at work in one's particular roles—despite all one's failings? Enter your vocations expectantly through these twelve encapsulations of the church's wisdom.

I encourage you to find time for this reflection—short or long, in a block of time or in many pieces—but be unhurried. Ask God to speak to you about your work. Then read each practice reflectively, prayerfully, expecting to hear God speak to you about your life. Begin where the practices do, rooted in the Gospel. And end there too. God is at work.

The Twelve Pastoral Practices

- *Practice of Being Rooted in the Gospel:* Articulates the Gospel in a way that is heard as Gospel. Is publicly Lutheran and Gospel-centered.
- *Practice of Missio Dei in Word and Sacrament:* Is grounded in Word and Sacrament as the means by which God creates faith in Christ and a community (*koinonia*) for God's mission (*martyria* and *diakonia*) in the world. The ordained exercise faithful worship preparation, evangelical preaching, and sacramental leadership. The consecrated serve as a strategic bridge between church and world. Associates in ministry serve faithfully in their areas of call in relationship to the worshipping community. All the baptized are sent by the Spirit to employ their gifts in God's mission for the life of the world.
- *Practice of Biblical and Theological Wisdom:* Interprets reality theologically and biblically as a habit. Has a core set of theological concepts that are interpreted with flexibility in different contexts.
- *Practice of Ecclesial Partnership:* Displays a healthy sense of connectedness with the whole church. Fosters partnership with the ELCA and ecumenical openness.
- *Practice of Complex Analysis:* Demonstrates capacity to carefully examine complex social, economic, scientific, and religious issues without oversimplification. Sees relationships from a systems perspective, remaining spiritually centered in the face of ambiguity.
- *Practice of Curiosity:* Is fundamentally curious, employing creativity in the use of language. Is open to grow beyond current perspectives and eager to pursue learning with intellectual depth.
- *Practice of Pastoral Concern:* Loves God's people with the compassion of Christ, demonstrating a generous spirit in relating to others, teaching and modeling stewardship. Maintains a clear sense of pastoral identity and desire for excellence in pastoral ministry.
- *Practice of Personal Faith and Integrity:*

Lives as a person of faith, grounded in a life of prayer and study. Is self-aware in seeing the larger picture, proclaiming hope, leading courageously, and setting healthy boundaries.

- *Practice of Collegiality:* Leads in a way that is responsive to the situation and promotes team building. Creates collegial groups within and beyond the church for promoting many forms of ministry.
- *Practice of Evangelical Listening and Speaking the Faith to Others:* Listens in a way that leads people to deeper faith questions. Engages in thoughtful witness to the Christian message, especially to youth and those outside the faith.
- *Practice of Immersion in the Context:* Shows awareness of the context through listening to, dialogue with and involvement in the local community. Has ability to interpret texts and contexts with insight.
- *Practice of Engagement with Cross-Cultural and Global Dimensions:* Engages multicultural issues and religious pluralism in the context of globalization. Understands the inclusive character of the Christian Gospel.

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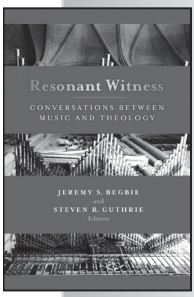

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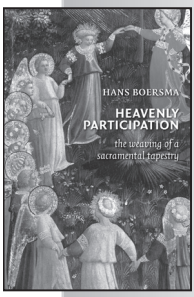

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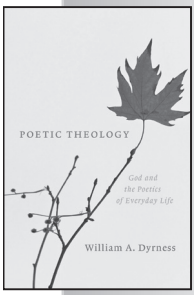

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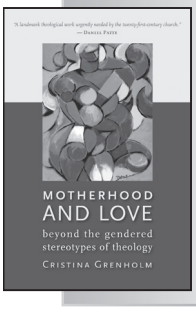

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Book Reviews

The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians. By Heikki Räisänen. Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8006-6266-0. xxiv and 479 pages. Paper. $39.00.

Heikki Räisänen, emeritus professor at the University of Helsinki, aims to give a broad overview of the development of early Christian beliefs. He offers an introduction to college students that may fruitfully lead to further research and interest.

Part I situates early Christianity in Second Temple Judaism, Greco-Roman religion and philosophy and Jesus' first followers. Part II sketches the development of Christian beliefs beginning with eschatology and covering life after death, the human condition, salvation, Christology, pneumatology, emergence from Judaism, interaction with pagans, and the development of Christian orthodoxy.

There is much to commend. His decision to begin with eschatology places later theological development in helpful perspective. The organization of material is well planned. He gives a wealth of endnotes to primary and secondary sources. At his best, he shares various arguments on contested issues.

The book is weakened in a number of ways. At times, he overstates scholarly consensus, e.g., that the "beloved disciple" in John is purely a literary fiction (308). He also privileges certain Christian traditions, e.g., repeated quotations from John Knox (225–226). He describes early Christianity with the anachronistic labels of "conservative" and "liberal wings." These undermine the book's usefulness to introduce students to the diversity of early Christian beliefs (Räisänen's stated goal) and modern debates.

The Rise of Early Christian Beliefs also may be difficult for undergraduate students who have no background in Christian scholarship, yet it is not technical enough for graduate students. He refers to a wide variety of ancient authors and terms, often without introduction (e.g., the Ebionites, 59). Graduate students would be frustrated by shallow discussion of contested issues and by primary source references in the endnotes rather than in the body of the text.

Peter S. Perry
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Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought. By Stephen H. Travis. Second edition, fully revised and updated. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-1-5985-6338-2. xiv and 383 pages. Paper. $24.95.

This is a fully revised version of a book that was first published in 1986, including three new chapters. It is a study of God's judgment, with the apologetic and theological goal of demonstrating that the New Testament does not see divine judgment as retributive. For Travis a retributive judgment is one imposed from the outside and based on equivalence between the deed and the deserved results, a tit-for-tat judgment. To the contrary, what he finds in the New Testament is a view of judgment that is relational; divine judgment is the built-in consequence of refusing to live in a relationship with God through Christ. Retributive language is sometimes used, to be sure, but only in a limited way to make sure judgment is seen as God's activity and is not arbitrary or vindictive. Travis makes his case in twenty chapters, divided into four parts: 1) an introduction and study of the Old Testament and Jewish literature; 2) the longest part, on judgment in Paul; 3) the Gospel tradition; 4) Revelation. This is a thorough treatment of judgment language in the New Testament, and it is largely convincing. One sometimes wonders if the theological distinction that guides the study is imposed on the texts. Is there always such a clear distinction between a judgment based on one's relationship with God and a judgment based on a principle of getting what one deserves? The theological approach of Travis needs to be supplemented by a social approach that asks about the rhetorical function of judgment language in the texts. This book is essential reading for any study of judgment in the New

Testament, as it is the most extensive and current study available on the topic.

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Luther: Out of the Storm. By Derek Wilson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0-8006-9718-1. xii and 399 pages. Paper. $24.00.

This book seeks to achieve the status of Roland Bainton's earlier classic, *Here I Stand*. In many respects, it is even more successful than Bainton's now dated book. Though lacking the woodprints found on almost every page of Bainton, this volume is spritely written, sensitive to the historical and political situation of Luther's day, and serves as a remarkably fine introduction to Luther. It is likewise illustrated with images of prints and portraits. The fact that it is not written by a recognized Luther scholar, such as the late James Kittelson or Oswald Bayer, makes it even better. All too often Luther scholars get lost in the minutiae of arguments for which the rest of the world has little appetite. A recognized historical biographer, Derek Wilson gets to the heart of what is most important in Luther's life and does so in a way that offers insights to even the seasoned Luther scholar.

According to Wilson, the young Luther found the study of law uncongenial and was already contemplating studying theology and preparing for an academic career before he faced death in the lightning storm near Erfurt. The intellectual breakthrough, which led to Luther's reformational insights, in Wilson's estimation, was due to a long-standing spiritual struggle and no mere exercise on the academic treadmill. Luther's resulting total disillusionment with monastic life was only the flipside of his earlier total devotion. Wilson acknowledges that it was Staupitz, Luther's mentor and father confessor, who constantly preached the cross as God's sheer goodness for sinners to the troubled Luther. Only the cross could fully reveal the depths of God's love; likewise, appropriate contrition can happen only as a response of love reciprocated to the God who from the first loves us. From this basis, Luther eventually articulated his understanding of the Gospel in which Christ's righteousness is transferred to us, exchanged for our sin. Indeed, for Luther, we are accounted righteous similar to how an artist sees her finished product already in an unfinished statue.

Wilson notes that the impetus for Reformation for some Germans was due less to correct religious doctrine and practice, and more due to German nationalism, a position from which Luther distanced himself. After all, for Luther, the word is always above both the church and civil powers. With respect to the Renaissance humanist Erasmus' view of Reformation, Wilson notes an important difference from Luther: "Follow Erasmus and you developed a spirituality based on inner contemplation and outward charity, hoping to gain divine approval. Take the Lutheran path and you cast yourself in faith upon a just but loving God, acknowledging your own sinful and helpless nature" (209). With respect to a third variety of Reformation—that of the peasants seeking egalitarian reform through violent revolt—Luther, always afraid of social chaos, responded that society was "divinely ordered" (225) and, as is well known, savagely attacked the peasants' revolt and the petitions. In a similar vein, Wilson masterfully deals with Luther's late, harsh castigation of the Jews, which, though violent, fell short of advocating "extermination" (315). This harsh image of Luther is to be contrasted to that of Luther as the doting father.

All in all, this is a superb text, highly recommended for university or seminary education and the lay reader. Indeed, congregational reading groups would benefit much for this text.

Mark Mattes
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The Rhetoric of Digressions: Revelation 7:1–17 and 10:1—11:13 and Ancient Communication. By Peter S. Perry. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009. ISBN-10: 3161500016. ISBN-13: 978-3161500015. x and 297 pages. Paper. $127.50.

This careful and substantive work is a doctoral dissertation that was completed at the Lutheran

School of Theology at Chicago. It offers a fresh perspective on how the Revelation would have communicated with ancient readers by focusing on two passages that seem to interrupt the flow of the book. Major sections of Revelation are structured in groups of seven. When Christ the Lamb opens the seven seals, readers face a rapid series of threatening visions that include the four horsemen and the martyrs under the heavenly altar, until at the sixth seal the universe is shaken with portents of wrath (Rev 6:1–17). However, just where readers would expect the end to arrive, angels hold back destruction and John tells of the one hundred and forty-four thousand who are sealed and the great multitude before God's throne (7:1–17). Then the seventh seal is opened to a graceful silence (8:1). At this point six trumpets are blown, bringing plagues on earth (8:2—9:21), but judgment is again interrupted by an angel who directs John to prophesy, and readers are shown visions of faithful witnesses (10:1—11:13). When the seventh trumpet sounds, heavenly voices announce God's kingdom.

Perry highlights the importance of the passages that interrupt the sequence by calling attention to the way rhetoricians used digressions in their speeches. He does not suggest that the author of Revelation studied rhetoric, but notes that the way ancient audiences heard things was shaped by established patterns of communication. Classical handbooks recognize that digressions can be among the most memorable parts of a speech. When speakers moved away from a progressive argument, they could deal with special topics and appeal to the emotions, both of which shaped the audience's response to the speech as a whole. For example, the threats posed by the seals in Rev 6:1–17 awaken a sense of fear, while the vision of salvation in the digression in 7:1–17 invites confidence (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.5.1–17).

Perry notes that digressions also played a role in the biblical texts that shape Revelation's language. A good biblical example is the Passover tradition. The book of Exodus tells of nine plagues against the Egyptians, but then interrupts the sequence to deal with the Passover, where the homes of the Israelites were marked with blood to protect them from the destroyer (Exod 12:1–8). Only then does the final plague occur. In an analogous way the threats brought by the seals in Rev 6:1–17 are interrupted by a vision of Israel being sealed and protected in 7:1–17 before the last seal is opened.

This book is a model of careful research and will be valuable resource for those engaged in New Testament research. For non-specialists his conclusions are also significant, since he convincingly shows how one digression creates confidence in God's grace by interrupting the seemingly inexorable movement toward judgment (7:1–17), and the other helps move the readers from passivity to active engagement as God's witnesses (10:1—11:13). Perry rightly points us to Revelation's vision of the church's vocation.

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Holy Clarity: The Practice of Planning and Evaluation. By Sarah B. Drummond. Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2009. ISBN 978-1-566-993-876. xx and 158 pages. Paper. $18.00.

Sarah Drummond presents a compelling case for seeing evaluation as essential to leadership. Many a pastor has been burned by a "church-wide evaluation" which was a performance review of the pastor cloaked in a comprehensive evaluation. Drummond stresses the need for ongoing, collaborative, transparent work that focuses not only on process ("Did it go well?") but on outcomes ("Did people grow in faith?").

Drummond, in Chapters 3 and 6, provides four types of evaluation, which build on one another: 1) Condition/Intervention Diagram, 2) Logic Models, 3) Stakeholder Mapping, and 4) Data Collection Strategy. These could be extremely useful. More of the book could have been devoted to ways to use them, rather than referring to fields which are not her forte. For example, Drummond mentions only one inductive approach to theological reflection, that is, "faith practices," which betrays her lack of awareness of the whole field of inductive theology and action-reflection methodology.

That said, this is a fresh, helpful book. The author convinces us of the need for holy clarity

in a noisy world of too many distractions. Ministry is complicated. In this postmodern world, there is too much information at our fingertips to make wise decisions without use of clarifying strategies. When religious participation is viewed as a commodity, people merely "evaluate" what they like and dislike. Instead, faith communities are called to discern their goals and evaluate how they are carrying out their mission together. As they develop a vision and strategy, they become a learning community through ongoing evaluation of how things are going, where they are going, and why.

Organization does not come easily to everyone, but through these pages one sees the value of truth and comes to crave the beauty of clarity, which, as Drummond stresses, is a gift of God.

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The Church Event: Call and Challenge of a Church Protestant. By Vitor Westhelle. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0-8006-6332-2. ix and 181 pages. Paper. $20.00.

It is hard to capture the essence of this book in a short review. Not only is Westhelle a profound ecclesiologist, but he also has a rhapsodic, poetic way of writing; he invites us to consider new metaphors from which to see the identity and mission of the church. Likewise, Westhelle is gifted in interweaving the classic Reformation heritage with contemporary theological concerns, all in a way that is likely to catch one off-guard, and thus open readers to new insights.

While appealing to recent social models of the Trinity, such as John Zizioulas', as a basis by which to understand human community (chapter five), Westhelle self-consciously offers a distinctively "protestant" view of the church, one whose ethos is itself an *event*, grounded in word and sacrament, but transformative of peoples' lives. Most importantly, the nature of the church is itself eschatological (29), defined by God's justifying word and anticipating the coming kingdom. By the same token, appealing to Luther's *Genesis Commentary* which claims that the church (*ecclesia*) was established before the structures of home (*oeconomia*) and government (*politia*) as a place of respite between them (9), Westhelle offers a "radically catholic" ecclesiology, inclusive of all humans.

As eschatological, the church is an "instrument" of the word of God (38), dependent upon God's creative action. It is a "happening" in which people are gathered around word and sacrament (40). With respect to scripture as the church's authority for life and teaching, Westhelle notes that scripture is "more than enough." By inculcating Christ among us, it takes away our attempt to bargain with God (74). Likewise, the church is a community of salvation. Building on the etymology the Greek word *soteria* and the Latin word *salus*, salvation involves healing, curing, and preserving on the one hand, and delivering, rescuing, and liberating on the other. "Hence…we can say that the church is the community of salvation insofar as, and only insofar as, it manifests itself in the places of perdition as a community that both heals and liberates. Where this happens there is the church. Church happens! We *believe* it; we *do not* believe in it…" (93). In that light, the church must ever be vigilant to preserve itself from idolatry and demons (manifest in individuals as self-estrangement, 99). Forgoing any self-righteousness, Jesus' followers (in light of Matthew 25) were completely unaware that they were in fact doing good in their works to the needy.

In a brilliant study of the story of Zacchaeus, Westhelle notes that Jesus' interruption of Zacchaeus' life illustrates a "harsh grace" to a man whose vocation is intertwined with Roman violence and brutality (131). Honoring both Sabbath rest and work, Westhelle concludes: "Church is aroused and inflamed by the white fire in the interstices of our ecclesial discourses, offering hope, a hopeful anticipation of the promise of something nearby or at hand, adjacently both ready and *at ease*" (168).

This book is highly recommended for thoughtful pastors, theologians, church adjudicatories, and seminary students.

Mark Mattes

The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology. edited by Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart and Nathan MacDonald. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN-13 978-0-8028-2588-9. ix and 456 pages. Paper. $36.00

One of the editors, Nathan MacDonald, wrote the introduction. He notes that the twenty-seven papers found in this volume were first presented in 2006 at the second St. Andrews Conference on Scripture and Theology. The first conference was on John and Christian Theology (2003). This is a very rich volume. I summarize some of the significant papers.

Richard B. Hays: Instead of supersessionism, the common position that Judaism has been rejected in Hebrews, Hays sees in Hebrews a new covenant in which there is no longer a need for an offering for sin. Jesus is the high priest who is also the sacrificial victim, the shedding of whose blood is a once-for-all act.

Mark Nanos: Nanos disagrees with Hays regarding his comments about Paul and his use of Paul as a rhetorical foil in Hebrews. Nanos believes the author of Hebrews wrote to a Jewish group that cannot receive the benefits of sacrifice as they might wish. So the author is offering a renewed or continued Covenantalism.

Morna Hooker writes a very clear statement about Hebrews and makes a comparison with Paul in such a way that readers of Paul will better understand the letter of Hebrews: both speak of an incarnational Jesus. In Paul, Christ dies our death and sets us free from the consequences of sin, while in Hebrews Jesus acts as a high priest who leads us into the presence of God.

Harold W. Attridge writes a significant short story of God. God exists as creator and sovereign Lord of the natural world and the guarantor of the moral order. God also stands in a key relationship to the covenant community. Therefore, the God of Hebrews is known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the beginning of the covenant community.

The scientist John Polkinghorne notes there is a platonic type of thought in Hebrews with its emphasis on a heavenly realm of eternal reality compared to the phenomena of this world. However, the modern scientific view recognizes we live on the edge of chaos, and like the suffering found in Hebrews, we will come out of the chaos to new life (exaltation).

Loveday Alexander writes primarily on the well-known list of Jewish heroes in 11:4–12:2. The prophet-martyrs exemplify the tension between withdrawal from the world (desert spirituality) and engagement with the world (social and political activism), that is, between priestly and prophetic callings. These heroes are not, however, the ultimate models of the Christian faith. It is, at the end, Jesus who is then pioneer and perfecter of our faith (12:2). Alexander then helpfully compares the Jesus model to some prophetic actions in our current existence.

Richard Bauckham wrote on Christology. New Testament Christology is best characterized as a Christology of divine identity. New Testament Christology picks up the identity of God as seen in Second Temple Judaism. Three main categories of this Jesus Christ identity seen in Hebrews are: Son, Lord, and High Priest. The High Priest identity is unique to Hebrews in the New Testament. After a somewhat graphic description of the God identity, he does a graphic type analysis of Son (1:2b–4, the Exordium), then Lord (1:5–14). Finally he gives a more extensive analysis of High Priest based on 2:5–18, 7:3, 16.

Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago

The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400. By Ramsay MacMullen. Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series Number 1. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-1589-8340-3. xii and 210 pages. Paper. $24.95.

MacMullen argues that the literary remains of the third and fourth centuries all come from the elite members of the church. The church in A.D. 200 had endless variety; Constantine after 313 used a stick and carrot method that strove for ascendance of the church over other religions and the unity of Christianity. MacMullen seeks to reconstruct the history of the change Constantine effects.

There are difficulties in reconstructing this history. Christianity began in the northeastern Greek-speaking quarter of the Roman world, not in the Latin west. The writers we know are no more than " a hundredth of one per cent of the Christian population at any given moment" (xi). So one must "look underground" for that Christianity's beliefs, i.e., to archaeological data, the tangible signs of worship practice.

What does MacMullen conclude? Church attendance, given the size of surviving church remains, was numerically low. On the other hand extra-mural churches related to saint's memorials, were crowded with other burials, with evidence of memorial meals, a tie to earlier non-Christian cemetery rituals, to the belief that the dead were somehow still sentient. This religion had less to do with intellectual formulations of belief, more to do with ritual practices. After Constantine's public recognition of Christianity many of the elite converted—and church buildings grew larger, with space recognizing the social distinctions of those attending. In brief, MacMullen argues that one can document the change that Constantine's recognition of the Christianity made archeologically. A valuable Appendix lists churches known to be built before 400 (117-141). There are also extensive notes and a long bibliography. MacMullen should inaugurate an interesting debate between historians who base their work primarily on early Christian texts and those who take archaeological data into account.

Edgar Krentz

Theology of the New Testament. By Udo Schnelle, tr. by M. Eugene Boring. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0-8010-3604-0. 910 pages. Cloth. $59.99.

Udo Schnelle, Professor of New Testament at Halle University, some years ago wrote a comprehensive scholarly Introduction to the New Testament, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), now a standard text. He followed that with a massive book on the *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). M. Eugene Boring also translated both.

The present text may be Schnelle's crowning achievement. The publication of a major work on New Testament theology is always an event worth noting. The approach is partly historical, partly almost systematic. Schnelle begins by discussing "Meaning Formation" as the key to interpretation of any text. He argues against a neutral "history of religions approach," preferring the position that "Christian theology deals with the God who has revealed himself in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ" (49).

He structures his text chronologically. Thus he has sections on "Jesus of Nazareth: The Near God," then follows it up with two chapters that he labels "Transformations," the first describing the emergence of Christology, the second the mission "without the Precondition of Circumcision."

He uses a recurrent set of thematic subdivisions to analyze each subsequent chapter: Theology, Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Anthropology, Ethics, Ecclesiology, Eschatology, Setting in the History of Early Christian Theology. This allows for easier comparison of the thought of the different writers; but this more rigid "systematic" approach to the writings obscures how the individual writers differ in their thought structures and obscures to some degree the individuality of the New Testament writings.

Schnelle treats in order Paul, The Third Transformation: Composition of Gospels as Innovative Response to Crises, The Sayings Source, The Synoptic Gospels and Acts: Meaning through Narration, The Fourth Transformation: The Gospel in the World, The Deutero-Pauline Letters, The Catholic Epistles, Johannine Theology, and Revelation: Seeing and Understanding.

His bibliography covers pages 773–838; he uses primarily German works. Thus his chapter on 1 Peter never mentions John Elliott's or Paul Achtemeier's commentaries on the letter, or the other major works of Elliott or the debate between Elliott and David Balch on the relation of the readers to the society around them. Schnelle is better in his discussion of Hebrews, referring to Harold Attridge's and Craig Koester's commentaries and some English monographs. Revelation refers to M. Eugene Boring's articles on Revelation, but to almost no other

English literature. Schnelle has given us a detailed, comprehensive work that passes in review all the writings of the New Testament. One will need to consult it frequently, though it has some problems as given above. It is a major addition to the Theolog-y/ies of the New Testament.

Edgar Krentz

The Rising of Bread for the World. An Outcry of Citizens Against Hunger. By Arthur Simon. New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8091-4600-0. vii and 168 pages. Paper. $16.95.

This book is at once a history of the origin and present status of Bread for the World and an autobiography of Bread's founder, Arthur Simon. Simon grew up in a Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod parsonage; his late brother Paul was a Democratic Senator from Illinois. Simon in fact participated in brother Paul's campaign for the Illinois legislature during his third seminary year at Concordia St. Louis. Arthur was part of a creative generation of Concordia students who tried to move the seminary out of its ecumenical shell and to address freely the theological and social issues of the mid-twentieth century.

After several early church assignments, Arthur Simon was called to Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan's lower east side in the 1960s. He joined a vibrant group of inner-city pastors, the most famous of whom was Richard Neuhaus, a Missouri Synod pastor who later in life became a Roman Catholic priest. This was the time of Vatican II and the Civil Rights Movement, signs of change in church and world. In 1966, Simon published *Faces of Poverty,* in which he introduced stellar members of his congregation and then criticized the church's flight from poor and racially changing neighborhoods that reflected a theology of success rather than a theology of the cross.

Two Simon books on hunger in the early '70s, one co-authored with his brother Paul, marked a major transition in his life and the launching of the citizens lobby now known as Bread for the World. An outstanding board was formed, including Eugene Carson Blake, who had recently retired as General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. An early (1974) victory came in getting the U. S. Congress to support funding for the International Development Association. Bread's salary structure was based on need rather than position. Simon's salary never reached the level earned by that of an average elementary school teacher and sometimes fell below that of the mailroom clerk.

The second half of the book chronicles the successes, challenges, and setbacks of Bread during Simon's long term as president. Letter campaigns, policy statements, and lobbying took a number of forms. Policy statements emphasized structural changes more than direct assistance. A national campaign for the right to food was introduced in Congress by Senator Mark Hatfield. Success in this campaign was followed by passage of a thirty-five million ton, farmer-owned grain reserve in 1977 that enabled the country to be ready for food crises throughout the world.

How many lobbyists does Bread have? Try 61,000. These Bread members contact decision makers on behalf of hungry people. Still in 2008, thirty-one million Americans received benefits from food stamps while eleven million others who were fully qualified received none. A 1985 book *Christian Faith and Public Policy,* authored by Simon, made the case for citizen action against hunger. Money crunch and staff cuts hit in the 1980s, and in general that was a lost decade for many of the world's poor.

Simon is now retired from Bread, and its current president is the equally competent David Beckmann. Attempts to pass a "harvest of peace" resolution in 1990 failed when Iraq seized Kuwait and altered the mood in Congress. Simon observes: "Christians place their ultimate hop not in anything so fleeting as shifting political winds, but in the resurrection of Jesus."

During the Marshall Plan after World War II, the United States contributed about three percent of its total annual income, and ten percent of its federal budget, to help desperate Europeans. By the late 1990s those percents had fallen to one-tenth of one percent and less than one half of one percent respectively. One can only hope and pray that Bread keeps rising.

Ralph W. Klein

Mission als Namenszeugnis: Eine Ideologiekritik in Sachen Religion. By Jochen Teuffel. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009. ISBN 978-3-16-149910-4. Paper. 269 pages. 24 Euros.

Jochen Teuffel wrote this book in Tao Fung Shan (Mountain of Way and Wind), Hong Kong, which is connected with the legacy of Karl L. Reichelt. As a dogmatic theologian, the author brings a systematic contribution to missional theology. The book title "mission as name-witness" is provocative in critique of ideology. Aware of the fatal mistakes of mission under the cloths of colonialism, Teuffel believes that the gospel must not be domesticated through western Christendom. A sensational event took place in 1949 when the Chinese government expelled European-American missionaries from the country, accusing them of espionage and colonialism. However, today we observe a new beginning of the church in China: the three self churches movement (self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating). Beyond that, we must add one more self movement: self-theologizing construction for Sino-Christian theology.

The book centers around the translation of God's name. When it comes to *Elohim* or *Adonai* in the Hebrew Bible, the appellations occupy a central meaning rather than replacing the name of God. *Elohim* or *Adonai* are embedded as predicates regarding the name of God. *Elohim* is representative of the name YHWH rather than an alternative name of God. YHWH is not replaced by any appellative titles. In the Septuagint translation of *HoTheos*, *Elohim* is theistically specified. Because of the holiness of God's name (Exod 20:7; Lev 24:16), the Tetragramm (YHWH) was read as *Adonai*. In the Septuagint *Adonai* is translated as *Kyrios*, while *Elohim* as *HoTheos*. God's self-introduction (Exod 20:2f) keeps God's name intact, although we recognize cultural translations of it. "God" is also no adequate translation of the Greek *HoTheos*, because the definite article *Ho* is not translated. In John's prologue, *logos* is translated as *theos* in the sense of predicate. It does not identify the *logos* as *HoTheos*.

Christian mission is defined by Jesus' mission mandate: baptizing in the name of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). On the basis of the Trinitarian economy of salvation, the witness to God's name has abiding significance. In fact, the doctrine of the Trinity as the interpretation of the name of the God of Israel takes seriously the Hebrew Bible and Israel's faith for Trinitarian mission in a Christian context. It is unfortunate that Teuffel does not discuss the Trinitarian dimension of Christian witness to the God of Israel in ecumenical dialogue with *missio Dei* in the post-Willingen period. Nevertheless, Teuffel indicates a new path to overcome mission as divine sending in a modalist tendency (Karl Barth) as well as mission as participation in divine *perichoresis* in the social doctrine (divinization; Catherine Lacugna).

Paul S. Chung
Luther Seminary

Briefly Noted

Harold W. Attridge's new translation of *The Acts of Thomas,* volume 3 in the Early Christian Apocrypha series (Polebridge Press, $18.00), contains everything necessary for understanding this text: a careful translation of the Greek and Syriac text, an introduction that sets it in historical context, text-critical and interpretive notes clarifying unusual language, an extensive bibliography, and an index of biblical and other literary citations and allusions. In short this is an ideal edition, lacking only the original text. It is one of the five early Acta to survive (along with Andrew, John, Peter, and Paul). They provide fascinating glimpses into the piety and hagiography of pre-Constantinian Christianity.

Edgar Krentz

Preaching Helps

First Sunday of Advent to Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Advent—Nine Years Later

When I wrote my first of these "Preaching Helps" columns in 2003, I shared that I was preaching in a congregation earnestly hoping their bishop will give them a pastor for Christmas. After describing how their eyes were peeled for any activity and their ears perked for any news, I half-whimsically asked, "What could possibly make us that anxious and expectant for the coming of the Christ? A healthy dose of uncertainty, perhaps? How about some honest-to-goodness fretting over the future?" My half-whimsical question has become deadly serious. This year, we heard that the world was going to end on May 21, 2011, and then that Judgment Day will come on October 21. While some among us might make light of such theology, we can scarcely snicker at the ways the churches whose theologies we hold dear are coming to an end. As I write these words in mid-July, we are waiting to see whether Congress and the President will raise the United States' debt ceiling, or whether the world-as-we-know-it will in fact end on August 2. With the unemployment rate over 9 percent and one in every 519 U.S. households receiving a foreclosure filing in April 2011, many people's world-as-we-know-it already ended. And this is just in the United States.

When I learned that Pastor Amy Kienzle would spend from February to May 2011 as an Ecumenical Accompanier in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, a ministry of the World Council of Churches, I immediately sought to secure her reflections and perspective for these Preaching Helps. Pastor Kienzle has served as pastor of Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Dearborn Heights, Michigan, since 2007 after receiving her M.Div. with an emphasis in Biblical Studies from The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. She has her BA in Medieval and Renaissance Studies with a minor in Religious Studies from New York University. After a 2005 trip to Palestine and Israel as part of an LSTC J-Term travel seminar with Professors Barbara Rossing and Esther Menn, Amy developed a passion for justice and peace in the Holy Land. She brings us insights and experiences from the part of the world where the Word became flesh, and broadens at least my perspective to some of the global implications of Christ's coming in this season when, so often, we focus on ourselves. Amy provides Preaching Helps for the First Sunday in Advent through the Baptism of Our Lord. When we come to the Second, Third, and Fourth Sundays after the Epiphany, the reflections are my meager offerings.

After his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus' first words, at least according to John's Gospel, are, "What are you looking for?" (1:38) Jesus asks John's two disciples who had followed him like sheep. These disciples could have answered, "Well, John said that you are the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We're looking for that. Are you the one John was sent to testify to? Do you baptize with the Holy Spirit?" That's heady stuff. That's churchy stuff. And Jesus could have replied, "Yep, I am!" and believing would be a whole lot different.

As we live our lives, that's not what we're looking for. Whether we claim as our preaching context our crumbling institutional church, our struggling national economy, seemingly insolvable global hotspots, the changes and chances of life, or the guilt and grief that sorrows and scars our souls, our answer is not so heady or churchy. So, speaking for us, the disciples answered, "Where are you staying?" In our day-to-day living, that's what we're looking for as well. "Where are you staying?" Jesus, are you staying with me? Jesus, will you walk with me? Are you really the Light? Can I trust you enough to follow? Jesus, do you see me as a winner? Do you think that I can make a difference? Will you show me how? "Jesus, where are you staying?" Are you staying with me?

And Jesus answers, "Come and see." And we tag along with Jesus and we see that Jesus stays with us. The babe born in a manger, the man baptized at the river, becomes the healer of the sick, the friend of the outcast, the herald of good news that God's reign is near. Jesus stays with us. Even in pain, even in humiliation, rejection, betrayal, denial, destruction, and death, Jesus stays with us. That's what it means to be "the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That's what it means to "baptize with the Holy Spirit." In Jesus, God stays with us, no matter what!

The people in our pews—and perhaps we preachers—look for spectacle, miracle, and some modicum of success as assurance that God has not abandoned us. A message of the Christmas Cycle of the liturgical year is that this is not the way God has chosen to work. "What are you looking for?" Are you looking for the nearness of Christ? Don't look to the heavens. Don't look for the spectacular. Don't look to your bank account, parochial report, or whatever it is you use to measure "success." Look to your life. Jesus is there, staying with you. "Are you staying with me, Jesus?" We ask. Jesus answers, "Come and see." Preach in ways that help your people to live their lives and find out that Jesus is.

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

First Sunday of Advent
November 27, 2011

Isaiah 64:1–9
Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19
1 Corinthians 1:3–9
Mark 13:24–37

First Reading

The Advent season plays with time; it progresses toward a specific ending that is really a new beginning pointing to the eschatological realization of God's kingdom. It is an unending spiral, at the center of which is God. Each Sunday's readings mark a point moving us forward and to which we will always return.

Themes: Restoration of the community, waiting for deliverance, hope in God's saving acts, long-suffering, repentance, God is faithful, keeping alert and prepared for the Lord's coming

The people of Isaiah's prophecy vent their deep frustration, disappointment, fear, deepest desires and longings to the God who has promised to be their God and has made them God's people. The first two verses of Isaiah 64 are an emotional outburst of expressive language that has violent undertones—"tear open the heavens… so that the mountains would quake…as when fire kindles brushwood…so that the nations might tremble at your presence." What would make us cry out like this to God? What things are we dealing with in our own lives that are cause for such strong language?

Isaiah 56–66 was of the time after the rebuilding of the Temple under the rule of the Persian Empire. Though the people had celebrated the return of the exiles scattered after the Babylonian conquest in 587 BCE, the promised restoration of Jerusalem was not going as smoothly as planned.[1] In verse 10, which we do not hear in the reading this week, the prophet expresses dashed hopes: "your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation." At the center of the passage, sandwiched between the hope that God would act mightily as in the past (vv. 1–5a) and the prayer for God to forget the people's turning away and remember they belong to God (vv. 8–9), is the recognition of human brokenness and frailty (vv. 5b–7). There is a tension that could be explored in preaching—the people experience their suffering as consequences of turning away from God (v.7) but they still call on God to help them because they recognize God's sovereign power (v. 8).

In Mark's Gospel descriptions of extreme suffering give voice to the experience of people under Roman occupation. The coming of the Son of Man on the clouds answers the cry of Isaiah 64 that the Lord would tear open the heavens and come down. Only an appearance of the divine among the people would suffice to put an end to the abuses of foreign rulers among people, whose true king is the Lord.

Pastoral Reflection

Patient waiting. Anyone who has sat in the doctor's office or stood in line at the post office to mail a package knows how difficult it is to wait. Especially in our society of immediate access to nearly anything we want, provided we have enough financial resources, the idea of waiting for anything annoys us. Now imagine waiting hundreds of years, and not only waiting, but also suffering under oppressive rule while waiting for God's deliverance. You know that God

1. Susan Ackerman, "Isaiah Introduction," *New Interpreter's Study Bible: NRSV with the Apocrypha,* ed. Walter J. Harrelson, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 956.

has taken care of you before, but now you are suffering and God seems nowhere to be found. But the good news of God's faithfulness to the promise of salvation, sustains us who are wearied with waiting.

They start to line up before 5 a.m. – thousands of men waiting to get to work in Jerusalem. Every day they wait in jumbled masses, clamoring and pushing to get through the narrow cattle stalls leading to turnstiles. Their fate is in the hands of Israeli border police, who control the opening and closing of each lane from a small booth off to the side. Permits to work in Jerusalem are more and more difficult for Palestinians to obtain. Being late for work is a great fear of these men. Being turned away completely is a nightmare. To be late or not arriving at all could mean being fired; being fired means being unable to care for your family. We watched them climbing up the sides of the stalls to get on top, so they could drop down in front of the rest of the crowd. We saw people pushing, getting angrier and angrier as only a few were let through. Human beings treated as animals, often acting the part. If you want to see the depths of human brokenness, spend a morning monitoring Qalandia Checkpoint.

The morning I was there things were not as bad as on some days, when fights might break out because, for reasons we are never told, the gates do not open. But then I saw an elderly woman come, who wanted to go through the humanitarian gate, which is reserved for women, children, elderly and sick people. She had come after most of the crowd had gone through that gate. The female soldier yelled at us when we asked her to come out of the booth. "I am not going to open the gate for every one person who comes, you just need to know that." She did let the woman through.

The coming of the Son of Man opens the way of freedom and life to all people, not just the lucky few. Salvation is for all who call upon God for deliverance. God is faithful; Christ is coming. ACK

Second Sunday of Advent
December 4, 2011

Isaiah 40:1–11
Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13
2 Peter 3:8–15a
Mark 1:1–8

First Reading

Themes: Words of comfort, end of affliction, God's coming deliverance, God is patient with us.

The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in the coming of Christ. This is clearly what the Gospel writer believes, since he sets Isaiah 40:3a as the lens through which we read the whole of Mark's Gospel. "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah…" (vv. 1–2a). It is interesting to note that although Mark seems to be quoting in part from Isaiah 40, there is a slight difference in punctuation that changes the meaning of the prophecy.

> A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God…" (Isaiah 40:3)

> "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; [3]the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" (Mark 1:2b–3)

In Isaiah's prophecy the voice cries from an unknown location that the barren wilderness is the place tamed by God's coming; valleys and hills will be leveled so the faithful can easily make their way back to the promised land with God as guide and protector. In

Mark's interpretation it is the voice that cries out *in* the wilderness—John the Baptist. God's way home is prepared by the one who is coming. This one is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. It is his birth that begins the hewing of the mountains and the smoothing of a way back to God.

It might be interesting to play with the different voices in Isaiah and the voice of John the Baptist. At first God speaks words of comfort for the prophet to speak. Then in verse 3 there is a voice in the wilderness. We may assume the voice crying out in the wilderness is God's, commanding the way to be prepared. In verse 6 there is another voice that does not know what to say. Is this the prophet's voice, asking what to speak to a fragile and finite people? And later in verse 9 Zion/Jerusalem becomes a voice speaking a message of hope and salvation to the cities of Judah, whose people have been languishing in exile.

"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together." Where is God's glory revealed? Is it in the comfort of a people long afflicted? When God comes and renews the promise of return, a promise of deliverance, then the glory of God is revealed. If the coming of Christ reveals the glory of God for all to see, how is it manifest in the church today?

Pastoral Reflection

I lived in a city at the heart of Judah. Hebron is Abraham's burial place along with his family—Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. The city's name in Arabic is *[Ibrahim] al-Khalil,* ([Abraham] Friend [of God]). It is a hill city at 900 m above sea level. I imagine the cry of God's promised deliverance going out from Jerusalem, ringing across the valley to the city of Abraham—a cry of comfort that the Palestinians living in Hebron today await just as those earlier inhabitants. When will they hear the words of Isaiah: "You have served your term, your penalty is paid"?

This city is a holy city for the people of all three Abrahamic faiths. Unfortunately this holy distinction means it is also distinguished by violence between Israeli settlers, who have taken over parts of the city, and the Palestinians whose land and homes have been taken over. There are 1500 soldiers in this city who protect the settlers and keep the Palestinians under their control.

The image of God as a shepherd, leading God's people back to the land is more powerful to me after having lived in that land for a time. One of the areas we covered in the EAPPI program was the South Hebron Hills, deep in the south of Judah. We stayed in tents with the shepherds of Susiya. One morning we awoke to a flock of sheep grazing just outside the tent we slept in. They were munching on everything in sight as the shepherds led them out before the already hot sun turned to blazing heat. A newborn lamb followed along, learning how to be a good sheep, even on its second day of life. It was trying as hard as it could to keep up, but it ended up getting lost at the side of the tent, while the others continued grazing around the other side. It was bleating a desperate cry, but the harder it tried to find its own way, the more lost it became. One of the men saw this and told a six-year-old boy, Hamoudi, to take the lamb back to the sheep pen. I watched as this young shepherd gathered the lamb in his arms (it was nearly as big as he was) and carried it resolutely and tenderly to safety.

Not one shall be lost; God gathers the lambs and gently leads the mother sheep. So it is for us and for all people at the coming of the Lord, who promises we will not be left to the injustices of this world, in which so many innocent people still suffer. Christ's coming into this world promises comfort for all God's people, when we see together God's glory. ACK

Third Sunday of Advent
December 11, 2011

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11
Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b–55
1 Thessalonians 5:16–24
John 1:6–8, 19–28

Themes: those who mourn will rejoice, God's justice, restoration and renewal

Isaiah 61:1–2a is part of the reading Jesus gives in the synagogue in Luke 4, which is the beginning of his public ministry, effectively providing the lens through which Luke views the coming of this one more powerful than any other. Jesus hears the words of God in Isaiah as his own call. He was used to going to the synagogue (we are told in Luke 4:16 that was his custom), but on that particular day Jesus heard the words of Isaiah anew. After rolling up the scroll, he says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." As Isaiah was anointed to bring good news to the oppressed, Jesus is sent into the world to "proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (4:18–19)). In Advent we give assent to the words of Jesus; this scripture of Isaiah has been fulfilled in our hearing because we believe that Christ has come and is coming again.

Mary's song from the first chapter of Luke is an alternate for the Psalm on the Third Sunday of Advent. In her song Mary speaks in past tense about the ways that God has delivered Israel by reversing the power dynamics of a world that values power over humility and the rich over those who have little. In words now all too familiar to us she sings proudly of God casting down the mighty and uplifting the lowly, filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty. But these past tenses have future vision. We know that these things have not yet come to pass universally, so we still await their promised fulfillment. Proclaiming as remembrance the ways God saved Israel and the promise God made to Abraham and his descendants, assures us of God's promise that in Christ these covenants are fulfilled. The birth of the child gestating in her womb as she sings is the sign of God's kingdom come near.

How do we hear Isaiah's words and Mary's song fresh in our ears? They have become customary for us to hear in this season of Advent. Like Jesus in the synagogue, are we able to imagine anew how God's promised salvation turns oppressive systems upside down?

There are a number of versions of Mary's *Magnificat* that could be sung by the congregation on this Sunday. How do we help people imagine Mary's words being true? Although Mary speaks of her own situation as a sign of God's favor for her own life, she broadens out the vision to people of all generations. We also can hear these words as a promise of redemption for all the oppressed of the world.

Pastoral Reflection

This past April my EAPPI team met with the Hebron office director for Defense for Children International. There are more people imprisoned from Hebron than any other city in the West Bank. A number of these are minors, who are put into the same Israeli prisons as adult prisoners. On average in 2011 there were over 200 Palestinian children detainees in a given month.[2] As we sat across the table from Raed, he explained to us that children as young as seven-years-old have been arrested under the rule of occupation law, usually for throw-

2. http://www.dci-palestine.org/documents/detention-bulletin-issue-17-may-2011, (accessed Monday, June 27, 2011).

ing stones. Often the army arrests children in the middle of the night, without their parents being able to accompany them and without legal representation. Organizations like the International Red Cross, DCI, the Palestinian Prisoners' Society and Addameer work to ease the suffering of the imprisoned and their families.

Occupation is a military administration of an area under the control of an outside force. This is the daily reality of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. They are severely restricted by walls, checkpoints, fences, and a permit system that prevents them from moving freely to work, school, hospitals, and to visit family. Jesus was born into a land under Roman occupation. He likely saw some similar injustices imposed on his own people; the returnees from exile, to whom Isaiah spoke, were more than familiar with what it means to live under the oppressive rule of a more powerful nation.

God promises liberation to the captive and the oppressed. God sent God's Son into the world to proclaim release and freedom for all people. Can we in the United States even imagine what it means for the captives to be set free? Few of us are literally imprisoned. We either have to see Jesus' words as symbolic of the metaphorical oppression and captivity of our society, in which we are beholden to what is not life-giving, or we must put ourselves into the shoes of the imprisoned and oppressed. Either of these is a way to preach these readings. One approach calls us to reevaluate our own value systems to see that God wants us to put trust in Christ's saving power, not in things that are finite—overwork, drugs, alcohol, food, other unhealthy behaviors. The other calls us to speak out against oppressive powers that keep others from having access to the freedom God promises in Christ. ACK

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 18, 2011

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16
Luke 1:47–55
Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26 (Alternate)
Romans 16:25–27
Luke 1:26–38

First Reading

Themes: The ordinary is used for God's purpose, the Davidic covenant fulfilled, God is the one who acts in human history

What must the words of Gabriel have meant to a young Jewish woman of first-century Palestine? Not only that, but Mary was a young woman whose cousin Elizabeth was of the priestly lineage of Aaron (Luke 1:5) and whose fiancée Joseph was of the house and lineage of David (Luke 1:27).

> "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1; 31–33)

These words of the angel are clearly messianic. He invokes the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:11–16) to explain who this unexpected child will be. The birth will begin the fulfillment of God's promise to restore God's people. Mary's song of ascent to this announcement forms an outline of what God's unending kingdom will be. In it the ways of the world will be turned upside down (Luke 1:46–56).

The visit of the angel to Mary parallels the announcement of John's birth to Zechariah earlier in Luke 1:18–23. Like Mary, Zechariah questions the possibility that his own wife is able to have a child, since

she is so old. But the fact that her older and barren cousin Elizabeth is pregnant confirms for Mary that anything is possible. It is also Elizabeth's child, who will prepare the way for Mary's as the prophet Isaiah foretold (Luke 3:4–6). We heard this prophecy already in the second week of Advent. Even *in utero*, John will point to the embryo in Mary's womb as the fulfillment of God's promise (Luke 1:44). Zechariah also sings his own song after his own son is born; a song that reinforces the angel's promise to Mary that her own son is the one foretold by prophets centuries before (Luke 1:68–79).

The stories of the two births are woven tightly together in the first chapter of Luke. These lives will intersect one final time at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when he is baptized by John in the Jordan and God's own voice confirms for him the words Gabriel spoke to his mother (Luke 3:21). The season of Advent continues to play with our sense of linear *chronos* time in favor of *kairos*, which is God's time. Everything happens according to God's plan of salvation.

Pastoral Reflection

The bus ride from Jerusalem to Nazareth took me more than two hours. As I looked at the scenery of the Judean landscape, I thought of Mary and Joseph making the journey in the opposite direction on their way to Bethlehem. Nazareth today is a Palestinian Arab city within the state of Israel. As with many of the cities in Israel and Palestine, this one is a mix of old and new. The streets wind around through the old market, where merchants sell their goods and old Arab mansions have been converted into cozy guesthouses. In the newer areas fast food *falafel* shops line the streets and city buses and taxis zip by on their way around. Mary's well is found in this part of the city. You could pass it by if you didn't know what you were looking for.

Not far away, the Church of the Annunciation stands as a grand monument to the story of the angel's visit. One of the most moving things about this church is that people from countries around the world make pilgrimages here to visit the place where Mary first heard the news that she was to bear a son, who would fulfill God's promise to redeem the world. Around the courtyard in front are mosaics given by Roman Catholics from around the world. Most of them do not depict the annunciation, but instead are of Mary enthroned in heaven or the Madonna and child. One that does show the angel's visit to Mary is from the Philippines. Mary is wearing a simple but beautiful dress with red striped skirt. Her long black hair flows behind her. She sits outside near the well with an amazing turquoise sky above her and brilliant emerald grass at her feet. The angel hovers just in front of her and the Holy Spirit as a dove comes down from heaven above, sending a beam of radiance onto Mary's head. She clasps her hands together in a gesture of obedience and assent to the will of God.

It is important that we not simply skip over this episode in the gospel drama. At this point in the Advent season people are completely fixated on the preparations for Christmas. But if we skip right to the manger scene, we miss the import of the angel's proclamation. It is God's favor on Mary, an ordinary human being, which is a sign to us that God acts in human flesh to bring salvation to the world.

There is much that can be done with this story of the annunciation. The paucity of emotional description leaves room for our imagination. I picture Mary as a young Palestinian girl living in Nazareth today. How would she hear these words of promise? Advent compels us to ask questions and wrestle with these readings in new ways as the living Christ is born anew into our world. ACK

Nativity of Our Lord
December 25, 2011

Isaiah 62:6–12
Psalm 97
Titus 3:4–7
Luke 2:[1–7] 8–20

First Reading

The Gospel author starts a new episode in chapter 2 with the phrase, "In those days…". Luke wants to locate us in particular times and places because God acts in human history. The realm of the divine and human are not distinctly separate. The fact that angels burst in on earthly shepherds, further reinforces this.[3]

It seems far-fetched to imagine that Rome asked every person in "all the world" to return to his ancestral home for registration in the census, but the author of the Gospel uses this worldwide event to explain how Jesus from Nazareth would be born in the city of David. Getting the parents to Bethlehem gave added Messianic significance to this birth. To this one God has given the throne of his ancestor David. That the whole world is said to be involved in this event indicates the monumental nature of this birth. Yet, the world is not even aware of the birth of this baby to an unknown couple from Nazareth. No one would have imagined that this child, lain in a feeding trough on his first night of life, would be the savior of the world. God acts unexpectedly.

That Emperor Augustus orders the census is a reminder of the control Rome had over the people in Palestine. In contrast to Augustus' broad decree, the message of Jesus' birth went out to shepherds. They were not rich or powerful people, but simple, hard-working men. There is a dynamic of power at play in Luke's Gospel. God in Christ turns the world's view of power on its head. Jesus is given the titles Savior, Messiah, and Lord (v. 11). These are not religious titles; they were claims to usurp the power of the Emperor, who was also called lord and savior.[4] This birth questions the status quo. The first word of this divine action in human history is not proclaimed by royal decree but on the lips of shepherds returning to tend their fields.

In Isaiah 62:1 the prophet speaks words of determination that we might want to consider today. We cannot pretend that what happens in other places in the world, does not matter to us. And in Jerusalem today there is a lot happening that runs counter to God's promise to vindicate. Indeed God has established Jerusalem and it is renowned (v. 7). These days, to some people, it is becoming infamous, synonymous with Palestinian home demolitions and more and more land confiscation. While others want to claim all of the city for the state of Israel as though God's symbol of return home can be claimed by only a few.

Pastoral Reflection

"You can smile now," the soldier told us as we stood watching the invaders leaving over the hills. "We aren't very happy," we told him. "Why not? This is good news. We got rid of them." He wanted us to be thankful for the peaceful resolution to what might have turned violent. He wanted us to see that he and his fellow soldiers were not bad guys. We agreed they were not bad guys, but told them the system of occupation that ruled the lives of Palestinians was the true problem. Yes, they had stopped them from ruining this land, but they sent them

3. Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Gospel of Luke," *Sacra Pagina*, volume 3, (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 51–52.

4. *New Interpreter's Study Bible: NRSV with Apocrypha*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), see comments under 2:1–20, p 1855.

onto another Palestinian's land. This trespass happens weekly; every Saturday morning shepherds from the settlement lead their sheep as weapons against the Palestinians in Susiya. The army has taken to preparing ahead of time, showing up around 8 a.m. before the madness starts. Good news? I found it hard to smile.

Now that I have lived among some real-life shepherds, the image of these first-century shepherds in the fields, tending their flocks by night comes alive for me in new ways. They are modern versions for sure, some wearing hoodie sweatshirts and tight-fitting jeans, talking on their cell phones as they use lengths of rubber tubing instead of shepherds' crooks. But these men and boys know every one of the animals in their care. They know how to tend them. Their lives are inextricably linked with the lives of the sheep and goats. And some of these shepherds were so young – boys of 12, 13, 15, taking the family herds out to pasture. These are not politically powerful people, but politics affect their lives. Many shepherds in Palestine today are vulnerable to loss of land, limited water resources, home demolitions by the Israeli army, and being confined to smaller and smaller spaces. What would it mean for these shepherds to be visited by a heavenly host? What would be the message of great joy for them? How does the birth of the Messiah into our world change things for anyone dealing with impossible odds?

Despite the difficulties of life for the shepherds we spent time with, I learned a lot about hope from them. Life's moments of joy were not lost and in fact they appreciated the simple things much more than we do. Christmas is a time when many of us fill our houses with excess—food, gifts, drink, candy, decorations—but is that a sign of the good news of great joy God promises? We who have so much can forget there are people in this world losing their homes, their land and their lives, even as we celebrate the birth of Christ. As preachers we can help people clear away the clutter to see how God's good news comes in unexpected times and places for us, but also for the rest of the world. ACK

The Name of Jesus
January 1, 2012

Numbers 6:22–27
Psalm 8
Galatians 4:4–7
Luke 2:15–21

First Reading

Themes: baptism into Christ, human freedom and responsibility, inheritance of resurrection life

These readings move from the particular to the universal. The reading from Numbers has Aaron bless the Israelites. They are entrusted with the name of God. It is a unifying distinction, one they use to identify themselves in contrast to others until this day. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul explains how God broadened out this election to take in others as children of God. Just a few verses before Paul explains that however many have been baptized have been clothed with Christ, so that there are no distinctions between those who have taken on this name (3:28). In 3:29 he says even more clearly what he reiterates in 4:7: "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise."

Paul speaks of this as adoption (4:5). Faith in Christ means that those who have been baptized have been taken in as children of God (cf. 3:27–29; 4:6–7). That God sent the Son in human flesh to a human mother, born under the law, means that all of us born to earthly mothers under the law may be redeemed by this incarnation (4:4–5a).

But it is not the birth that saves us. Paul has already explained to the Galatians that it is the crucified Christ, who lives in us (cf. 2:19–20) as the Spirit of the Son sent by God to give our hearts the ability to cry out to God, "Abba, Father!" (4:6).

In Psalm 8 we get a mirror image of God's majestic work in creation and human work tending this creation. At the center is a question we all wrestle with: "What are human beings that you even care about us at all," (vv. 3–4). We are told that humans were made only a "little lower than God" (v. 5), which gives us a special responsibility over the rest of creation. The psalm is book-ended by acknowledgment of God's sovereignty: "O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (v. 9).

Finally in the Gospel the good news of the Incarnation is germinated through its being told first to simple and unknown shepherds. From this humble beginning, the message began to spread slowly, but relentlessly to the whole world (2:17–20). The author of Luke is believed to be the author of Acts and these two works are considered to be part of one great telling of the good news of Christ spreading throughout the world. In Acts we read how the disciples and Paul take the message to the far reaches of the known world.

Pastoral Reflection

Names are significant. Names are entrusted to us by the ones who have authority to give them, usually parents. Most people, when they have children, take great care in choosing names that carry meaning. Names expressing positive qualities like strength, generosity, or bravery are indicative of the desire of a parent that a child exhibit such attributes. Often children bear the name of another person, who is admired or beloved of the parents. In the Muslim culture, often the first-born son is named Muhammed or some variation—Ahmed, Hamoudi, Mahmoud, Hamoud. In Hebron if you couldn't remember a man's name, it was always worth it to guess Muhammed. If you were wrong, the weight of that name is such that he would not likely take offense.

But names can also be used to cut us down. One day while I was standing on the corner monitoring the checkpoint where the Palestinian children come through on their way to school, a car pulled up next to me. Only Israeli settlers are allowed to drive on the street, so I knew I was in for a confrontation. The passenger had a camera pointed in my face and from the backseat a man said, "Hello, Garbage," as easily as he might have said my name. Clearly they did not appreciate my presence. Even though I know I am not garbage, the label still stung, partly because I am not used to someone treating me with such hatred, particularly without knowing me.

Bearing the name of Christ means more than just a vain hope that we will be like Christ (Phil 2:1–11). We know that no matter how hard we try, we will fail at that more times than not. Being granted the name of Christ in fact frees us from having to try to be like Christ out of the fear that unless we meet God's expectations, we will face the consequences. As Paul tells the church in Galatia, our adoption into Christ frees us from the constraints of the law. God gives us the name of Christ, so that we are made acceptable to God not of our own merit but only because the Spirit of Christ dwells within us. It is also an indelible if invisible mark reminding us whose we are. The mark of the cross, imposed on the head of the baptized, is a seal of the Holy Spirit and mark of the cross of Christ, which is not undone by any labels the world chooses to give. The name of Christ is a gift from God; it is entrusted to us as a sign of God's faithfulness, and it can never be erased. ACK

Baptism of Our Lord
January 8, 2012

Genesis 1:1–5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1–7
Mark 1:4–11

First Reading

Themes: Creation/new creation, God's glory revealed, God's voice, water and baptism

Which readings the lectionary assigns together makes a difference for the way we might preach in any given week. We heard part of the Gospel passage from Mark back in the second week of Advent (Mark 1:1–8). There the passage was paired with the reading from Isaiah (40:1–11) of the voice crying out in the wilderness. In that week the connection was the fulfillment of Isaiah's messianic prophecy. One could argue that Mark wants to make that connection with the whole of his Gospel from the way it begins. The Gospel begins, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah…" (vv. 1–2a), but we do not hear verses 1–3 this week. For the Baptism of Our Lord the passage from Mark is coupled with the opening verses of Genesis. The first reading can set the thematic frame for the rest of the readings.

Both the reading from Genesis and Psalm 29 invoke images of God's powerful voice over the waters. In Psalm 29 it is the might of this voice that breaks the cedars and can strip the whole forest bare. It can startle nations and mountains as though they were skittish animals. God's glory is shown and God is in control. Even the flood, perhaps reminiscent of the story of Noah, is beneath the throne of God (v. 10). In Genesis we hear the brief account of the first day of creation, which began when a wind from God moved over the black waters and God's voice broke out, calling light into being. God need only speak for it to be so.

In the gospel reading the water is an obvious common thread. And it is God's action in and above that water that is the focus. God speaks again as in Genesis, and God's voice proclaims Jesus the beloved Son. Mark was likely reminding his first readers of the connection to the first day of Creation. In Jesus Christ God was doing a new thing. As at Creation God is in control. The Spirit descending on Jesus as he comes out of the water also shares the image of wind with the Genesis account. The Greek word *pneuma* means "spirit" but also "wind" or "breath."

Pastoral Reflection

Water is a precious and often scarce resource for people in the Middle East. At the time when I left Hebron, as the weather began to warm and the winter rains had about ended, people were lamenting how little rain had fallen thus far. It was not enough to fill their wells and keep their families, fields, and animals hydrated. So they were forced to buy tanker trucks of water in order to survive. I remember being shocked to hear that our landlord had to buy a tank every month that cost him 400 shekels or about $130. I became ashamed that I had been taking showers and using water without much thought. Not only that, but clean water is not always available. In many areas of the West Bank, due to lack of infrastructure, the drinking water is at risk of contamination by sewage from septic tanks. Palestinians are not often granted permits by the Israeli government to build the necessary pipes and water systems to keep the two separate. So we find increased rates of illness and kidney disease, particularly among the elderly and young children.

We in the U.S. think nothing of turning on the tap and finding clean running water. Just like with so many things in our society, the abundance of this resource means we easily devalue it. I know I don't worry about

whether I will have water enough to drink, cook, take a shower every day. and wash my car. But now I think about how tragic it is that people in Palestine, Africa, South America, India, and other places would be lucky to have water as clean as what is left after I rinse my dishes.

Water is life. Our bodies are mostly water. We need it to drink, to grow food, to wash; the whole of creation needs water for its survival. It is significant that the story of creation begins at the waters of the deep. If we are to trust modern scientific theories about the origins of complex life on earth starting in the oceans, this is not too far off the mark. In the church we say water is life in another way too. Not only do we recognize its significance for sustaining life physiologically but also soterologically. Even when we baptize and remember our baptisms, the liturgy takes us through God's saving acts beginning with Noah and the flood, the Israelites coming through the waters of the Red Sea, and the baptism of Jesus. His baptism at the Jordan prefigures the baptism we share in the body of Christ. Christ is the new creation, through whom creation itself came into being (John 1).

The gift of God through baptism is not to be taken for granted, though it seems in our trusting God's abundant grace, we have forgotten how precious and essential the promise of salvation in Christ is. The church is becoming less relevant to a world that seems to need the promise of God's unfailing love and redemption more than ever. As we enter Epiphany season, we should seek to reveal this good news through lives worthy of the name under which we are baptized. ACK

Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 15, 2012

1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20)
Psalm 139:1–6, 13–18
1 Corinthians 6:12–20
John 1:43–51

In the babe born at Bethlehem who, liturgically, has grown to adulthood in the past two weeks, God is doing something new. If you doubt it, look to Samuel and see that God has worked this way before. God's revelation to Samuel provides a precedent for God selecting a boy to announce a radical shift from an established priestly family to a new priestly lineage. In fact, Luke, who provides the only account of Jesus as a boy, most likely drew upon this story to announce the shift from the temple priesthood to the priesthood of Christ. Most notably, as Samuel instructs the priest Eli, so the adolescent Jesus instructs the rabbis in the temple (Luke 2:41–46). As "the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people" (1 Sam 2:26), so "the child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him" (Luke 2:40). As God spoke through Samuel to announce a new priesthood, so God acts in Jesus to do something new. This message comes in an age like ours: "The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread" (1 Sam 3:1). The good news here is that "the lamp of God had not yet gone out" (1 Sam 3:3), and it hasn't yet.

I often know myself to be more like Eli than Samuel, and not only because, like Eli, my "eyesight had begun to grow dim so that [I] could not see" (1 Sam 3:2). The question is whether I can see the Word becoming flesh, the Christ being manifest, in ways and places outside my established and cherished

priesthood and religion. In preparing this sermon, perhaps I need to seek out those younger than me and demand, "What was it that [God] told you? Do not hide it from me" (1 Sam 3:17).

The homiletic hazards to be avoided when preaching on the Second Reading from First Corinthians are moral exhortation and doctrinal instruction. Preachers might do better to spend time in Paul's Corinth to discover and name the ways their own congregants compromise their beliefs to get ahead and struggle to balance Christian freedom and Christian responsibility. How might we help our hearers to do this when it comes to individualism, career, wealth, power, status, reputation, sex, nation, piety, church and ethnic group? Paul seems to do this by sorting things that benefit from things that dominate.

Such a sermon will be an honest *conversation* about the Christ made manifest amid the realities of life, "in which congregation and preacher, together with Scripture, Christian history, doctrine and practice, the greater Christian community, and voices from the world search for an adequate Christian interpretation of life in all its dimensions, so that the congregation thinks, feels, and acts from the perspective of the Gospel."[5] In the sermon, the preacher facilitates conversation by correlating claims of Christian tradition and the congregation in its present time, context, circumstance, and theological perspective. On behalf of the congregation, the preacher speaks to the contemporary world from the perspective of the Gospel, and critiques the Christian tradition form the perspective of contemporary insights and experiences. The sermon might reinforce what the congregation holds to be true, prompts the congregation to modify their thoughts and actions, raise questions that they have not previously considered, or introduce them to new possibilities that redirect thoughts, feelings, and actions. Yet, its overall goal is to proclaim with Paul that "anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him, that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, …and that you are not your own, …for you were bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:17–20).

In our Gospel reading, Jesus is unmistakably unremarkable. Jesus doesn't teach anything, show any sign, or in any way discourse on his identity or God's coming reign. And perhaps this is the point. Contrary to all our human expectations, God's very own eternal Word comes to us in the flesh of an ordinary human being—the son of Joseph from, of all places, Nazareth, and particularly in his descent (crucifixion) and ascent (exaltation). No wonder Philip scoffs at Nathanael's invitation to come and see Jesus. Throughout this Gospel, John shows us that Jesus is genuinely human; he hungers, thirsts, cries, and dies.

Yet, Philip calls Jesus "him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote" (John 1:45). Nathanael declares, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49) Jesus awakens in people a faith that leads to following not by proving, persuading, or convincing, but simply by being present to and with them. For John, this presence is nothing other than God's own power and authority. Jesus' call to Philip and Nathanael—and us on this day—is not to take up the mission but to experience an Epiphany—to "see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:51). For those who remember Jacob's vision of the ladder of angels at Bethel (Gen 28:10–17), Jesus is the ultimate ladder between heaven and earth, time and eternity, the finite and the infinities. Those who see Jesus see the

5. Craig A. Satterlee, *When God Speaks through You: How Faith Convictions Shape Preaching and Mission* (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2007), 71–72.

very face of God, just as Jacob did.

So the message of this sermon, it seems, is that God chooses to use an ordinary human being to come to us and to do something extraordinary and new. Being joined to this One and the new thing he is doing makes us new as well, and we are free to sort out what this newness means for our lives and then to live that way. CAS

Third Sunday after the Epiphany
January 22, 2012

Jonah 3:1–5, 10
Psalm 62:5–12
1 Corinthians 7:29–31
Mark 1:14–20

Last summer, each member of the first-year class of the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program memorized two verses of Jonah and, together, they recited and embodied the entire book. I learned that the best preparation for preaching on Jonah is hearing the entire tale of this prophet's adventures. Its layers of meaning are revealed in the emotional coloring and texture of the book, which are lost on a silent reading. The book of Jonah is funny, improbable, subversive, and ironic. Most important, we discover that this story is not as much about Jonah as it is about God's persistence, responsiveness, and all-embracing love.

As a preacher, Jonah wouldn't fare well in our preaching program. In fact, Jonah's preaching might lead us to question why we need to work on our preaching at all. Jonah's message is, well, anti-gospel. "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (Jonah 3:4) Jonah offers no promise or good news; he does not speak a single word of hope. I am told that, in Hebrew, the name *Jonah* is the name *Noah* turned inside out. Rather than investing in his message of repentance, Jonah seems to be expecting—hoping even—a sequel to the flood, when God washed the unrepentant away in forty days. But despite Jonah's preaching, Nineveh repents and God relents.

It is important to remember this story is more about God than Jonah. Otherwise, we might be tempted to decide the moral of the story is that our preaching really doesn't matter. The good news is that God can accomplish God's purposes with a minimum of faithfulness on our part, and faithfulness has more to do with what we do than how we feel. The good news is that, when God intends salvation for all people, we are not going to thwart God. In Christ Jesus, God does intend salvation for all—including whatever we would name as *Nineveh* in our lives and in our world. So, we might as well get on board, get over our grudges, and get on with proclaiming God's salvation for all.

Depending on where you sit, Paul's message in our reading from First Corinthians is more bad news. Like Jonah, Paul proclaims, "…the appointed time has grown short…" and calls for his own brand of repentance. This is bad news unless we are among those for whom Paul's assertion, "For the present form of this world is passing away" (v. 31), is a true word of grace. All we need do is look around to see ways the present form of this world is passing away. The homiletic question is in what ways is Paul's pronouncement good news for our hearers? Paul seems to be naming the possibility that spouses, mourning, rejoicing, possessions, and dealings with this world may produce anxieties that hinder our devotion to Christ. Regardless of whether we truly believe the appointed time has grown short, we belong to Christ and the in-breaking reign of God, and so the claims of this world do not merit our ultimate devotion.

Looking over some of my early sermons on Mark 1:14–20, I find that my tendency

was to move immediately to verse 16 and Jesus' call of Simon and his brother Andrew, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, and basically call my congregation to something. The sermon's call was exasperated when the Third Sunday after the Epiphany was also the occasion of my congregation's annual meeting. Craig the homiletics professor would not have been pleased with Craig the newly minted pastor.

"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:14–15). The sermon, like the reading, starts here. Mark's portrait of Jesus gives the impression that preaching was the primary emphasis of Jesus' ministry. We can describe the vision of Jesus' preaching ministry as "fulfillment."[6] Jesus came onto the scene "proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'" Rather than calling people to follow, the first priority of Jesus' preaching ministry is announcing the good news that the promises of Scripture are fulfilled and the long-promised reign of God is at hand. Jesus recounts the promises of God and their fulfillment in himself by teaching the Scriptures and announcing in word and deed the good news that they are being fulfilled in him. Only in light of this reality does Jesus call people to faith and faithfulness. Like the preaching of Jesus, this good news is the central theme or main message of Christian preaching. Then, when we invite people to follow, perhaps, like Simon and Andrew, James and John, they will leave their nets—and even nets tangled up in cherished relationships—and follow Jesus.

The message of this Sunday's sermon, then, is that the time is fulfilled, the appointed time has grown short, and the kingdom or reign of God has come near to all people. Nothing will stop Jesus from bringing it, not even the church's Jonah-like halfhearted proclamation and tendency to hang on to our hate of the *Ninevehs* of our lives. God's coming reign means this present world is passing away. Jesus invites us to believe, repent, and follow. Paul tells us the first step is not allowing the claims of our present world to produce anxieties that hinder our devotion to Christ. CAS

6. Satterlee, *When God Speaks through You*, 24-25.

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
January 29, 2012

Deuteronomy 18:15–20
Psalm 111
1 Corinthians 8:1–13
Mark 1:21–28

Deuteronomy provides another precedent for what God is doing in Jesus of Nazareth. God is rising up from the people a prophet like Moses, "whom the Lord knew face to face" (34:10). Moses performed great signs and wonders in Egypt to secure freedom for the Hebrews. Moses also regularly spoke for YHWH to the people. At Horeb, the assembly of Israel asked God to provide them with a mediator like Moses, since they feared they would die if they again heard YHWH's voice or saw the great fire of YHWH's presence, and God agreed. No subsequent prophet equaled Moses—until Jesus who, like Moses, knows God face to face. This reading helps us understand why, in our Gospel reading, the people in the synagogue were astounded at Jesus' teaching—for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes—and kept asking one another, "What is this? A new

teaching—with authority!" (Mark 1:22, 27)

So what does eating meat sacrificed to idols, the subject of our Second Reading, have to do with us? The issue, for Paul, is whether we will puff ourselves up by acting out of our knowledge or build up the body of Christ by acting out of love. To be free in Christ is to be free to take responsibility for one another. Acting solely out of knowledge is insufficient. More important is the way our decisions and behavior impact our relationships.

So often, the message of the sermon is determined by where we place ourselves in the reading. Christians, congregations, and pastors surely feel the pressure to produce like Jesus did in the synagogue. There are, after all, so many unclean spirits to be cast out in congregations and neighborhoods, in our nation, and all around the world. "Be silent, and come out!" We long to command those unclean spirits. Alas, we are not Jesus, but surely we can be the means through which Christ works! Except that we have so much everyday stuff to do. So how are we to call out unclean spirits?

Truth be told, our time for calling out unclean spirits will come, and Jesus might ask us to do a bit of that sooner rather than later. Yet, Jesus invites us to do something simpler and harder right now. Jesus invites us to join the crowd in the synagogue and be astounded at his teaching, and to experience the Christ as one having authority to command even unclean spirits.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?" The unclean spirit asked. "Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:25). Some scholars say the reason the unclean spirit recognized Jesus is that Jesus was filled with the Spirit of God. In the synagogue, spirits possessed both Jesus and the man; as we used to say on the playground, "It takes one to know one." Jesus received God's Spirit when it descended upon him at the Jordan. God's Spirit took possession of Jesus during forty days in the wilderness, when he was tempted by Satan. I imagine Jesus' wilderness time to be one of searching and struggle, of discovering and doubting, of questioning and of becoming clear, convicted and convinced. Then Jesus commanded spirits, cured diseases, called people to faith, cultivated God's kingdom or reign, and changed the world. And on the cross, Jesus yielded up the spirit—to the world, to the church, to us.

Whether we think of Sunday worship as a synagogue or a wilderness or little bit of both, it's a precious time of being filled with Christ's spirit as Jesus' teaching astounds us. It's a privileged time of receiving the good new of Jesus not only for ourselves, but also for both the people we bring with us and the people we will serve one day, as well as the church we love and the world that so needs to be astounded by Christ's presence and power. So what would it mean to preach in ways that Jesus—and not our preaching—is astounding? What would it mean to invite our people into a spiritual discipline of allowing ourselves to be astounded?

If we need to issue or hear Jesus' call today, let it be the call to be astounded by his teaching and filled with his spirit. Let it be the call to embrace Scripture, and intentionally grow in spirit, with the expectation that Jesus will astound us. More than gain knowledge, we will experience Christ's love so astoundingly that we passionately practice the Christian love of which Paul speaks. If we need to issue or hear Jesus' call today, let it be the call to be content to stand by and be astounded by Jesus' teaching, rather than rushing into the spotlight ourselves. Let it be the call to allow Jesus to slow us so that his Spirit can possess us. CAS

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