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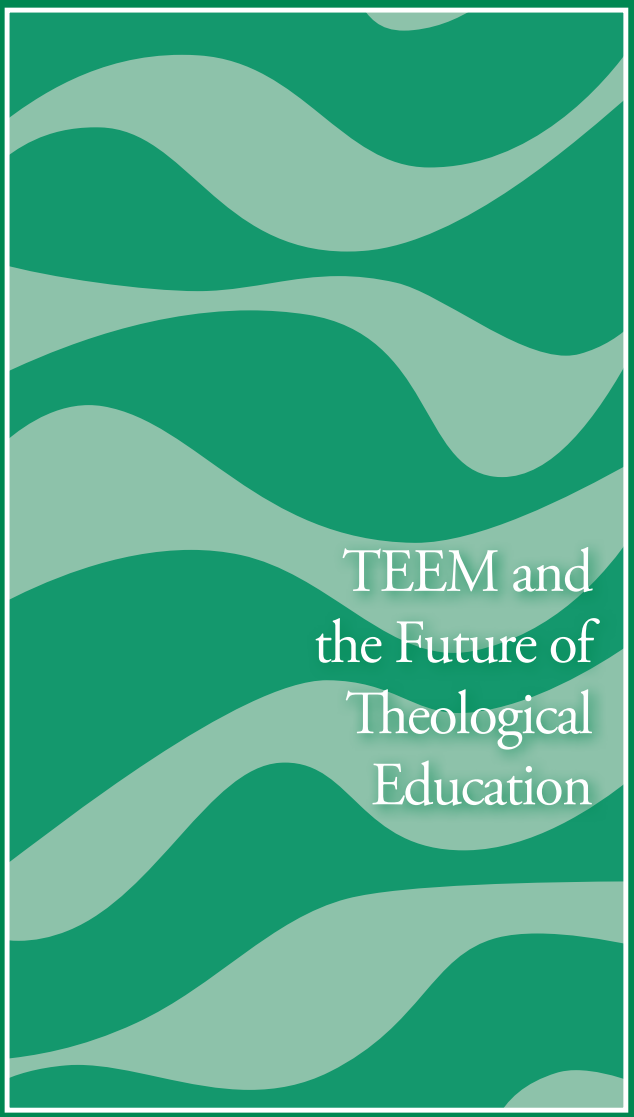

TEEM and the Future of Theological Education

CURRENTS in Theology and Mission

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in Theology and Mission

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Preaching Helps

TEEM and the Future of Theological Education

In this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*, I am delighted to welcome as guest editor Dr. Moses Penumaka, Director of Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) and Assistant Professor of Contextual Theology at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) in Berkeley, California. Dr. Penumaka has gathered for publication here a set of three major presentations and a sermon given at the 2009 and 2010 TEEM conferences at PLTS—annual events that have become a kind of think-tank with regard to the future of theological education, for the sake of mission in a changing church.

TEEM is defined on the ELCA website as "a process by which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American approves for the roster of ordained ministers those persons 'who by reason of age and prior experience' (Constitution 7.31.14) are qualified to participate in an alternative program of preparation for ordination. It is for exceptional persons who are identified for ministry in a specific context and complete theological education (non-M.Div. degree) and candidacy requirements."[1] The essays gathered together in this issue of *Currents* are remarkable in that they present TEEM not merely as an exceptional form of ministerial formation, or an accommodation to "special cases," but rather as a sign of our future, a laboratory of theological education, and a serious contribution to our thinking about what it means to be the church in mission in North America in the twenty-first century. We are invited to ponder the hopes and accomplishments of TEEM as we feel, think, and experiment our way into new forms of theological education and ministerial formation suited to a de-centered, post-Christendom, Spirit-driven church capable of bringing "changing ministries" to "changing cultures." One contributor here, PLTS President Phyllis Anderson, prophesies that "all our seminaries will change radically, perhaps beyond recognition," but suggests that a transformed seminary may have a future as "a vital node on a thriving network."

Such ideas (and prophecies) are not necessarily easy to hear—at least for those who love and are heavily invested in the seminaries that face radical change. But these ideas do, in the first place, remind all of us (including and especially seminary professors like me) that theological education and ministerial formation is *the work of the whole church*. Even in its most traditional form in

1. "Theological Education for Emerging Ministries," on the ELCA website under "Leadership" at http://www2.elca.org/leadership/liderazgo/english/teem.html (accessed April 22, 2011).

the ELCA, the work of ministerial formation involves the families and congregations, colleges, camps, and volunteer experiences (and so on!) where faith is formed, gifts discovered, and vocation discerned. Seminaries have extraordinary "adjunct faculties" that include field education and CPE supervisors and the communities of the faithful around them, as well as the supervisors, lay committees, and congregations who participate in the remarkable American Lutheran institution of the full-time, year-long internship. But while we are *reminded* that theological education and ministerial formation is the work of the whole church, we are also *challenged* to embrace and imagine this reality in new ways. The essays in this issue of *Currents* suggest that as the church is de-centered in post-Christendom North America, so increasingly will be theological education and ministerial formation. TEEM helps us see what this might look like and gives us some leads and some space to imagine "thriving networks" by which the faithful will be edified and leaders raised up in the future.

And so, as I turn the word over to Dr. Penumaka, I offer him and his colleagues thanks for the rich offerings in this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission*.

Mark N. Swanson

Co-editor of Currents in Theology and Mission

TEEM: A Collaborative Pedagogy of the Church

Necessity is the mother of invention. This popular dictum reminds us that in times of need we become creative and innovative. When the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) came into being as a church with a new vision and identified the need for pastors for emerging ministries, seminaries collaborated with the church and invented a new model of teaching and learning theology: Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM)—the pedagogy of the church. Congregations as the loci of ministry, leaders with the discernment of a call to ordained ministry, exemplary pastors as mentors, and dedicated faculty with passion for teaching and learning have all been playing important roles in this model of theological education for the preparation of leaders for ordained ministry, especially for ethnic, underserved, rural, urban, and special ministries in the ELCA.

TEEM is a certificate program that prepares students theologically and academically to be competent candidates for ordained ministry in the ELCA. TEEM is based on an action–reflection–action model of teaching and learning theology. In developing systematic and structured models for training numerous candidates for ministry over a century—and through TEEM for more than two decades—Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) continues to reflect critically on the what, how, and where of theology. This has been part of our conversation and reflection during the TEEM annual gathering which brings together students, mentors, and internship supervisors for reflection, training, and networking. The papers in this special issue of *Currents* try to address these questions: How can we teach and learn theology together as a church? What kind of theology helps us prepare leaders to serve emerging ministries? How can we prepare leaders and pastors to have "proactive competence" as well as "performative excellence"[1] both in the classroom and in the society? How we are able to address these questions through the TEEM pedagogy?

1. For David Perkins, "performative excellence" in a field, that is, technical precision in the handling of a wide range of concepts, may be less useful outside the classroom than "proactive competence" in fewer concepts but with a greater capacity for and alertness to their practical application and transfer from one context to another. See Patricia O'Connell Killen, "Editor's Note," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14/1 (January 2011): 1, referring to David Perkins, "Beyond Understanding," in *Threshold Concepts within the Disciplines*, ed. Ray Land, Jan H.F. Meyers, and Jan Smith (Rotterdam and Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2008).

In his essay "'Go in Peace and Serve the Lord': Changing Cultures—Changing Ministries," **Michael Aune,** Academic Dean at PLTS and a TEEM faculty member for more than a decade, gives an analysis of changing cultures and invites Lutherans to a radically new way of reflecting on culture and ministry. Aune challenges us by raising many important questions: Are we able to live and serve, free of agendas, for the needs of our neighbors? Are we able to move beyond ethnocentrism and beyond an arrogant and coercive multiculturalism and recognize that God in Jesus Christ uses cultures to communicate with us? With examples of cultural expressions from both MDiv and TEEM students, Aune is hopeful about the role of theological reflection in facing the realities of our contexts: "what we have confronting us with changing cultures and changing ministries is the *particular*, the *regional*, the *local*—taking seriously the unique historical experience of the United States *and* the Americas 'in all its specificity and complexity'." Aune also takes us back to our Lutheran legacy and says:

> Think of Luther for a moment—he was a professor and a priest (thus belonging to a particular social class) who had a certain kind of piety because he was a Saxon, a German, and an Augustinian. As a result he would experience, think about, and articulate the relationship between God and humankind in ways that not only he could understand but also that others could understand.

Aune goes on to note that in the Lutheran liturgical tradition, already by the end of the sixteenth century there were nearly 200 different forms of worship employed by Lutherans.

Reflecting on the theological education offered by PLTS for over a century, PLTS President **Phyllis Anderson** promotes new models of being church and of educating pastors to serve the church and the world that are in the midst of change. Describing a variety of models of the church—Ark, Word Event, Body of Christ, People of God—which emerged in contexts in which it was natural to think of the church as *central* to the society, Anderson redefines, with a gracious and yet powerful voice, the new ecclesiology as follows:

> The emerging ecclesiology is not church-centered, but God-centered and world-focused. It begins with the idea that the church itself is sent. The church is God's mission. Of course if great numbers are added to those who are being saved, as they were on the day of Pentecost, that is a wonderful thing. Surely we are called to baptize and make disciples. But maintaining and growing the church are not primarily what this is about. The mission does not depend on success. It is not a strategy to re-establish Christendom. No, the Spirit-breathed church is simply sent into the world to serve, to spread the good news, to prefigure God's realm, to expend itself in love.

How do we educate leaders for this new "Spirit-breathed" church? Anderson highlights hopeful new beginnings and speaks with a prophetic voice: "This

seminary and all our seminaries will change radically, perhaps beyond recognition. Our future at PLTS is not as the 'lone' seminary in the West, but as a vital node on a thriving network with the capacity to provide flexible, affordable, in-depth, distinctively Lutheran theological education for Spirit-filled leaders for a Spirit-breathed church."

Bishop **Mark Holmerud** offers a pastoral, theological, and practical reflection on theological education, stating that TEEM is "a welcome sign of a healthy collaboration between the seminaries and congregations of this church, and a much needed gift for the future of theological education and any possibility for a 'new' ecclesiology that is nimble, agile, and responsive to shifts in the culture as well as willing to risk shaping that 'dominant' culture with the message of Christ's transforming love for the world." Holmerud challenges the seminaries and church structures to radically rethink the ways that pastors are trained for ordained ministry. He notes the intensive and imaginative means of pastoral formation that he encountered in El Salvador, and proposes a way to shorten the duration of classroom time at the seminary. He emphasizes that "[a]long with a diversification of modalities for theological education, we need to recognize that the diversity of our ministries or the manner in which we are trained to do ministry in a variety of contexts in *no way denigrates the unity in Christ we celebrate.*"

Steed Davidson's prophetic sermon on "Courage and Imagination in Ministry" invites us to a radical redefinition of ministry from the perspective of wisdom and love in today's age. Davidson challenges the church to have "the imagination to be daringly different, not simply doing an old thing anew; the imagination to bold in our thinking, not merely affirming existing structures to have our way; the imagination to pioneer new ground, not inscribe old habits." Such imagination is imperative to serve the world.

Stephen Brookfield, a scholar in the field of education, was invited in 2009 to assess the effectiveness of the TEEM program of the ELCA in the Western Mission Cluster. After a detailed assessment, Brookfield commended this pedagogy as follows: "It seems that the intent of the program to connect curriculum to students' own practice of ministry is both understood and appreciated by TEEM students…. In forty years of teaching I have never come across a program that has such a high level of relevance in the eyes of students." It is our TEEM students who validate this new way of teaching and learning theology.

I thank Dr. Mark Swanson, the editor for this issue, and all the editorial team of *Currents* for publishing this special issue on TEEM. I hope that you will find this special issue of *Currents* to be enlightening to you as you reflect upon your own experience of participating in, facilitating, and contributing to imaginative and innovative ways of teaching and learning theology.

Moses Penumaka
Guest Editor

Go in Peace and Serve the Lord: Changing Cultures—Changing Ministries[1]

Michael B. Aune

Academic Dean and Dean of the Chapel, Professor of Liturgical and Historical Studies, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS)

Introduction

I want to begin by saying "thank you" to my colleague, Dr. Penumaka, for the invitation to participate in this Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) conference and for the opportunity to think with you this afternoon about the ever-daunting and challenging questions of mission and ministry today. In addition to this being a day of challenge, it is also a day of joy and gratitude. TEEM is celebrating its 20th birthday at this conference. For half of that time, as both Dean and faculty member, I have had the opportunity to serve and to participate in this program of preparation for ordained leadership in our church.

On this 20th birthday of TEEM, I certainly remember Dr. Edmond Yee's years of dedicated service. I remember the many gifted students who are graduates of this program and are now serving this church, some in extremely remote places. I also remember faculty colleagues both here at PLTS and at Luther Seminary. I remember mentors and synod staff who have been partners in this program of theological education. It is quite amazing to call to mind how far TEEM has come in these twenty years—from a church basement in Manhattan Beach in Southern California to Claremont School of Theology to Monterey Park to Berkeley and St. Paul. Beginning next fall, TEEM will have a new partner, the Church Divinity School of the Pacific here in Berkeley, a seminary of the Episcopal church.

Things are going well for TEEM. This mentors' conference and Dr. Penumaka's leadership are evidence of that. We have a vision of making theological education accessible in a unique way. We employ varying ways of teaching and mentoring, all for the sake of providing a theologically competent and pastorally savvy leadership for the wider church. My sense is that the major reason we are able to do this kind of theological education is that we have a keen awareness of the interactive dynamics of gospel and culture. As we continue to be faced with the important questions and challenges raised by this encounter, we seek to provide adequate and solid theological resources for understanding and responding to the imperatives of the Christian mission.

Dr. Penumaka has asked me to think with you about this encounter, or interface, of the gospel of Jesus Christ with our contemporary circumstances

1. Keynote address at the WMC-TEEM Annual Leadership Conference, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, October 13, 2009.

of attitudes, concepts, and relationships variously described as postmodernity, hypermodernity, or supermodernity—take your pick. The title of these remarks, "Go in Peace and Serve the Lord: Changing Cultures—Changing Ministries," points to the current challenge of effectively demonstrating and participating in the *missio Dei,* and how that requires our continuing attentiveness to contextual experience and historical consciousness as those impinge upon the theological task of articulating and communicating God's saving grace in Jesus Christ.

To the task at hand, then: I want to explore this topic of "Changing Cultures—Changing Ministries" in three parts. First, I will spend a little time in clarifying our contemporary circumstances. Second, I will make more explicit what I mean by "changing cultures." Finally, I will offer two vignettes illustrating how the richness of Lutheran theology and practices can be expressed across cultures, one in rural Montana, the second in urban California; in other words, "changing cultures" **and** "changing ministries."

Our Contemporary Circumstances

Each Sunday many of us hear the words, "Go in peace, and serve the Lord." Sometimes we may be relieved to hear these words, especially if the liturgy has lasted a long time. But there are times, more often than not we hope, that we hear these words at the end of a liturgy that has inspired and moved us beyond the "it is all over, you can go home now" to "work might and main for the neighbor," as Luther was fond of saying. In fact, he never seemed to tire of speaking of what he called "the fruit of the sacrament, which is love; that is, that we should treat our neighbor as God has treated us." In fact, in a sermon from the year 1532, he said: "The whole world would be full, full of *Gottesdienst*—worship, the service of God—if everyone truly served his or her neighbor."[2]

In this vein, we can say that we are "liturgical people of faith" —because word and sacrament call us to action, to witness and to serve in these critical times. We live in the midst of crisis, promises, challenges; in the midst of what some have termed the "indeterminacy, randomness, ambiguity, and even chaos" at the heart of reality itself.[3] The theme before us, "Changing Cultures and Changing Ministries," reminds us of how rapidly cultures are changing. It is also a theme that calls us to rethink our ministries so that they are relevant in such challenging and changing times.

As we reflect on the various crises of our day and age, perhaps we wonder what exactly went wrong. Fareed Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek International,* says in a recent article, "Greed is good (to a point)," that what we are experiencing is not a crisis of capitalism but a crisis of finance, of democracy, of globalization and *ultimately of ethics*. Zakaria concludes by saying:

> We are in the midst of a vast crisis, and there is enough blame to go around and many fixes to make, from the international system to national governments to private firms. But at the heart, there needs to be a deeper fix within all of us, a simple gut check. If it doesn't feel right, we shouldn't be doing it. That's not going to restore growth or mend globalization or save capitalism, but it might be a small start to sanity.[4]

2. Martin Luther, "Predigt am 18. Sonntag nach Trinitatis," *Luthers Werke, Weimarer Ausgabe* 36:340. ["Wenn ein iglicher seinem nehesten dienete, so were die welt vol vol gotts dienst."].

3. T. Howland Sanks, "Postmodernism and the Church," *New Theology Review* 11/3 (1998): 53.

4. Fareed Zakaria, "Greed is Good (to a point)," in *Newsweek* (June 22, 2009).

While it is not often that we find religious implications, ethical insights, or theological challenges in a news magazine article, nevertheless there is one here. It is this: Can we as Lutherans be culturally astute enough and theologically savvy enough to know what is right and, by extension, to be able to communicate the central message of gospel "in the complexity of how God works in the world"?[5] Our late president, Timothy Lull, liked to speak of our actions as Lutherans in terms of the great verbs of our tradition, "to confess—that is, to witness; to teach—that is, to deepen faith in Christ; to serve—that is, to be free to live without agendas for our neighbors' needs; and to reform—that is, not to settle things but to continue to point away from ourselves to the One who is sheer, unbounded love for the whole world and for us." [6]

The challenge, then, is to employ the ideas and actions of our tradition to bring some sanity to our circumstances. However, since we gathered a year ago in October 2008 for this conference, it feels like things are less sane. The pace of change has intensified, thereby "upping the ante," as I like to say, for how we address political, social, and economic issues not only theologically but also practically. There are still two wars going on. More and more people seem to be becoming unhinged because change is happening much too fast. Our task is even more complicated—by the phenomena of globalization, radical pluralism, or various forms of extremism.

While some nations have a greater consciousness of belonging to a world community, others continue to thumb their noses at such a thought. Add to all of this the most severe economic crisis of the past eighty years or so. And so, here is the church, not only confronted by these realities but also by intractable theological, ethical, and cultural realities saying: Is God doing anything these days? Are we able to live and serve, free without agendas, for the needs of our neighbors? Are we able to move beyond ethnocentrism and beyond an arrogant and coercive multiculturalism and recognize that God in Jesus Christ uses cultures to communicate with us? Faith is hardly an abstract affirmation. It is a tangible matter made available in ways that we can know, feel, and understand. In short, faith is culturally expressed and radically embodied.

The challenge, then, is to employ the ideas and actions of our tradition to bring some sanity to our circumstances.

Cultures/Cultural Expressions

To assert that Lutheranism, whether here in the United States or somewhere else in the world, is "culturally expressed" brings us to the tricky business of specifying what is meant by "culture." Not only do people use this term in different ways, but they are also ready to do serious and intellectual battle over its meaning. When the great literary and cultural critic

5. Timothy F. Lull, "The Vocation of Lutheranism," lecture presented to Pastoral Institutes at Uppsala and Lund, Sweden (March 29–30, 2003), 2.

6. Ibid.

Raymond Williams discussed the word "culture," he identified three interrelated modern usages.[7] First, culture "is a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development"; second, it "is a particular way of life," of either a people or a group; and third, culture involves "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity." We could add Clifford Geertz's well-known definition of culture as "webs of significance" that we spin for ourselves.[8] On the other hand, we can employ this notion articulated by Stanford anthropologist Renato Rosaldo:

> Culture lends significance to human experience by selecting from and organizing it. It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art museums. It does not inhabit a set-aside domain, as does, for example, that of politics or economics. From the pirouettes of classical ballet to the most brute of brute facts, all human conduct is culturally mediated. Culture encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime. Neither high nor low, culture is all-pervasive.[9]

So what we have is a dynamic and fluid notion of culture, the intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic as well as a particular way of life, a "structure of feeling" that seeks to get at meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, affective elements of consciousness and relationships. "Not feeling as against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind in a living and interrelating continuity."[10]

We know that Christianity has always struggled to express its message in ways that can be comprehended and accepted, actively lived and felt, as practical, as a particular way of life. A particularly fascinating aspect of this struggle for those of us who take our bearings from the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century has been how to communicate this central message of grace, gift, and gospel in ways that believers can grasp and make their own. It is no accident, then, that Luther spoke so often of gripping and grabbing. It is not enough to look at and worship the newborn God in the manger, or to look at the elements of the Lord's Supper. The most important thing is that we as believers **grasp** and **make our own** the Savior of the world.[11]

So our Lutheran Christianity has had a culture, has a culture—cultural "stuff"—just as the sacraments need physical elements of water, bread, wine, touch, words. It is these physical elements—the incarnational character and dynamic of our faith, our so-called "traditional" patterns of worship, religious education, social life, and also of doctrine—that have given Lutheranism in this country much of its distinctive character. As a result, the experience of being Lutheran is as much "cultural" as it is "doctrinal" or "confessional." We have seen ourselves as participating in and bearing a "culture," that tangible, elusive something deep within our bones that can't always be put into words.

A quick example from the late Gerhard Forde who once wrote a wonderful essay

7. Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1976), 80.

8. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

9. Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 26.

10. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

11. Johann Anselm Steiger, "The *communicatio idiomatum* as the Axle and Motor of Luther's Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (2000): 130.

in which he described what it was like to grow up and be shaped by an identifiable religious, even theological culture, marked by a very serious intellectual and churchly quest for the truth of what God in Jesus Christ had done for sinners, but at the same time characterized by joy—the joy of living in the light of this truth that was a kind of calm confidence. Forde noted, "Sinners were accepted in baptism and forgiven through the means of grace, and that was that. One could count on that and there was no need to get all worked up about it!"[12]

So Lutherans have a culture. Nevertheless, while we acknowledge the need for culture, we also need to confess our propensity to collapse the gospel into culture, whether into those cultures of Europe that birthed many of us, or now into the cultures and cultural systems of the Other that are somehow beyond critique and without sin. However, instead of criticizing each other, we do better to acknowledge the tremendous variety and vitality of those cultures—those sensibilities—that bear the name "Lutheran." We don't have just one Lutheran culture. We have numerous Lutheran cultures which are often ethnic, but also regional and particular in their own ways. So, the question I want to ask now with Daniel Boyarin is, "How can I ethically construct an identity that is extremely precious to me without falling into ethnocentrism on the one hand and racism on the other?"[13]

Perhaps we need to pay more attention to thinking about the criteria for *faithful culture* and less attention to whether one is "better" than the other. If we really desire an incarnational model of culture, then specifics need to be very much a part of the conversation. We need culture in the sense that we need the "spiritual," "aesthetic," and "intellectual" to give our lives reference points of some kind—or, to feel at home, placed in some way. Yet in thinking of culture incarnationally, it seems we place culture over on one side of things and on the other side is this gospel that seems to be devoid of cultural trappings. We just can't do that! It's not even possible. Our very own history should remind us of this.

We don't have just one Lutheran culture. We have numerous Lutheran cultures which are often ethnic, but also regional and particular in their own ways.

Think of Luther for a moment. He was a professor and a priest (thus belonging to a particular social class) who had a certain kind of piety because he was a Saxon, a German, and an Augustinian. As a result, he would experience, think about, and articulate the relationship between God and humankind in ways that not only he could understand but also that others could understand. Alterna-

12. Gerhard O. Forde, "The 'Old Synod': A Search for Objectivity," in *Striving for Ministry: Centennial Essays Interpreting the Heritage of Luther Theological Seminary*, eds. Warren A. Quanbeck et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977), 77.

13. Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 228–29.

tively, think of the various liturgical changes brought by the Lutheran Reformation. There was no one Lutheran-type *Book of Common Prayer* for all who became Lutheran. Rather, by the end of the sixteenth century, there were nearly 200 different forms of worship employed by Lutherans.

Across Cultures: Incarnating the Richness of Lutheran Theology and Practice

So gospel for Lutherans, by its very nature, is to be embedded, located, and incarnated. I like to think that many of our students "get it" on this score, because they energetically enter and engage the historical debate about the relationship between our Lutheran tradition, its cultural and ethnic roots, and our diverse American context. In fact, one of our students in a paper written for my course in the history of "American Lutheranism" expresses well the argument I have been presenting this afternoon. She wrote:

> The richness of Lutheran theology can and should be encouraged to be expressed across a variety of cultures, which will allow it to reach its fullest expression. By being in conversation with others who share the same foundational confessions but live them out in distinct cultures, we can come to a better understanding of our own cultural expression of Lutheranism and perhaps even reclaim some of what has been lost.[14]

In another instance, a recent TEEM graduate showed how the richness of Lutheran theology can be expressed across denominational cultures. Here is a newspaper report about Janet Young, who was recently ordained in Hot Springs, Montana:

> Since April 2008, the Lutheran and Presbyterians of this small Sanders County have worshipped together, two separate congregations from two separate religions joined together by similar beliefs, and similar realties in rural America. "Lutherans and Presbyterians are in full communion with one another, and we can exchange pastors," Young says.…With rural churches often facing closure, it's not uncommon, especially in small towns, for a single pastor to lead two separate congregations, conducting services at one church, then moving across town to lead worship at another. "But that's not what we are," Young says, "We worship together, do ministry together, do fundraisers together. We are breaking ground in Montana as a joint congregation."[15]

These two examples give me hope. Our students are learning something important. As we know, these questions of culture and identity have become increasingly accentuated since, to proclaim the obvious, there have been Lutherans in Africa, Asia, and Latin America for a long time. In addition, Lutherans of these cultures are becoming part of the ELCA. Whether we call such a state of affairs postmodern, hypermodern, supermodern, or whatever, it is clear that what we have confronting us with changing cultures and changing ministries is the *particular, the regional, the local*—taking seriously the unique historical experience of the United States *and* the Americas "in all its specificity and complexity"[16]—where even ethnicity,

14. Carolyn Lesmeister, "Final Paper Submitted for American Lutheranism" (December 13, 2007), 9.

15. *Missoulian,* Missoula (September 21, 2009): B1-2.

16. For example, see such "specificity and complexity" writ large in Gloria Ladson-Billings, "New Directions in Multicultural Education: Complexities, Boundaries, and Critical Race Theory," in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education,* ed. James

too, is understood differently, that it's not some recreational hobby. Rather, it has to do with the

> …discovery of a vision, both ethical and future-oriented. Whereas the search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from that past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future. Such visions can take a number of forms: they can be both culturally specific (e.g., the biblical strains of black victories over oppression) and dialectically formed as critiques of hegemonic ideologies (as alternatives to the melting pot rhetoric of assimilation to the bland, neutral style of the conformist 1950s).[17]

Using these more fluid and dynamic understandings of culture and ethnicity to read and re-read our own ministries brings to light insistent and important concerns such as inheritance or lack of it, social marginality, alienation, and participation.

It is time for another example, one that illustrates very well that God's presence in history in Jesus Christ is, as my late colleague Robert Goeser loved to say, "communication clothed in history and creation."[18] Every Sunday, I experience changing cultures and changing ministries. I belong to Resurrection Lutheran Church in Oakland, an urban, multi-racial, multicultural, and theologically diverse congregation, where over thirty percent of our members are Swahili-speaking, and where there is an emerging if not already keen awareness of other voices, other bodies, and other worlds; of other stories, other languages, and other identities; of another "incarnatedness" of gospel and church in the particular and the local. I will let my pastor tell you this story. This is what she wrote for the current issue of our newsletter, *Good News: Resurrection:*

> Such lovely music has been heard at Resurrection these past Sundays. You may think I'm speaking of the singing of our two choirs and soloists or the melodies of strings and pianos played by children in the After-School Music Program or the magnificent sounds our music director Dr. George Biester coaxes and commands from the organ. And, certainly, I love **that** music as much as you do and look forward to new musical offerings each Sunday.
>
> But I'm thinking of a different kind of music: the music of members talking with each other around the tables in the undercroft, as in our recent "Listening Sunday," organized by Resurrection's Local Organizing Committee. It is music to my ears to hear people of different ages and from different places in the world sharing their stories, sharing their perspective on the world—and especially Oakland—and sharing their hopes and dreams for this congregation as it seeks to make Christ known and make God's love visible. It's a sign of the Holy Spirit at work among us that we have been able to move past sticking to our "usual" groups and getting to know others in the faith. I hear you greeting one another by name—no longer dependent to have the pastor be the only one remembering everyone's name. At the door many of you are

A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 50–65. See also Djelal Khadir, "Introduction: America and Its Studies," *PMLA* 118/1(Jan 2003): 9–24.

17. Michael M.J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 196.

18. Robert J. Goeser, "The Doctrine of Word and Scripture in Luther and Lutheranism," *The Report of the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, Second Series, 1976-1980* (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 1981), 121.

eager to share your delight in finding unexpected connections with others: "We live just a few blocks from each other!" or "Our kids go to the same school!" or "We're all interested in starting a women's group…or Sunday School." or "We both love to walk… and now we're going to walk together!"

It is a beginning, not an end. September 27 was not meant to be our one and only "Listening Sunday." It was to give us something to talk further about with one another, through 1–1 conversations or table conversations at coffee hour. And it helped us exercise the muscle of generosity, compassion, and attentiveness that is at the core of loving our neighbor. We have ourselves known that generosity, compassion, and attentiveness in Jesus…who has shown us the face of a God utterly attentive and in love with us all. Now we want to follow Jesus in offering that same priceless gift to one another, a gift our society, so hectic and detached, cannot give.

I pray that we will keep on listening and, through the help of OCO and our Local Organizing Committee, learn how to translate what we hear and learn and share into faithful and meaningful acts of compassion and justice that knit us together and give us the power to do the work of Resurrection in the world around us for the good of all. Keep the music coming! What if the rest of our neighborhood heard it and began to sing along? Hm-m-m-m.[19]

So, if this is what can happen when we take up the challenges of changing cultures and changing ministries, we can hear, "Go in peace serve the Lord" in a radically new way. And when we do, it's "Thanks be to God" indeed!

19. Lucy Kolin, "From the Pastor," *Good News—Resurrection!: October 2009 Newsletter*, Vol. 9, Issue 94: 1.

Theological Education as Hope for a New Ecclesiology[1]

Phyllis Anderson
President, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

This year, and this weekend in particular, PLTS is celebrating its centennial. Our big celebration this Sunday falls on October 10, 2010. That's 10-10-10! So we are calling it our Cen-ten-ten-ten-ial. We trace our origins back to St. James Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon, where a handful of people had the faith, courage, and the *chutzpah* to start a seminary in the Sunday school room in the balcony of the church. They saw the need for "native pastors" trained in the West to serve the burgeoning population along the West Coast in the first decade of the twentieth century. There were six students and three teachers, one of them a woman, Jennie Bloom Summers. This "lone seminary in the West" moved to Seattle a few years later and gained strength until it had to close during the depression. The money from the sale of the property was invested. In 1950 that nest egg enabled another visionary band of folks to buy this property in the Berkeley Hills and make the dream of a seminary in the West a permanent reality.

Well, we're betting on it being permanent. The church, our denomination, our society, the economy, the world of higher education, and theological education itself are all in such radical flux right now that it is hard to say what, if anything, is permanent. We are in for a world of change. Without an exhaustive analysis, let me just mention briefly some of the cosmic shifts we are going through.

1. **We live in a more diverse society, with people of many cultures and religions brushing shoulders in one interdependent global village.** We all need to learn how to relate to the people around us who are not like us. We also need to get used to the fact that—whatever our race, culture, or religion—we can no longer act as though we are the only one or the dominant one.

2. **An explosion in interactive communications modalities is changing the way people connect with one another, how they get information, how they learn, and how they organize their worlds.** The computer, the Internet, cell phones, texting, and social networking have transformed offices, education, entertainment, media, and social life in a very short time. This genuine revolution opens up unprecedented avenues for communication and cooperative work. It redefines what is possible in creative interdependence where physical distance is no longer a factor.

3. **We are going through the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s.** Governments, educational systems, small business, not-for-profits of all kinds—including churches—find themselves

1. Presented at the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) Conference, "Theological Education as Hope for a New Ecclesiology," at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, October 5, 2010.

with not enough money to do their jobs. Eight million people are out of work. Wages are stagnant. The real estate bubble has burst. Families have taken staggering losses in the value of their investments or their homes—if they've been able to keep their homes at all.

In his best-selling book *The Great Reset,* Richard Florida argues that economic crises of this magnitude, like the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Long Depression of the 1870s leave the economic landscape permanently transformed. The decades following these great economic events are times of radical reordering and vast creativity. He identifies patterns that will "reshape virtually every aspect of our lives, from how and where we live, to how we work, to how we invest in individuals and infrastructure, and how we shape our cities and regions."[2]

4. **A less powerful church.** The church is, of course, profoundly influenced by these trends. These and many other forces have had the effect of altering the place of the church in society—from centered to de-centered, from powerful to less powerful. I'm not talking about spiritual power, but rather power as the world counts it. The mainline churches have not only lost position, but also people and financial capacity. Distinctive denominational identities themselves have become thinner and more fluid.

Of course, this loss of power is relative and is further advanced in some denominations and in some parts of the country than others. People may disagree about whether this loss of power is an inevitable, permanent trend or something that can be turned around. Some call this kind of thinking defeatist. Others assert that this new awareness of our fragility is a positive corrective to a kind of triumphalism and entitlement that a more powerful church exhibited when it was riding high. However you come down on this, it would be hard to deny the reality that the church in the West is less powerful, less influential, less respected, less well resourced than it was in the mid-twentieth century when I grew up, and perhaps at any time in the last fifteen hundred years.

At the congregational level, this means fewer people in church on Sunday morning**.** That too is uneven. More of the people who go to church are choosing larger membership churches with multiple paid staff and a variety of programming for all ages. The vast majority of mainline Protestant congregations, however, are small and growing smaller. Many can no longer support a pastor and are closing or yoking with other churches.

It is important to keep in perspective that this *less powerful church* is really a Western, post-Enlightenment phenomenon. The loss of power is not so striking in places where the church never enjoyed the same kind of power and cultural dominance. Indeed, the church is not shrinking everywhere. It is growing by leaps and bounds in other parts of the world. When the ELCA was formed in 1988, it was the second largest Lutheran body in the world, after the Church of Sweden. Well, now we are number four. The Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church has moved ahead of us into second place and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania into third place. The center of influence in the church is moving to the south.

Coming to terms with the realities of a less powerful church will have a profound impact on how we define the church

2. See Richard Florida, *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity* (New York: Harper, 2010).

and its mission, how we understand the role of ministry and what we expect of theological education. We may be in for more fundamental change in theological education in the first twenty-five years of this century than in the whole century since the founding of that "lone seminary in the West" in Portland in 1910.

Theological Education as Hope

In times of vast social change, education becomes very important. When old paradigms start shifting under your feet, either you become paralyzed by fear or you learn how to make adaptive changes. Education then becomes the HOPE for people to move into a new way of being and doing.

This is true of education in general. If the United States wants to be the leader in the emerging world market for all things green, then we need to find a way to educate a whole new generation of environmental biologists, technicians, inventors, entrepreneurs and legal specialists. We need to educate people to be ecologically smart consumers and savvy marketers, and on and on and on. Education has a role to play in forming those seminal thinkers who see the need for change and who can imagine a way forward. Education also has the power to effect broad social change in the direction of that new vision. When things seem stuck, education is the way out.

This is also true in the church. The church may be less powerful, but within this chastened, humbled church, theological education is seen as a locus of power, and hope. Theological education is the most efficient way to shape and influence the called leaders of the church, who in turn have broad and disproportionate influence among the people of God. People who care about the future of the church often see the seminaries as the place to have the greatest influence. They volunteer to come to the seminary to give lectures. They send me books that every seminarian should read. Churchwide staff are so convinced of the importance of teaching seminarians that they will do it for free. TEEM mentors and supervisors are another prime example!

Seminaries may be the institution you love to hate, for all the ways they fall short. Nevertheless, they also represent an enduring hope that there is a way to move the church to a place that is more faithful, more relevant, more just, more confessional, more safe, more socially involved, more culturally inclusive, more Christ-like. Theological education holds the tantalizing promise that change is possible, even while these schools are painfully slow to change themselves. We are going to have to accelerate the rate of change. Theological education represents the best hope for a new kind of church.

When old paradigms start shifting under your feet, either you become paralyzed by fear or you learn how to make adaptive changes.

That was what was going on in the basement of St. James Lutheran Church in Portland one hundred years ago. A couple of local pastors, a female teacher, and a handful of lay leaders were angry that

they couldn't get the pastors they needed out here on the West Coast. The preachers who came to serve for a few years just weren't suited to the life. That little band imagined a new kind of seminary that fit a new kind of church. They knew at some deep level that the seminary—the training of the next generation of leaders—was the key to the future.

What if we were that little band today? Imagine with me, if you will, that we are those concerned church leaders in some church basement, facing a million challenges to do ministry in a new way. What if it were up to us to dream how to meet the need for theological education in our time and place—in this next *Great Reset*? And I don't just mean PLTS or PLTS together with Luther, our partner in offering the TEEM program. I mean the whole enterprise, the whole industry of theological education. If you are going to dream, you might as well dream big. What if we were not just strategizing to stay alive? What if we were not scrambling to keep up? What if we were actually starting over from scratch?

Of course, you can never really do that. We are all too, too aware of the things that make it hard, if not impossible, to start from scratch. We might at least go through the exercise, for the sake of trying to wrestle down a vision that is not just a disguised way of keeping what we know and love in place.

Ecclesiology

If we are starting from scratch, we should begin with theology. We should make it our first priority to get clear on ecclesiology. That is the theme for this conference: *Theological Education as Hope for a New Ecclesiology*, for a new way of thinking about the church. What is the church? And what is it for? Knowing that becomes the basis for asking, "What kind of leaders does such a church need?" And then, "What kind of education/formation would those leaders need to have?" And finally, "How can we organize ourselves to get the job done?"

As circumstances changed through the history of the church, different ways of understanding the church have emerged. New ecclesiologies provided needed correctives or opened new possibilities for what the church might become. Let's look at a few examples from history.

The Roman Catholic Church of the middle ages was a powerful unified institution with a hierarchical structure. One ancient image of the church was a ship, like Noah's ark. Those on board, connected through sacraments administered by priests in communion with Rome, were saved. Outside the boat was oblivion.

How could the Reformers reconcile their break from the one church understood in this way? They couldn't. They had to re-define the church. They said: *the church is the assembly of believers where the word is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered.* The church is not so much an institution, like an ark. Rather the church is a function, a Word Event. By defining the church in these terms, by introducing a new ecclesiology, the Reformers were able to make a case for still being part of the church, of actually being the true church, even though they were outside the ark.

Through the centuries, the mystical *Body of Christ* had provided a theological rationale for a very hierarchical church, with Christ as the head of the body, and popes and bishops and priests taking their appropriate roles in descending order. The Body of Christ has very clear boundaries about who is in and who is outside the "skin." In the mid-twentieth century, Vatican II proposed *People of God* as an alternative way of thinking about the

church. The rise of a new image, the People of God, did not denigrate the importance of Christ. It did not do away with the need for offices and authority. It did, however, put the spotlight on the people, on the laity, on all the faithful. It made the laity part of the essential nature of the church. The church as *People of God* even leaves room for those of us who may not be so formally incorporated into the institutional Roman Catholic Church. This opened the windows, as Pope John XXIII liked to say. Now it was easier to think of Protestant denominations as "ecclesial bodies," if not exactly "the church."

Each of these ecclesiologies, and many more, are useful lenses through which to explore the fullness of what the church is and how it should be organized and what it should be doing. Each adds a new perspective or emphasis, without necessarily denigrating the earlier images.

The four that I have mentioned—Ark, Word Event, Body of Christ, People of God—are very different, but they all have one thing in common. They all presume the context of Christendom and a gathered church. They each emerged in a context in which the church was at the center of society or even coterminous with society. They each assumed that the people were inside the church, already gathered. The questions that needed to be addressed from different angles were: Who counts as part of the church? Do some people count more than others? How do you know which church is true? How to you make sense of the fact that there is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church when there are many separate churches?

Our traditional understanding of the church and of ministry was largely shaped under the assumptions of Christendom. We have inherited a system of theological education developed over the centuries to prepare men to fill the office of priest within established churches—or to establish new ones to expand the whole. Now as Christendom is fading, we must begin to imagine a new ecclesiology that will call forth a new model of ministry, which will require a new system of theological education.

We are asking different questions today. What will the new ecclesiology be for a church that does not begin with the assumption that the church is in the center and that the people are already inside? I don't know. It's not all fleshed out. But I know that it is an issue we need to be working on. I recently heard a compelling proposal from Dr. Cheryl Peterson, Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. She said something like this:

> The church no longer finds itself at the center of society, but more on the sidelines. The church no longer enjoys a cultural establishment it once had, but is in the process of being disestablished from a position of power and influence. Rather than mourn this as a loss, I see this as a real opportunity for the church to rediscover its true vocation, which is not to prop up the American Dream, but to "be my witnesses from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the ends of the world."[3]

As many have said, it is a context not unlike the one we see in the Book of Acts. The early church was one religious movement among many in the vast Roman Empire. They were not in the center of things, but people of the way.

If this is our situation, we can respond in one of two ways. We can draw the lines

3. From a presentation given at the 2010 Convocation of Teaching Theologians, "What Does it Mean to be the Church? The ELCA and the ELCIC in the 21st Century," California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, Calif., August 8, 2010.

even tighter around this small enclave to protect it and ensure its purity in an alien world. That is not how Dr. Peterson sees it. Nor do I. Or we could turn our focus outward. We could fix our gaze beyond the church that has been gathered and imagine a church that is continually sending. This church centers its attention less on itself and more on the world into which it is being sent, the world God loves. In this new paradigm, the boundaries are more permeable. It is not so important to keep the worldly ones out, but to be able to penetrate into the world beyond the walls of the church. It is a simple but profound shift.

This emerging ecclesiology is not church-centered, but God-centered and world-focused.

This sending theme is not new. It is deeply rooted in the tradition. In traditional language for the Trinity, the Father sends the Son; the Father and the Son send the Spirit; the Spirit sends the church. The Spirit propels the church out to serve the world. We understand in the creed that the church is the proper work of the Holy Spirit. Christ breathed his Spirit into his Apostles—the sent ones. The Pentecost church was sent out from Jerusalem to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the world.

Dr. Peterson suggests that the image for our time might be the *Spirit-sent* church, the *Spirit-breathed* church. This church is not centered on its own survival, growth, or purity. It is on fire to witness to its truth, to proclaim the possibility of new life in Christ in the midst of the great big world that is largely indifferent and possibly hostile to it. In the language I remember from the early years of our newly merged denomination: "The ELCA is a church so deeply rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ that it gives up its life for the sake of the world."

I am not trying to make the case that reaching out beyond the boundaries of the church is a new idea. The church in every age has had a sense of mission—more or less. Pastor J. Allen Leas and the others in the basement of St. James Lutheran Church were concerned about the mission in Portland and along the West Coast back in 1910. How would they ever be able to gather and serve the Lutherans and others migrating from the Midwest? How could they keep up with starting new churches? How would they be able to extend the church across the whole continent? They were planting a new seminary to establish what they knew of Christendom way out here.

And the great missionary movements of the Age of Discovery from the fourteenth through the nineteenth centuries may have had many motivations, but surely one of them was about extending the church, gathering more people in. The church of that time understood itself to *have* a mission to reach to the last person on the farthest shore and bring them in. That is still a church-centered mission.

This emerging ecclesiology is not church-centered, but God-centered and world-focused. It begins with the idea that the church itself is sent. The church *is* God's mission. Of course, if great numbers are added to those who are being saved, as they were on the day of Pentecost, that is a wonderful thing. Surely we are called to baptize and make disciples. But maintaining and growing the church are not

primarily what this is about. The mission does not depend on success. It is not a strategy to re-establish Christendom. No, the Spirit-breathed church is simply sent into the world to serve, to spread the good news, to prefigure God's realm, to expend itself in love.

Ministry in the Spirit-breathed Church

How do we find and shape leaders for such a church, a church we can barely imagine? What will ministry be like in this Spirit-breathed church?

Many things, of course, do not change. The church will always be a place of gathering, of worship, of confessing, of caring, of teaching. Ministry will continue to require the smartest, the best, the most faithful, the most committed, the most compassionate, the most profoundly called, and the most energetic of leaders. They will need deep theological rudders. All the things we need now. We'll need them more and more.

We are still the People of God. We are still the Body of Christ. We are talking about a new accent that comes with the new image of a Spirit-breathed church. What do we know about how the Spirit works that will help us envision how ministry in a Spirit-breathed church might be different?

The Spirit is restless, always on the move, like a rushing wind. So ministry too will have this "sent" quality. The church of the future might be less settled, less established. And its leaders will be pushing the boundaries, exploring the next frontier, seeking those places where there is an opening for the gospel to be heard. They will have to be leaders with a capital "L," who can teach and inspire and mobilize the whole community to be sent out.

The Spirit delights in diversity. The Spirit that descended like tongues of fire on the diverse company at Pentecost enabled each one to hear the good news in their own tongue. The Spirit was not offended by the cacophony. The Spirit is continually calling and gathering, working in the hearts and minds of strangers and aliens and the most unlikely folks. The ministers of a Spirit-breathed church will have to be diverse themselves—speaking many languages, colored like the rainbow. They will need to know how to navigate gracefully among cultures and religious traditions.

The Spirit is extravagant in dispensing a variety of gifts for a great variety of roles and functions in the church: some apostles, some teachers, some healers, some bishops. And those lists are not fixed. They are just suggestive of the diversity of ministries that need doing. They leave room for the lists to evolve indefinitely. We are going to have to get used to that too. Here are just some of the forms I see ministry taking: lay people equipped for ministry in the world, senior pastors of large membership congregations, a fleet of lay ministers to run the programs of those large churches, mission developers starting emergent churches in urban neighborhoods, leaders for immigrant communities, people who rise to leadership in small congregations that cannot afford a full-time paid pastor, tent-making pastors whose living does not come from the church, pastors equipped to serve ecumenical parishes. The director of our Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Ministries unit is calling for one thousand new evangelists—of many different kinds. The degree of diversity is dizzying. And they all need theological education suited to their settings and gifts.

The Spirit is free. The Spirit is not hung up on forms and structures. The Spirit abhors uniformity. In the Spirit-breathed church, there will be pressures from all sides to make the processes for cre-

dentialing leaders simpler, more flexible, and more free. We have inherited a "civil service" model of ministry recruitment and deployment, which has its roots in a much more powerful church of the past, where ministry was a privileged, upwardly mobile position. The established churches had well-defined slots that needed to be "filled" by a person with the appropriate credentials. Those appointments were mediated and controlled through a well-developed ecclesial bureaucracy. Quality will always be important. But there will inevitably be some loss of control.

Ministry in the Spirit-breathed church will be free not only in the sense of less-controlled, but also free in the sense of less-stipended. More people will be doing ministry for FREE—more or less. Some will be volunteer, part-time, or bi-vocational. They cannot afford to go into educational debt to prepare. They will need access to quality theological education that they can do part-time and at a distance while they do ministry. Even those preparing for full-time, fully credentialed professional ministry may not be able to keep up with the cost of theological education.

Assuming that many churches will have fewer resources, those engaged in its ministries will need to be more resourceful and entrepreneurial themselves. In that way they are very much like those folks at St. James Lutheran Church in Portland a hundred years ago, figuring out how to start a seminary in the Sunday school room with no structures in place to support it.

Forming Leaders for the Spirit-breathed Church

So, if we were starting from scratch, how would we envision a new kind of theological education that can do all that?

1. Well, first we should begin with a word of thanks to our existing system of eight small to medium-sized ELCA seminaries. They have maintained a strong Lutheran theological identity. They take seriously their role as theological centers for the church, as places of research and critical thinking. Each thinks of its primary mission as providing residential Master of Divinity programs for ordination candidates. But they have also flexed enormously and are willing to flex more. They have re-built their curricula from the ground up again and again to meet the changing needs of the church. They have developed an avalanche of degrees, joint programs, certificates, concentrations, extension centers, and distance modalities. You name it, and someone has tried it. These places are not asleep at the switch. This TEEM program is just one prime example. Distributed learning at Luther is another. Gettysburg does a great job with lay education. Several of us have picked up the challenge from EOCM to offer a concentration that will prepare our graduates to develop new mission congregations.
2. To take on the challenge to prepare myriad ministers for a Sprit-breathed church, the seminaries will need to change more. They—or should I say we—will need to change radically. We have to rethink our understanding of what our core business is. Residential, graduate-level professional theological education is a very, very good thing and we have done it well. It is a model well suited to an establishment church. It will continue to be an important pattern of ministerial formation, but it will surely diminish. If we were starting over, we would make distance modalities our primary way of offering a flexible range of theological education for a diverse movement of Spirit-breathed ministers. That is a complete inversion of business as usual

for us. It means that we embrace fully and invest our attention and resources in developing:

- Online degree programs of the highest quality;
- Degree programs that combine college and seminary work in one condensed, shorter, less expensive degree;
- Joint programs with colleges and universities that allow people to prepare for ministry and another profession at the same time;
- Degree programs organized to allow working people to access them on weekends, evenings, or summer intensives;
- Certificate programs, like TEEM, that can be accessed at a distance, using local resources like pastor mentors and supervisors;
- Programs of theological depth to equip laity for their ministry in the world;
- Easily accessible courses like SELECT available to the laity and church staff ;
- Intensive programs to enrich those already engaged in ministry;
- In-depth theological grounding for ministry in daily life; and
- New programs and delivery systems yet to be imagined.

In this restless, mobile, free environment, community and formation will continue to be very important, but it will not all happen on a residential seminary campus. More formation than we think can occur in online communities. Face-to-face engagement will still be essential. Maybe the congregation becomes the primary place of formation for some. Maybe we link up with Lutheran colleges or ecumenical communities or create dispersed extension centers to be places of formation for the leaders we need. We will have to be very wise and deliberate in thinking through how to make the very best use of the precious periods of time when we have students in residence on a seminary campus—whether for three years, or one year, or two weeks every semester, or four-day intensives like we have for TEEM. As you know, a lot can happen in a very short time.

How could we possibly do all that? This is a vast expansion and diversification of theological education. The seminaries as they are may have the will, but none of them on its own has the capacity to mount and sustain all the diverse programs that this new understanding of church and ministry calls for. Where will the resources come from in this less powerful, Spirit-breathed church?

We can't do it alone. But we can do it together. We can do it as a whole church. We can do it as part of a larger learning network in which many partners play a part.

The first strategic partner is the church —the ELCA churchwide organization and the synods. If the ELCA—with all of its challenges—fully embraced "theological education as hope for a new ecclesiology," it could make this vision a reality. It would require a strategic decision to invest in unprecedented levels in a system of theological education that could deliver on this promise. We hear about major cuts and reorganizations in all mainline denominations, including our own. The church would literally have to bet the farm on theological education as its best hope for negotiating the cataclysmic changes we are encountering. Theological education, as we said, is a powerful engine for change. It is the single most efficient way to move the church to a new way of being and doing. If the church could assure initial financial and powerful moral support, the seminaries would organize themselves and work with others to get this done.

To make possible this massive shift we are talking about, we would need to be working collaboratively with countless other partners in the church and beyond. The seminaries are seeking ecumenical partnerships with neighboring seminaries to be able to not only survive but also expand and diversify theological education for a new time. In this networked, interdependent age, we would link together a much wider circle of theological education providers who would have important roles in a flexible system of formation for a million different ministries. The colleges would have a big role, as would the schools of our full-communion partners. Teaching congregations and pastors would play a part, with more theological education based in the congregation. Retreat centers, camps and campus ministry centers might also serve as loci of theological education.

Together we would have to develop a business model that could sustain this system over time. It would involve a real plan to reduce the cost of theological education and a new degree of realism about how those very real costs will be met. It won't be free. But we have friends with vision who are ready to invest in new ventures in theological education because they believe this is the best way to ensure a church that can adapt and thrive in a changing world. They care about TEEM because it is making the riches of theological education accessible to a wider circle of Spirit-breathed leaders.

Back in 1910, Dr. J. Allen Leas, Jennie Bloom Summers and a few others had a bold vision to start a seminary in the West. They started with nothing, and that tiny mustard seed has grown beyond all reasonable expectations. That is how it is in the kingdom of God.

This year we are honoring their faith and courage. This "lone seminary in the West" is doing the work for which it was intended. The seed they planted has a future, if not necessarily one they could have imagined. This seminary and all our seminaries will change radically, perhaps beyond recognition. Our future at PLTS is not as the "lone" seminary in the West, but as a vital node on a thriving network with the capacity to provide flexible, affordable, in-depth, distinctively Lutheran theological education for Spirit-filled leaders for a Spirit-breathed church.

This is not a new vision, nor is it my private revelation. This is basically the vision of the ELCA Study of Theological Education resoundingly approved by the 1995 Churchwide Assembly.[4] And it is a vision that has been affirmed in one form or another every time there has been a serious reconsideration of theological education in the ELCA since then. It has been implemented here and there. TEEM is one of the great success stories. But we are still waiting for this total inversion toward more diverse and accessible forms of theological education.

What makes me think it could happen now? The pace of change around us has accelerated—radically. Pluralism. Technology. A less powerful church. An economy in crisis. The *status quo* is unsustainable in light of mounting student debt, depleted endowments, and a precipitous drop in grants to seminaries from synods and the churchwide organization. This perfect storm creates the urgency necessary for deep, deep change. Economic forces may finally drive a Spirit-led transformation long overdue and badly needed to meet the mission challenges of our time.

4. "Faithful Leaders for a Changing World: Theological Education for Mission in the ELCA," available on the "Theological Education" page of the ELCA website, www.elca.org (accessed April 19, 2011).

Theological Education as Hope for a New Ecclesiology

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Bishop, Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA

Introduction

Trying to imagine a new ecclesiology for a denomination as large and complex as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which boasts a variety of sensibilities regarding the work of ministry among its 10,300 congregations, is at best a daunting task. As the history of Christianity in the world, Lutheranism in general, and more recent events in the life of the ELCA can teach us, we are often divided in our sensibilities about what it means to be the "one true church." In fact, I believe it can be said that our "one, true ecclesiology" is actually a number of "little ecclesiologies" which have been attempting, with varying degrees of success, to co-exist with each other over the twenty-two year history of this church's existence.

The coexistence of these differing sensibilities about ministry have no doubt been aided by our recognition that the *ecclesia,* the gathered people of God, is first, foremost, and last a work of the Holy Spirit, and not the people who make up or lead this church. Luther's explanation of the third article of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe that I cannot by own understanding or strength believe in my Lord Jesus Christ, or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with its gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith, just as the Spirit calls gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth…" reminds us that the work of the Holy Spirit does not begin with us in the formation of our own faith journey, nor in the gathering together of the Church. Can we then accept, trust, and believe that the work of God's Holy Spirit to "call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole Christian Church on earth" may well happen in ways and at times and in places and through people that can leave us scratching our heads in wonder and amazement? Such trust in the eclectic sensibilities of a God whose image and imprint is on all the peoples of the earth would serve any denomination well, and any seminary charged with preparing leaders to serve God's called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, and *diverse* people.

It might be helpful to remember that our trust in the work of God's Holy Spirit can and should be applied to our present and future in the ELCA. We are what we represented ourselves to be when the *merger* that brought us into existence took place. We are congregational in our sensibilities, and we are committed to our place in the life of the larger church. We are rural, and we are urban; we are large, and we are small; we can be racially and culturally diverse, and we can be monochromatic; we are willing to take risks in our outreach, and we are left

1. Presented at the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) Conference at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, October 6, 2010.

to wonder why there is all this *talk* about transforming our "we are doing just fine, thank you very much" congregation. We look to our pastoral leaders to be strong and dynamic, to guide and to lead us. We look to these same leaders to be collaborative in their leadership style and enable us to share our gifts. We are hopeful and we are fearful. We are focused inwardly, and we are focused externally, and in the best of all realities, when we are truly honest with ourselves, we realize that we are and *need to be* all of these things, as many portions of New Testament letters and Marty Haugen's hymn "Gather Us In"[2] remind us.

This conference of those invested in Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) is testament that we are recognizing that it is time, and perhaps past time, for us to imagine more new possibilities for theological education and the training of the rostered leaders, possibilities that TEEM has helped bring into the life of the ELCA.

Which came first, the ecclesiology or the theological education?

For many years, the ELCA has prepared rostered leaders in a manner that served its congregations well, but has also, to some degree, subjugated the missional needs of the whole church. Identifying potential candidates for seminary was largely a process of congregational leaders, ordained and lay, endorsing candidates for study who were reflective of the values and culture of the congregations from which they came. This no doubt left congregations better disposed to receive and celebrate these trained leaders when they were called to serve among us following their course of study at seminary. Such a "consumerist model" produced leaders the seminaries were expected to produce: pastors, Associates in Ministry, and diaconal ministers who met the general expectations of the body of congregations from which they came. It can also happily be said that this relationship was symbiotic in nature, in that it also provided for generous and much needed support from donors who were willing to support the work the seminaries have been and are doing in providing gifted leaders for service to the church. Decades ago, in fact, such support provided for the entire cost of one's seminary education; now it is an important way of helping to subsidize an education that has become increasingly more costly for students—and, in some cases, beyond the reach of people who might have been gifted candidates for ministry.

The relationship between seminaries and congregations also existed in the role congregations played in the training of future rostered leaders for the church. What the seminaries began in the process of training pastoral leaders in the classroom was left to congregations and synods of this church to complete. The long process of the church's "acculturation" of pastoral leaders often started in the early days of seminary education and was continued through contextual education and internship opportunities and certification processes of synodical committees largely made up of lay and rostered congregational and synodical leaders. The acculturation process was continued through judicatory placement "drafts," a vetting of candidates by synod staff people and finally congregational interviews. Assuming a call was received, the process then continued in the first years of parish ministry, when the full weight of ecclesial expectations for the "right kind" of pastoral leadership was laid upon the shoulders of these brave and vigorous young leaders. Their energies and fresh ideas were kept in check by guardians of congregational expectations and orthodox approaches to serving in parish

2. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #532.

ministry who often employed the tried-and-true maxims, "We tried that once and it didn't work…," or "We've never done it that way before." This was not a universal experience for all rostered and pastoral leaders, but it has been enough of a shared experience that it needs little explanation at gatherings of church professionals or when Garrison Keillor refers to it in the "News from Lake Wobegon."

I wonder if it could be argued that our method of preparing pastoral leaders was largely informed by a similar sensibility that guided the newly formed ELCA in its mission strategies across the country. When the ELCA was formed in 1988, there was rarely conversation about consolidating ministries from the different antecedent bodies of the merger to facilitate the strategic missional goals or needs of the *larger church*, even when such congregations were in close proximity to one another, or were *struggling to exist* as two congregations that might have been able to *thrive* as one. Strategies for mission that were based more on the needs and contexts of the communities in which these ministries had existed were subjugated to the needs, wants, and desires of local congregations for continuing their autonomous existence. Sensibilities for a more "global" conversation regarding resources for ministry were left at an altar of expediency—the path of least resistance. The needs and wants of the local congregation trumped the needs of the larger church. Could it also be said that congregations were able to affect the shape of theological education for similar reasons?

The practical realities of the relationship between seminaries and congregations could not help but shape, to some degree, the expected outcome of one's seminary education. However, this was not a one-way street. Seminaries, blessed with an increasingly diverse teaching staff and student bodies and students who were not "cradle" Lutherans, began asking questions about how to anticipate meeting the needs of ministry in our changing culture. Churchwide staff and the faculties of our seminaries began sensing a need for investigating other models for theological education as a means to affect the overall shape of ministry in this church, as well as to respond to shifts in the culture, which congregations were not necessarily able to identify or to which they were willing to respond. As "emergent ministries" began to become a part of the landscape of Christian witness and evangelism in this country, the need for faculty and students in our seminaries who were conversant and competent in such ministry strategies became increasingly evident. The relationship between seminaries and congregations has become more vitalized in recent years by the desire for discourse concerning the changing contexts of our ministries. TEEM is a welcome sign of a healthy collaboration between the seminaries and congregations of this church, and a much needed gift for the future of theological education and any possibility for a "new" ecclesiology that is nimble, agile, and responsive to shifts in the culture as well as willing to risk shaping that "dominant" culture with the message of Christ's transforming love for the world.

Our Many and Varied Contexts

We are called to be a sign of God's ability to create unity in the midst of diversity and harmony from dissonant chords *for* the world. We are called, as the ELCA's branding names us—to be a church known for doing "God's work" with "our hands" *for* the world. We are called to be the fulfillment of Christ's gift of peace and reconciling love *for* the world. A world, by the way, that seems to prefer the discord and rancor of political pundits, or liquor stores and massage parlors—but for God's sake *not a mosque*—anywhere near Ground Zero in New York City. I believe the best hope for shaping, transforming, and

revitalizing theological education as "hope for a new ecclesiology" is to recognize that we cannot possibly meet all of the expectations and contextual nuances through offering a single path to ordained ministry or to word and service ministry. Along with a diversification of modalities for theological education, we need to recognize that the diversity of our ministries or the manner in which we are trained to do ministry in a variety of contexts *in no way denigrates the unity in Christ we celebrate*.

In the field of education, it has been recognized that all learners do not learn in the same manner. Different approaches to more traditional, some would say *linear,* modes of teaching have become a part of the landscape of elementary and secondary education in this country. In addition to identifying students who are intellectually gifted for learning, the concept of honoring and celebrating the learning styles of those with "emotional intelligence" is also a part of a school's education plan. My wife, a high school principal, has a poster in her office, which says, "All students are gifted, they just open their presents at different times." In like manner, we have come to realize, as Paul offered in Ephesians and Corinthians, that there are a wide variety of gifts for ministry that are inspired by God in response to particular needs in the life of the church, and that this variety of gifts may alert us to the need to "push" previously held boundaries with regard to seminary education. Could this be one of those times? Could the needs before us be some of those needs? Are we ready to trust that, beyond our seeing and our level of comfort, God may be doing a "new thing" in our midst by encouraging questions such as the ones we are considering in these times and especially at this conference—questions for which God may *already* be providing an answer?

People in a variety of life circumstances receive the call to ministry, as they always have; but there are now more options for people to amend their lives so as to be able to answer that call. Thankfully, the church has recognized that once popular "traditional tracks" for theological education are accessible to smaller numbers of people today than in the past. Additionally, culture and the economy have played a role in re-shaping the means and methodology of theological education. At one time, the "usual" track in the Lutheran church for those entering theological education was a twelve-year sojourn through Lutheran high school, college and seminary, beginning at age 14 and ending at age 26. Many of today's seminarians are entering into the ministry as second- and third-career individuals with a great deal of life experience. Early retirement has made it possible for some to enter seminary with their pension "subsidizing" the costs of their education. Others have found that spending three years in seminary and one year on internship is not practical, given their circumstances, and so alternatives have needed to be explored and developed.

Even as the possibility for such changes has been embraced by many, concerns have been expressed that the Lutheran church's commitment to rigorous theological training is being sacrificed for the sake of a new order. Some have asked, "How can someone become theologically grounded without the three years of seminary and one year of internship that has been the standard for the preparation of pastors to serve this church?" "Won't this lead to a watering down of our theology?" There is surely some risk involved in adapting what have become *tried and true* methods for training rostered leaders, methods that have become somewhat iconic in nature. It is past time for an honest assessment of these concerns. I believe we will find our church well served in years to come if we risk implementing new concepts for seminary training and theological education. A process of educating members at all levels

of the church's life would ameliorate some of the concerns that might be raised, as well as, I imagine, the passage of time while living into these new models.

I recently visited El Salvador, where I had the opportunity to meet with a number of leaders in the Salvadoran Lutheran Church. During the time of the Civil War, a number of pastors in remote areas of the country were ordained through a program similar to TEEM and continue to serve the parishes that first identified them as having gifts and skills for ministry. Today, these pastors continue to meet for regular continuing education opportunities, in some cases fifteen years after they began serving in ministry. During the Salvadoran Civil War, there was a great need for pastors to serve these parishes and, thankfully, the church found a way to meet that need on an immediate and continuing basis. It was my impression that these pastors are not seen as "less than" their more traditionally trained counterparts; they are received as full partners in the ministry of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church and are thanked and acknowledged for their service in challenging ministries. It would be my hope that our church could learn more from our Salvadoran sisters and brothers about this imaginative approach to preparing leaders for the church's ministry, and have the courage to implement such a vision.

For instance, the traditional length of time and manner of study for Master of Divinity students has been to require a four-year undergraduate degree, usually a B.A. in the liberal arts and sciences, and then a prescribed four-year course of study at seminary, including a year of internship, usually during the third year. For most of the students who came through this system, this was a familiar pattern, similar to the years of study they had previously completed in elementary school, secondary school, and college or university. It is a model for education that was based, in part, on the need for children to work on the farms of their families. Now, many public schools in this country have adapted their school years to accommodate year-round or "modified traditional" schedules, which have been shown to better serve the educational process of the students. Might we also be able to adapt our traditional course of theological study to accommodate the changing needs of those who are called to service in the church and the milieu of our non-agrarian culture? Additionally, might not virtual classrooms and online learning continue to be developed as options to expand the manner in which students could complete their education?

An idea that has surfaced in recent years and that I would be willing to support as a judicatory leader (caveat: I am not speaking here for other bishops) would be to shorten the length of classroom time at seminary to two years of study, while expanding the previously mentioned collaborative relationship between seminaries and congregations, as well as other kinds of ministries, to complete the training of would-be pastors. Instead of the one year practicum of internship, an expanded three-year paid "residency" would be required following the shortened course of study at seminary, with regular meetings during that time of residents, supervising clergy, and seminary contextual education staff, as well as professors from the different teaching disciplines of the seminary. Each of the three years of the residency would have specific, measurable, and objective goals for the student to complete and upon which their final graduation from seminary would be determined. Similar changes could be made in the training that Associates in Ministry and diaconal ministers receive. A more traditional four-year track would also be offered for those who desire this option. Care would need to be taken to ensure that a disparity did not come to exist in the wider church between how pastors prepared in the

more traditional manner are received over and against those who are trained in a newer course of study.

Seminary training has not always allowed for "specialists" to be trained for non-parish contexts of ministry. Instead, it was expected that theological training would be for the general purposes of parish ministry. In fact, a seminary graduate could not usually be certified for special ministries such as global mission, intentional interim ministry, mission development, or chaplaincy until after they "paid their dues" by serving three years in a conventional parish setting. Thankfully, there have been recent changes in this sensibility, with more work and conversation to come. It might be worth exploring whether the fore-mentioned residencies could be used as a means for students to discern particular callings to ministry—mission development, small town and rural ministries, multiple staff ministries, chaplaincy, global mission, interim ministry, congregational redevelopment, inner-city, multi-cultural, or youth and family ministry.

Benefits and Challenges

The benefits of a shortened course of classroom study for the preparation for ministry are numerous, not the least of which would be to help end the cycle of driving seminary students into crippling debt. Graduating students with debts that need to be serviced for a decade or longer represent a great challenge to the pastor and their family as well as to the church, especially when the relatively low compensation of pastors will be the primary source for the repayment of these debts. Pastors can become, in effect, "indentured servants" because of the need to service student loan debts. In the scenario described above, instead of accruing four years of indebtedness during one's course of study on the traditional track of seminary, students could begin earning an income beginning in their third year of study. Additional benefits could be an even greater sense of collaboration between seminaries and congregations, the ability of residents to serve ministries that might not be able to afford to compensate a pastor with more years of experience, and a greater length of time for residents to explore their gifts for ministry in a parish setting. In certain circumstances, such residencies might morph into more conventional calls, but it might be wise to preserve these "cradles of pastoral formation" for future student-residents. Congregations that are found to have a gift for serving the larger church and the residents they help prepare for ministry should be reinforced in their mission and assisted to understand the importance of continuing in this vital ministry.

The challenges of altering the present course of study for the awarding of Master of Divinity degrees could involve educational requirements falling short of accreditation requirements set by national boards. This might be further complicated by accreditation boards for chaplaincy ministries not recognizing the new course of study as meeting the requirements for service, specifically ACPE[3] or military chaplaincies. At one point in American Lutheranism, Bachelor of Divinity degrees were awarded to students graduating from seminary. Perhaps a course of education at seminaries that requires two years of undergraduate study and/or an associate degree in religious studies, coupled with the two years of course work at seminary, could lead to once again awarding Bachelor of Divinity degrees for those students who choose, for a variety of reasons, not to follow the more traditional eight-year path toward a Master's degree. A variety of options or accreditation paths to ordained service, as well as to ministries of word and service, would recognize the many and varied contexts for

3. ACPE = The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc., which provides accreditation for CPE centers and certification for CPE supervisors.—Ed.

ministry in this church, and the life situations of those who are called to such service.

TEEM has played, and most importantly, will continue to play an important role in helping us to imagine the future of theological education for a changing church. TEEM is a course of theological training that is leading us to a new ecclesiology—one that is more responsive to the ministries of local congregations while offering a bold witness to the power of the Holy Spirit in shaping and re-shaping our life together as a denomination. TEEM allows and even encourages this church to seek, celebrate, and utilize the widest variety of gifts from the greatest number of people to serve and bless our work in making Christ known.

Simul Eustis at Como?[4]

I'd like to close on a personal note. Some of the most helpful theological training I received came not in the classroom, but sitting around a table in the "Diet" of Luther Seminary—what we called the cafeteria—sometime *after* class. It isn't that what my professors had to offer during class wasn't helpful or relevant; it was. In fact, it was what we received in class that became fodder for discussion among students over coffee a few hours later. In my case, that was after I'd had time to ride on a lawnmower or shovel some snow around the grounds of the seminary. I think some of my best theological formation came from riding a John Deere tractor on the forty acres that made up our campus as I put my mind in neutral and tractor in "go."

Thankfully, the formation didn't stop there. Thoughts that I believed would mesmerize my colleagues with their theological profundity were shot down within seconds of our beginning those heady discussions in the Diet. And thoughts that I was nowhere near gifted enough to formulate seemed to come with relative ease to those with whom I was blessed to be sharing a cup of coffee. It was clear that what we had heard in the classroom took on new life with the help of caffeine and snickerdoodles, and no doubt, the Holy Spirit. A few years later, it took on new life on internship and in our first calls, in conversations with parishioners and colleagues and, every now and again, with people who had no connection whatsoever with the church.

Keep in mind, when I was in seminary there was no such thing as "online learning." There was barely an Internet. Apple computers had as much memory as the floppy disk that had been inserted into them, measured in bytes and not gigabytes. Theological conversations happened over coffee, and still do, but now they also happen in blogs and through social media. And the church, not falling too far behind in this area as it has in so many others, has attempted to keep up by expanding opportunities for distance learning, online theological education, video classrooms, journals published over the Internet, and virtual seminaries. TEEM has proven to be a gift not only to those who have previously been excluded by life situations from considering advanced theological training, but to the whole church, which is benefitting from the rich diversity of gifts these students and eventually pastors bring to the contexts of their ministries. TEEM is truly a way in which a new ecclesiology is being shaped for a post-modern, post-Christian, and perhaps post-denominational culture. It is a sign of hope for the mission of the ELCA: "Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world."[5] May God's grace and peace be with us as we continue to move forward in ministry together.

4. This is a pun that relies on the names of the streets forming the western and southern boundaries of Luther Seminary in St. Paul.—Ed.

5. The Mission Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Courage and Imagination in Ministry

A sermon preached at the TEEM Annual Conference, October 6, 2010, at the Chapel of the Cross, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley, Calif.

Steed Vernyl Davidson

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Reading: Luke 17:7–10

Parables make interesting reading and preaching material. Quite often because of their simplicity, we believe that we know how to interpret them. Further, because we think that parables function like similes, we engage in a relentless drive to identify equivalents in them. Sometimes this approach not only misreads parables, it makes for less than appealing readings. This appears to be the case with *this* parable of Jesus, peculiar to the gospel of Luke and couched within a number of sayings in Luke. This location for the parable needs to be borne in mind lest we think that we have in these chapters a continuous narrative rather than a cluster of sayings.

Like several Lukan parables, this one pays attention to the household context of Jesus' day. It features a master and a slave. Various translations reflect discomfort about whether *doulos* is really "servant" or "slave," but the NRSV correctly translates it ("slave") based upon the relationship described here. Yet the translation of *doulos* seems to be one of the least troubling aspects about the interpretation of this parable. Any conversation about slavery in the Bible becomes refracted through the lens of the history of slavery in the United States, in good and bad ways. And this surfaces as most interpreters refrain from critiquing what appears to be an abusive relationship between a slaveholder and his slave. Jesus raises the question as to whether a master exercises compassion for a hardworking slave at the end of the day or insists on more thankless service. Not only do we find little comment or even discomfort about this reality in most commentaries, but this description seems normal, in fact acceptable, to most interpreters.

Jesus outlines the actions of a slave master. Do you say to your slave at the end of the day, "Come sit with me and let us relax because you have worked faithfully"? Or do slave masters insist that their slaves work the fields, tend the sheep, and serve at table without rest? And even after recognizing that this may have well been an overloaded day, the slave master offers no favor or appreciation. Well, the general consensus in the interpretive tradition of this text appears to be the former. Slave owners work their slaves to the bone and get as much as they can out of them. And perhaps this is true in slave systems over the course of history. But do you think that the question Jesus poses here requires silence—or for someone to come forward and to answer "Me"?

Let us consider the notion that many believe that Jesus asks this question of the

apostles, bearing in mind that for Luke "the twelve" constitutes the apostles. The only thing that leads us to believe this is addressed to "the twelve" lies in their identification in v. 5, where they are asking for an increased faith. The presumption that the response of Jesus in v. 6 continues into v. 7 may be warranted, except when we stop to ask *which* of the twelve he could be addressing with this question. The question presumes a group of slave owners. Which ones of "the twelve" would fall into this group? Yet constantly you read of the application of the message of this parable to *discipleship* and the necessity of accepting either that discipleship stands as its own reward or that you gain no favor from God for discipleship.

The image of God portrayed in the standard interpretation of the parable appears even more troubling. To equate the apostles with the slave, and consequently discipleship of Jesus in every age with a spiritual slavery, turns God into the slave owner. We already have interpretations that gloss over the issue of overworked slaves, now we have divine sanction for such actions. It becomes problematic to affirm that the actions of the slave owner appear as a normal way to treat a slave, but it appears even more worrisome to suggest that God treats overworked disciples as slaves, pays no regard to the well-being of disciples, and even worse offers no grace, no favor, no thanks to disciples. Much of this interpretive trend arises from the necessity of avoiding works-righteousness in this passage. Most interpreters remain convinced that an interpretation that says, "Yes, a slave can be thanked or better yet be given favor or grace," opens up the door for personss to claim that God owes them something for their work. Of course, keeping God as the abusive slave owner seems preferable, because if the slave owner's actions equate with those of God then the social structure is affirmed. If God's actions normalize this treatment of a slave by calling it "discipleship," then issues of work, reward for work, treatment of slaves, and slave systems get taken off the table.

Should Jesus' words here be directed to a group of slave owners, and indeed they should be so read, then what point does Jesus make to them? It seems then that Jesus puts them into the category of slaves. If the punch line of the parable lies in v. 10, then Jesus says to those who are addressed as slave *owners* in v. 7 that they remain "worthless *slaves*" in the end. Certainly such an interpretation alters the way we read the parable as well as its impact. That parables take their effectiveness from their dissimilarity makes such a reading possible. What does it mean for slave owners to be called slaves at the end of the day? They who walk around as the captains of industry, they who command the economy, direct the affairs of state, grease the wheels of power? That they too are slaves suggests that their power stands only as a phantasm. Slave owners, like slaves, exist in a web of power where they too act like slaves to the system, slaves to greed, slaves to ideas of superiority, slaves to principles that convince them that they know what is good for everyone and good for society. They no more control power than they are controlled by external powers. And if Jesus speaks to that group, then this parable turns that power on its head and makes a mockery of slave-owning.

The original question that frames this parable also proves instructive for our interpretation of the parable. Rhetorical questions serve various functions and at times we believe that the answers to these questions lie right before our faces. The question, "Who among you would say…?" implies the answer, "No one!" Yet it may well stand as a challenge to someone in

the crowd to step forward and say, "Yes, I treat my slaves differently. I operate with different principles. I do not always look at the bottom line. I am sensitive to their needs because if I keep working valuable slaves I will lose them all too quickly. I show favor and grace to my slaves so that they may want to stay in my household much longer. I am different." The question may well pose a challenge to some slave owner to show courage and step outside the system and not be counted as a slave to the system, dutifully supporting something that debases and dehumanizes.

This parable challenges us as to whether in the practice of ministry we find freedom or enslavement.

Should we read the parable this way, then we hear Jesus calling us to act counter-culturally and move against the system. We people of faith can easily identify those systems in the world that require our resistance. However, we all too often fail to see the system that we are a part of as problematic. That slave ownership and the social position of the slave remain in the church's vocabulary in an uncritical and unexamined way up to today speaks volumes for the church's understanding of ministry and those who perform ministry. That ministry and the institutions of ministry become its own system with its unique culture, its own apparatus for rewards and punishments, its mechanism for advancement, its rules to play by to get along and get by, suggests that we too need to critically hear this parable. The issue becomes not whether we earn God's favor or not by our works, but rather, that we wish to remove God from being gracious to those who serve suggests the construction of an apparatus of power to control the lives of those who serve the church. As people called to serve God in the church and the world, we can hear in this parable the challenge to be different from the system and to declare courageously: "My service will not be that of a slave to the system." An insistence that our practice of ministry will not lead to us being captured and oppressed by systems and thoughts that restrict human thriving, that seek to replicate traditions just for their own sakes, and that keep wheels turning without a sense of direction and purpose. This parable challenges us as to whether in the practice of ministry we find freedom or enslavement.

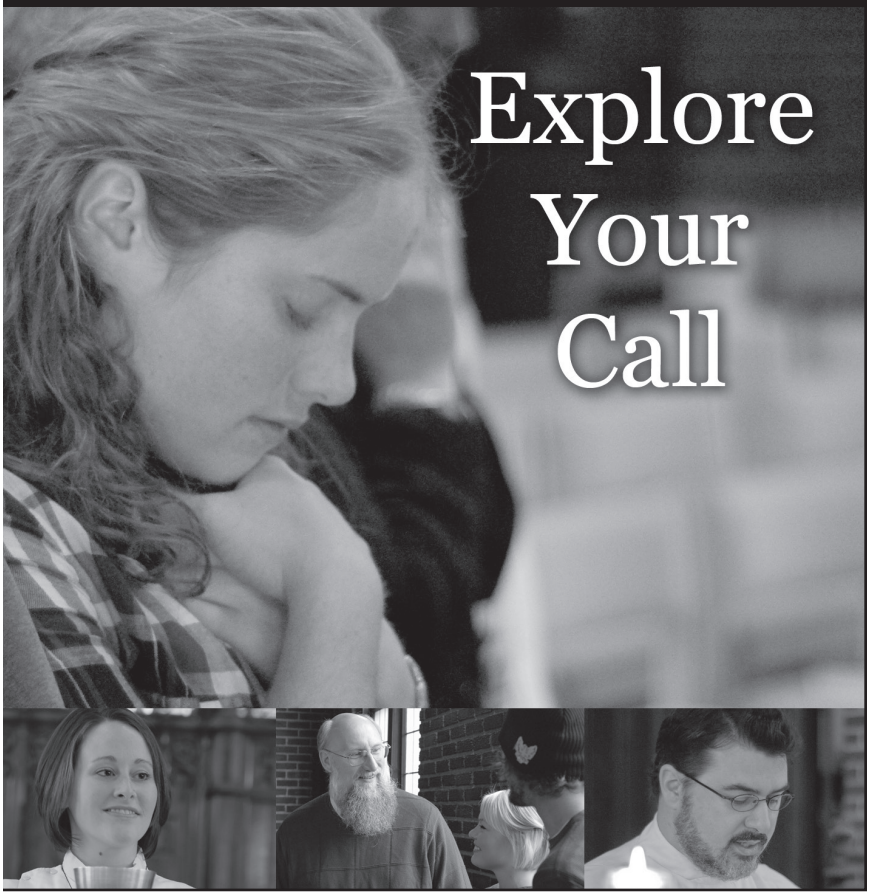
In these days, the church and the world need persons with the courage to be in ministry in a radically different way. This radically different way calls upon us to redefine what we understand by ministry not so much from the perspective of what the church needs, but more so from the perspective of what service to God looks like in today's age. Today the world cries out for people of faith who would provide more than the usual, more than the expected, break outside of the normal, and dare to be different, in order to dismantle the systems that hinder the full liberation of all people. Now more than ever we need persons who will act against the normal and respectable church culture to fashion new communities of faith, new avenues where individuals can encounter God and the grace of God in liberating and renewing ways. Now more than at any time in

the history of the church and its service to the world, ministry requires persons with excitement and enthusiasm unrestricted by the system. Such people require moral courage, a moral courage that knows that being different is not tied to their worth nor determines their worth. It is a moral courage that understands that even in acting against the culture they claim no special or elite status, but merely act out their freedom to serve God as joyous, loyal, committed workers for God. This courage means that we do not play it safe in the performance of ministry. It means resisting the seductions of the system that call us to comfort, predictability, security, and ultimately to control. This courage to stand up and stand out means being unafraid to fail and in fact expects mistakes and failures to occur. But this way of serving takes imagination, the imagination that Jesus speaks of in v. 6: to "say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted…,' and it would obey you." The imagination to be daringly different, not simply doing an old thing anew; the imagination to be bold in our thinking, not merely affirming existing structures to have our way; the imagination to pioneer new ground, not reinscribe old habits. This imagination comes from faith in God. An imagination based upon faith in a God who empowers, renews, releases, restores, recovers, and resends God's workers into the world refreshed and energized to serve. This imagination sees service to God through the church in the world in different ways, and responds when Jesus asks, "'Who among you would' act apart from the crowd, stand out from the normal and the everyday, and be willing to find your freedom in true service?"

This parable calls us to see our service to God not in the structure of slave systems but in the freedom of service to a loving God. Ministry in today's world needs the freedom of service that enthusiastic workers bring. Augustine's famous prayer helps us to refashion our approach to service by basing it upon our unconditional love for God. In this prayer, Augustine recognizes the mind and the heart as sites for service. He sees knowledge and love as the basis for serving God. And in so doing we joyfully serve, finding our freedom in service to a gracious and loving God:

> O Thou who art the light of minds that know Thee, the life of the souls that love Thee, and the strength of the wills that serve Thee. Help us so to know Thee that we may truly love Thee, so to love Thee that we may fully serve Thee, whose service is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Wartburg Theological Seminary



Do you know someone who is considering a call to ministry?

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Book Reviews

Early Irish Monasticism: An Understanding of its Cultural Roots. By Catherine Thom. London: T&T Clark, 2006. ISBN-13: 978-0567032751. 256 pages. Paper. $44.95.

Catherine Thom, a Sister of St. Joseph, residing in Australia, has written an extensive study of Irish Monasticism as it existed from the sixth to the eighth century. She references primarily St. Columba, founder of Iona, and the peripatetic Columban who carried Irish Christianity beyond Ireland. Her interest lies primarily in the ascetic and penitential writings of these and other Irish monks. She writes a sympathetic picture of Irish monasticism, in contrast to some who have considered it too severe. Her argument depends in part on the supposition that Irish Christianity developed from the poetic and imaginative Celts, and in part that Irish monasticism was coenobitic rather than eremitic.

Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago, Illinois

Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ. Eds. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0802862877. 527 pages. $32.00.

This excellent collection of essays and reprints has one major purpose: to offer alternatives to the Anselm doctrine of atonement. In 1097 CE, Anselm penned in his *Cur Deus Homo* a theory of penal satisfaction. Though the social context has altered much since then, still many Christians assume the Anselmian teaching correctly interprets the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is, the sinful nature of humanity aroused the wrath of God, who then demanded a human sacrifice to restore right relationships. That human sacrifice was God's own Son, Jesus Christ (Nathan Rieger, 382–83). Among many thoughtful Christians, the Anselm doctrine has lost its impact. For example, in 2007, seventy people participated in a conference on "Nonviolent Atonement." Under the guidance of Michael Hardin, some papers presented there became the nucleus for the current book (Michael Hardin, 14–16).

There are several major atonement proposals in this book that would replace the Anselm doctrine. One comes from René Girard's "scapegoat mechanism." According to Girard, all cultures avoid disintegrating violence and maintain social cohesion by creating a scapegoat whom they kill. Girard himself argues that the self-giving act of Jesus destroyed the necessity of such a mimetic abyss. That is, Jesus' designation of himself as a scapegoat in a highly conflictive Roman world eliminated the need to create a scapegoat (Wayne Northey, 370–72).

Another major alternative to Anselm comes from those who consider the cross a nonviolent act of reconciliation (notably the Anabaptists; Willard Swartley, 10–12). The classic view of atonement ignores the life and teaching of Jesus. It knows only a final blood sacrifice. It does not see that Jesus taught a nonviolent way of life and settled conflicts in a nonviolent manner. The cross then serves as an ultimate nonviolent act in the face of Roman and Jewish conflicts. The resurrection signals the victory of such a way of life (J. Denny Weaver, 319).

In addition to the Girard and Anabaptist alternatives to Anselm, several other helpful proposals have been included. In a fine reprint, N.T. Wright says Jesus followed God's covenant promise to Israel. Instead of a Messiah who conquered his opponents, the cross became a process of victory by means of love and peace (148). For Anthony Bartlett, Christ's passion begins a new, radical creation and a new humanity that fulfills what God intended as recorded in Genesis (410). In a very thoughtful essay, Miroslav Volf wrestles with the relationship of justice and forgiveness. In a somewhat anguishing reflection, he insists that if one comes first, both will be destroyed. Justice and forgiveness must occur

simultaneously in the will to care or embrace the other—as seen in the death of Christ (283–85). Perhaps the most radical alternative comes from the pen of Canadian novelist Brita Miko. She writes that when a person is violated, it is Christ who is violated. What about the violator? Christ died to forgive the violator. While we may dislike or even hate the perpetrator of the crime, what shall we do? Christ does not die for us, but we are one with him on the cross, shedding our blood also for a cruel world (242–49).

The doctrine of penal satisfaction leaves room for violence against those whom we dislike or fear. God has wrath; so can we. The articles in *Stricken by God?* give us another way to deal with social and political conflict—the way of the cross. As such, this book should be available to all who teach or preach in a Christian context.

Graydon F. Snyder

Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts. Second edition. By K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0800663098. ISBN-13: 978-0800663094. 256 pages. Paper. $32.00.

Fortress Press has produced a second edition of this social science manual to the Gospels that was named "Book of the Year" in 1999 by the Association of Parish Clergy. Responsive to their readers (critics and supporters alike), the authors have revised the earlier work to present a volume that is both insightful and provides an important introduction to a social-science approach to the Gospels. The first chapter presents an overview of the use of models and explains how the organization of the first-century Mediterranean world differs from ours today. This is followed by chapters on family dynamics, political structures, political economy, and political religion.

The reader-friendly format includes biblical quotations to introduce each chapter and questions for further reflection. Seventeen sidebars, twelve illustrations, and thirty-two figures supplement the text. Significant terms (printed in bold type) send the reader to three different glossaries (ancient groups and events, ancient documents, and social-scientific terms). Three bibliographies (ancient documents, social-science theory, and references cited in the text) are provided for further reading.

For those who want more, the authors offer a Web site with numerous resources www.fortresspress.com/hansonoakman.

This book is a must for parish libraries, as well as for college and seminary students.

Fred Strickert
Wartburg College
Waverly, Iowa

Letters and Papers from Prison. By Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 8. English edition edited by John W. de Gruchy. Translated by Isabel Best, Lisa E. Dahill, Reinhard Krauss, and Nancy Lukens. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. ISBN-10: 0800697030. ISBN-13: 978-0800697037. xxiii and 750 pages. Cloth. $60.00.

Letters and Papers from Prison by Lutheran pastor, theologian, leader of the Confessing Church, conspirator, and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, remains as gripping today as when first published in English translation in 1953. In this new edition, however, readers can feast on the most expansive collection of Bonhoeffer's prison materials ever made available. Moreover, this new edition, while mindful of earlier English translations, renders Bonhoeffer's writings with unprecedented accuracy, freshness, and accessibility.

The general editors of the new sixteen-volume English edition of Bonhoeffer's Works, Victoria Barnett and Barbara Wojhoski, and a large and talented team of collaborating volume editors and translators, are making available a scholarly resource that will shape the character of Bonhoeffer studies for future generations. The scholarly apparatus—included in this volume are an excellent introduction

by John W. de Gruchy, an epilogue by Karl-Friedrich Bonhoeffer, an editor's afterword by Christian Gremmels, four appendices (chronology, Bonhoeffer family tree, a comparison of this edition with previous ones, and listing of unpublished material from the Bonhoeffer literary estate), bibliographies, indexes, and elaborate footnotes—ensures that this volume serves the needs of all those seeking critical engagement with this culminating period of Bonhoeffer's life and thought.

Most importantly, through this book the substance of Bonhoeffer's prison letters, prayers, poetry, and other writings can continue to inspire, guide, and challenge a new generation of readers. The witness of Bonhoeffer in these writings testifies to the meaning of living a faithful Christian life under dire circumstances. Arrested for his role in resistance to the Nazi juggernaut, Bonhoeffer centered his existence in Jesus Christ and followed Christ's way of life "for others," including ministry to guards and fellow inmates as beautifully articulated in prayers. The letters provide a glimpse into the meaning of family, friendship, and love in the face of the isolation of imprisonment. His ventures in poetry from prison disclose previously hidden dimensions of Bonhoeffer's personal struggle with his situation and how Christian faith came to bear on that struggle. His sermon at the wedding of his niece to his closest friend brings to focus the necessity of forgiveness in marriage. In addition, his reflections on the necessity of a non-religious interpretation of Christianity in a world come of age remain both tantalizing and provocative. Each of these dimensions of Bonhoeffer's legacy becomes even more vivid through the new translation.

Subjecting himself to rigorous self-examination, the poem, "Who Am I?" culminates in the following lines:

> "Who am I? This one or the other?
>
> Am I this one today and tomorrow another?
>
> Am I both at once? Before others a hypocrite
>
> and in my own eyes a pitiful, whimpering weakling?
>
> Or is what remains in me like a defeated army,
>
> Fleeing in disarray from victory already won?
>
> Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
>
> Whoever I am, thou knowest me; O God, I am thine!" (page 460)

Through the lens of Bonhoeffer's authentically lived human and Christian existence, we are empowered to view and live our existence Other-wise.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

A Guide to Preaching and Leading Worship. By William H. Willimon. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0664232574. ISBN-13: 978-0664232573. x and 108 pages. Paper. $17.95.

Willimon's work states: "This handbook is a practical guide to enable you to be an effective preacher and liturgist" (x). His work covers topics of planning, leading, and evaluating Sunday worship, as well as attending to the components of prayer, preaching, baptizing and communing. Three chapters are devoted to an overview of sermon preparation. The final chapter discusses laity's role in worship. Worship components such as prayer and sacramental actions are also addressed. The index provides a survey, which parishioners can use to evaluate the sermon. Most of the chapters contain italicized lists of key issues and advice for each of the stated topics.

The *Revised Common Lectionary* is viewed as a useful tool for worship planning. While this is taken for granted in a number of denominations, those reading from non-RCL perspectives will find a good rationale for its inclusion in worship planning. Willimon notes that the use of the lectionary "helps [preachers] to ensure that their preaching is also truly biblical" (51). The author seeks to

support the ongoing dialogue between speakers and listeners in offering advice about garnering responses of the laity to proclamation.

This work seems to be slanted for the wrong audience—the pastor. Most of what is covered is very basic seminary material. If pastors are looking for anything new or in-depth here, they may not find it. This book, however, would be admirably suited as a basic text for conference and synodical preparation of lay leaders or for review by laity who plan and direct parish worship. With pastoral vacancies a major issue in all Protestant denominations nationwide, this text could be a helpful primer for those laity leading worship in such settings. The book might also be used as a primer for adult Sunday education classes.

Susan K. Hedahl
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Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God. By J.R. Daniel Kirk. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008. ISBN-10: 080286290X. ISBN-13: 978-0802862907. vii and 245 pages. Paper. $32.00.

This study of Romans derives from the doctoral dissertation of the author while studying at Duke University. Though Kirk's writing will prove complex for some readers, his thesis is simple: the key for understanding Romans does not lie with such concepts as law, grace, justification, righteousness, or salvation. Instead, Romans must be understood in terms of resurrection. Paul begins Romans with an affirmation that the promise of God to the descendents of David was fulfilled by the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. This remarkable affirmation of resurrection (rather than incarnation) becomes the gospel that unites Jew and Greek, as seen in the quote from Hab 2:4 in 1:16–17. Paul ends the letter with an Isaianic passage that repeats the beginning of Romans: God's covenant with the Jews has been fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

> [12] and again Isaiah says,
>
> "The root of Jesse shall come,
>
> the one who rises [is resurrected] to rule the Gentiles;
>
> in him the Gentiles shall hope." (15:12)

Given this literary envelope in which Jesus becomes the Son of God in his resurrection and thereby fulfills God's covenant with Israel by rising anew, Kirk then offers an exegesis of several key passages that substantiate his analysis. For example, the fatherhood of Abraham in Romans 4 combines the so-called death of Abraham with the resurrection of Jesus. Following the promise that his descendents would inherit and bless the world, the skeptical Abraham realized he had no heirs and because of his age was as good as dead (v. 19). But, writes Paul, God gave heirs as promised for Abraham and then completed the promise by resurrecting the dead Jesus as our Lord.

An analysis of Romans in terms of resurrection does indeed result in considerable insight. Readers interested in Paul and Romans certainly need to consider seriously Kirk's exegetical conclusions. On the other hand, there are other major purposes in Paul's writing. Kirk's argument centers on the theodictic nature of Romans—that is, justification of God's promise to Israel. But there are other primary purposes. The letter was written to churches in Rome subordinate to, or even oppressed by, the Roman government. It is difficult not to see in the book of Romans a political intent in which Jesus is the cosmic Lord over all—even the Emperor (8:37–30).

For Kirk, the resurrection-centered church will be inclusive of all believers because the real church does not center on any given dogma, but becomes a unity under the risen Lord.

Graydon F. Snyder

The Historical Jesus of the Gospels. By Craig S. Keener. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN-10: 0802862926. ISBN-13: 978-0802862921. xxxviii and 831 pages. Cloth. $30.00.

This massive book discusses Jesus as the Gospels present him. Keener seeks to show the historical reliability of the Gospels; at the same time, he is interested in the theological concerns of the Gospels. After surveying modern Gospel research in its variety and conflicting views, he turns to explicate what we can learn about Jesus from the best sources, i.e., the canonical Gospels. The footnotes on pages 394–603 show that he has actually used the bibliography on pages 604–713. He stresses that the Gospels, like ancient histories, are based on eyewitness accounts. (He does not note that ancient historians were often themselves eyewitnesses of what they report, e.g., Thucydides and Polybius.) Keener is a respected evangelical scholar, one informed by modern exegetical writers. He holds that Jesus was not just a wisdom teacher or a Cynic philosopher, but an eschatological prophet who went to his death as an intentional martyr to avert God's anger at the Jewish people. He presents his views clearly, makes his reasoning evident, and so invites one to engage his evaluation of modern interpretations of Jesus. A big book, a long read, but worth the effort.

Edgar Krentz

Wounded Lord: Reading John Through the Eyes of Thomas. By Robert H. Smith. Edited by Donna Duensing. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-1606086605. xiv and 202 pages. Paper. $24.00.

Robert H. Smith helped students at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, including myself, to engage the New Testament in creative and insightful ways. Before his death in 2006, he read John's Gospel through Thomas' eyes; he shares his insights in this book, edited by his wife and colleague, Donna Duensing.

Wounded Lord is a commentary that interprets each pericope. For those who think John's Gospel has such a 'high Christology' that Jesus' feet hardly touch the ground, Smith shows how even the texts such as the "I AM" passages point to Christ's wounds. "This 'I' is the resurrected and exalted Jesus who still bears the marks of his wounds" (82). Jesus' feet not only touch the ground but are pierced! By placing the encounter with Thomas at the end of his Gospel, John argues that Jesus' wounds are integral to God's identity.

Smith does not refract every passage through Thomas' vision, and more could be said about wounds in John. For example, the water and blood from the side of Jesus demonstrate "the glory and efficacy of Jesus' wounds" (177), but Smith does not bring that insight to the rivers of living water (Jn 7:37–39) or eating Jesus' flesh and blood (Jn 6). More should be said about the relationship of Jesus' wounds and human violence. How do we see Peter cutting off Malchus' ear? The high priest's guard striking Jesus? The soldiers who beat Jesus? And how does seeing John's Gospel through Thomas' eyes affect interpretations that exaggerate the violence done against Jesus (à la Mel Gibson's *the Passion of the Christ*)? Smith's insights beg for further elaboration.

This is a fine book for lay people, pastors, and seminarians to be enabled to see through Thomas' eyes and stimulate new insights. Perhaps, someone will gather Smith's other articles for publication (many from *Currents*).

Peter S. Perry
Glendale, Ariz.

Doing Theology in a Global Context: A Festschrift for the Rev. Prof. Dr. Hans Schwarz. Edited by Craig L. Nessan and Thomas Kothmann. Bangalore, India: Asian Trading Corporation, 2009. ISBN-10: 8170865107. ISBN-13: 978-8170865100. 382 pages.

Increasingly North Americans have adopted the adage "Think Global, Act Local." With congregations engaged in ministry and service

in their own communities—including work abroad—many American Christians are getting the "acting local" down. Additionally, thoughtful North American Christians are beginning to understand the importance of "thinking globally." That is, the church extends not only diachronically but also synchronically, both across all time and through all continents. This volume, a tribute to the pioneering energy of Hans Schwarz, recently retired professor of theology at the University of Regensburg (Germany), exemplarily testifies to the renewal that theology can experience when it thinks globally. Schwarz knows the North American context well, having taught for about fourteen years at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. Important as his work in North America is, one of his major contributions is the training of doctoral candidates for Asian countries. The essays here testify to an emerging vibrancy amongst Asian theologians, voices not so readily heard in North America and Europe.

This book includes contributions from five North American theologians, twelve from Europe, and nineteen from Asia (many from Korea)—over half the contributions. Given the caliber of these essays, it is hard to highlight some papers over others. That said, wisdom that stands out can readily be seen in several. Jens Colditz (Bavarian Lutheran Church) contends that we cannot pit religion and science against each other since we shape our lives in the context of both. It is the requirements of the whole human being that need to be met. Likewise, criticizing modern views of autonomy, the current basis for freedom, Mathias Heesch (Regensburg) observes that we humans are dependent on nature and can act only within history and as embodied. Nevertheless, our sense of ethical behavior transcends nature. While we should not seek a religious legitimation for the state, we can justifiably argue for a transcendental ground for human existence. Rolf Hille (Albrecht-Bengel-Haus) notes that European theology can be enriched by learning from Asian, African, and Latin American theologians, without giving up its own distinctiveness.

Andrea König (Regensburg) claims that in light of aging populations in Europe we need to continue to uphold the dignity and worth of all, given that it is God who gives life. The best way to approach geriatrics is an interdisciplinary one that includes psychology and medicine. Thomas Kothmann (Regensburg) says that we need to continue to promote dialogue among different religious traditions without proselytizing. The aim of dialogue is peaceful coexistence and genuine association based on the creation of a common ethical witness. In a fascinating article, Dumitru Meghesan (Romania) takes up the ancients' view of a "harmony of the spheres" and argues that contemporary physics likewise sees incredible harmony within creation itself. Hla Aung (Myanmar) notes that with the rise of globalization, all people have come into closer contact with one another, and that the appropriate response is to promote love, peace, and harmony within societies as much as possible. Terry Dohm (Columbia, S.C.) claims that while there has always been a contextual element to Christology, today it must be reinterpreted for new situations, since new situations provide new glimpses of Christ's saving efficacy. Anna Madson's (Augustana, Sioux Falls) article adroitly takes on imperialist aspirations of Radical Orthodoxy and similar movements, which contend that Christianity can foster its own politics and economy independently of and far superior to that of the world.

It is impossible in this short review to convey the richness found in these essays. Readers will need to find that for themselves. Nevertheless, in light of current needs for theology done in light of globalism, we have some paradigms here that can help us advance a more inclusive theology for our time.

Mark Mattes
Grand View University
Des Moines, Iowa

From Orality to Orality: A New Paradigm for Contextual Translation of the Bible. By James A. Maxey. Biblical Performance Criticism vol. 2. Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, Wipf and Stock, 2009. ISBN-10: 1606083244. ISBN-13:978-1606083246. xii and 221 pages. Paper. $26.00.

This highly original work opens up new ways of conceptualizing biblical translation. Maxey served for years as a missionary among the Vuté people in Africa. These people live in an oral culture, still largely non-literate. Maxey uses their reaction to oral transmission of biblical narrative as a laboratory for communication theory. This is a revision of his doctoral dissertation, mentored by David Rhoads, at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

He states that good translation must be contextual, that is, communicate to the target audience. He argues this theoretically in chapter one, applies this to the contexts of Africa, holds that the New Testament arose in an oral culture, and then argues for the oral performance of biblical texts. He concludes with a chapter on how oral performance of Markan stories took place in Vuté assemblies. All of this is interesting, well argued, and persuasive in theory. Maxey deserves wide reading and critical evaluation.

I have some reservations, both practical and theoretical. 1. Maxey almost entirely disregards the evidence of ancient Christian art and archaeological data as evidence of contextualization. Yet that is the primary evidence for the interpretation of Christianity—and the Bible—by non-literate Christians. Thus the evidence of excavated early Christian churches argues that they had a restricted knowledge of Old Testament materials, stressed meals with the dead more than the Eucharist, and did not attend church in large masses. 2. Maxey does not give criteria for evaluating the adequacy of oral performances that differ substantially among interpreters of the same Markan narrative. When is an oral performance good, when is it inadequate? The Italian proverb, *traditore, truditore,* "The translator is a traitor," also applies here. When is an oral performance wrong? 3. All of Maxey's examples in his case study chapter were taken from narrative texts. How would Vuté narrators do with a text like Colossians, Ephesians, or Hebrews where the abstraction of a paragraph from its context might lead to the loss of the argument? Maxey himself notes points of oral translation where more research is needed.

I repeat. This is a significant work, which deserves wide reading and discussion. How should Maxey's views affect translation into contemporary English for a literate society? Should oral performance be restricted to doing complete texts, not isolated stories or paragraphs? Maxey stimulates a host of questions that cry for answers.

Edgar Krentz

Holy Spirit: Creative Power in Our Lives. By Lois Malcolm. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009. ISBN-10: 0806670584. ISBN-13: 978-080667058. 94 pages. Paper. $10.19.

Lois Malcolm has provided us with a brief but biblically comprehensive overview of the work of the Holy Spirit. She traces the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, in the life of Jesus, and in the Spirit-created Christian community and explores the work of the Spirit in creating faith, hope, and love.

There are many strengths in this brief book. Most importantly, Malcolm covers just about every passage in the Bible where the word "spirit" appears. This makes the book a ready reference for Bible study and for preaching! It would have been helpful if an index of biblical passages had been included in the book. Reading the book also gives a wide vision of the work of the Holy Spirit's creative power in our lives and in the life of God's creation.

There were two foci of Malcolm's book that particularly impressed me. One, her deep understanding of human sinfulness is paired with clear and powerful testimony to God's Spirit-empowered grace. Two, her keen focus on the work of the Spirit in the creation is joined to an unrelenting call for Spirit-filled

people to care for the creation and the people of creation who cry out for justice.

I believe this book would be a good resource for preachers when confronted with lectionary texts related to the Holy Spirit. The book would also work well for an adult study. For some it might be a good resource for devotional reading and meditation.

Pentecostal theology of the Holy Spirit is a powerful influence in our culture. I believe this book could have benefited if she would have contrasted her excellent understanding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit with Pentecostal understandings.

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Serving the Word: Preaching in Worship (Elements of Preaching). By Melinda A. Quivik. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. ISBN-10: 0800661982. ISBN-13: 978-0800661984. vii and 96 pages. Paper. $10.20.

This work connects the act of preaching with the enactment of the liturgy: "…Quivik introduces readers to the ways in which the sermon does (or should) relate to the whole of the worship service."

Quivik's work contextualizes preaching within the overall acts of the church's worship-planning and liturgical life. She sets the stage for this venture with a preliminary discussion of the meanings of God's word and how these are verbalized and enacted in worship through prayer, preaching, and the sacraments.

Next Quivik discusses the global challenges of the church's efforts to maintain and reflect unity and cultural realities through its worship. The 1996 Lutheran World Federation document, "The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities," is cited to specify the characteristics that good preaching and liturgy should exhibit: "Worship practices are to be transcultural…contextual…countercultural…and cross-cultural" (19–21). This section is particularly useful for those who may need to reassess the balance between local and global elements in worship planning.

To illustrate her proposed strategies work for using God's word to integrate worship and preaching, Quivik offers guidance in chapter three on "Ash Wednesday: A Case Study." An Order of Service for the case study is found in Appendix I of the book. Chapters four through seven discuss the distinct parts of the liturgy beginning with gathering, engaging in the sacraments, listening to preaching, and finally being sent out for service.

This work will be helpful to pastors who are looking for more effective means to integrate preaching and worship. It would also be an excellent book to use in conjunction with educating lay leaders about the planning and leadership of worship. Quivik integrates well the current reflections of preachers and liturgists who are referenced in the "For Further Reading" section which concludes this useful book.

Susan K. Hedahl

Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation. By David Schnasa Jacobsen and Robert Allen Kelly. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. ISBN-13: 978-0800662509. vi and 186 pages. Paper. $18.00.

Jacobsen and Kelly, both ordained pastors and professors at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, explain that the purpose of this volume is to "bring together practical resources that represent the best of both contemporary homiletics and systematic theology" (10). Indeed, they engage preachers much as a pair of seminary classroom instructors might: presenting occasional events encountered in the parish, followed by a methodology for developing theologically sound *and* pastorally appropriate sermons in the ensuing milieu. Jacobsen and Kelly argue that while each event is nuanced, enough commonalities exist to build a basic framework with which a preacher can begin processing the call to proclamation in the face of such significant milestones.

The book centers around five events: *funerals, weddings, stewardship, injustice*, and

public crisis. For each, Jacobsen and Kelly begin by explaining how a preacher must discern the larger context as well as the situation; they then move on to describe a handful of "gospel commonplaces" which often surface under such circumstances. Preaching implications follow for each of these commonplaces. By way of illustration, a gospel commonplace at a funeral might be that "We take death seriously because of the centrality of Christ's cross in revealing God to us" (59). Along with a discussion of this commonplace, the authors highlight a preaching implication that directly results from the commonplace: "Funeral sermons should face death squarely in ways consistent with the pastoral relationship to the mourners and the grieving community" (61). The theology of the church is faithfully reflected in the homiletical event.

The prior example highlights a major strength in this text; the interweaving of thoughtful theology with practical preaching tips, the "homiletical payoff" (10). The parish pastor will find the mind thoroughly theologically engaged, but, thankfully, at no point do these pastor-authors lose sight of the real people in the pews.

Angela Zimmann
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

Reclaiming the "V" Word: Renewing Life at Its Vocational Core. By David Daubert and Tana Kjos. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009. ISBN-10**:** 0806670576. ISBN-13: 978-0806670577. 93 pages. Paper. $11.99.

Daubert and Kjos add to the "Reclaiming" series [others include "Reclaiming the 'C' Word" (Christian), "Reclaiming the 'E' Word" (Evangelical) and "Reclaiming the 'L' Word" (Lutheran)] with this slim volume focused upon clarifying the Christian/Lutheran understanding of vocation. While clergy may benefit from this book, the intended audience is primarily the layperson, particularly a group of people who engage in this study together, such as an adult Sunday school or Bible study group. The structure of the book is conducive to a ten-week exploration of the notion of vocation for contemporary Christians.

The book is divided into brief chapters, each concluding with discussion questions and a simple prayer. Chapter one introduces the reader to the dilemma of the V-word, noting three traps: the conflation of occupation with identity; the focus on religious work as superior to secular work; and finally, the idea that meaningful work can take place in one's spare time (avocation). In chapters two through four, these misconceptions are deconstructed by both biblical stories and Martin Luther's theological reflections on the priesthood of all believers, with a particular focus on 1 Peter 2:4–10.

In chapters five through nine, the authors lead the reader toward the task of discovering one's own vocation utilizing "PAWN" analysis: Purpose, Principles, Assets, Wows, and Needs. In the final chapter, the authors remind the reader that "no matter what we do, or where we do it, we are called by God to be part of God's loving action in the world" (85).

Overall, the text is engaging and motivational—the stories of real people such as Andy, the factory worker-turned-homebound visitation leader and Jenn, the campaign-worker, bring the concepts to life and draw the reader in—but the book is definitely more suited for an audience seeking inspiration rather than serious theological scholarship.

Angela Zimmann

Briefly Noted

In ***Discovering Jesus in the New Testament*** (Hendrickson, $19.95. ISBN-13: 978-1598560114) Keith Warrington explores how different New Testament books present Jesus. He seeks both the commonality in their presentations and what is unique to each. He gives a characterization of each book's stresses, yet argues finally that the New Testament "consistently presents Jesus as fully God." (204). Theologically conservative, also

in matters of historical conclusions, the book contains valuable insights, but does less than justice to the variety in the New Testament.

Edgar Krentz

Twenty major Jewish scholars discuss Jewish denominations, movements, diversity, and challenges facing American Judaism in ***Synagogues in a Time of Change: Fragmentation and Diversity in Jewish Religious Movements,*** edited by Zachary I. Heller (The Alban Institute, $20.00, ISBN-13: 978-1566993890). It makes the many challenges facing American Judaism clear and suggests what the challenges and prospects are for the future of American Judaism. Synagogues discussed include two types of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. An essay by Rodney L. Petersen of the Boston Theological Institute on denominationalism and post-denominationalism in American Christianity illustrates the parallels to the Jewish situation. Christian leaders will learn much from this volume.

Edgar Krentz

A Journey with a Status Confessionis: Analysis of an Apartheid Related Conflict between the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1982-1998 by Lennart Henriksson (Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 2010), originally a dissertation at Lund University, examines in depth the declaration of *status confessionis* by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches against the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa in 1982. To declare *status confessionis* was to assert that the faith, praxis, and organizational behavior in support of apartheid were in violation of the core convictions of the church. Henriksson engages in a comprehensive case study that evaluates the effectiveness of the declaration, concluding that the actual outcomes appear ambiguous in light of the original intention.

Craig L. Nessan

Psalms. Volume 3: Psalms 90–150. By John Goldingay (Baker, $49.99). With this volume the author concludes his magisterial commentary on the Psalter. In addition to a fresh translation, he provides textual criticism and verse by verse commentary, ending each psalm with "theological implications," that evoke many devotional or homiletical ideas. Goldingay is skeptical of recent attempts to find significance in the ordering of the Psalter and leaves to others the attempt to find redactional layers in individual psalms. His footnotes show an exhaustive attention to what others have said. For my taste this commentary is hands-down the best that is currently available.

Ralph W. Klein

Interpreting Isaiah: Issues and Approaches. Edited by David G. Firth and H. G. M. Williamson (InterVarsity Press, $28.). The editors note in the introduction that recent scholarship on Isaiah has moved beyond an author-centered question, such as, was the book written by one Isaiah or three Isaiahs, to a text-centered investigation of how the component parts of Isaiah relate to one another. Williamson, for example, has argued that Second Isaiah was the editor of First Isaiah and that Isaiah 40–55 never existed apart from its being appended to the Isaiah scroll. After Williamson's programmatic essay on current scholarly approaches to Isaiah, two sets of essays follow. One set deals with themes in the book (monotheism, faith, wisdom, etc.) while the other set discusses the meaning of specific texts within the book (Isa 9:1–7; 41:1–9; and 61:1–3). Williamson, who is writing a massive and authoritative ICC commentary on chapters 1–27, notes that the current focus on the book's "unity," does not mean at all that the book was written by one person. His own study of the messiah and servant in Isaiah tried to show "how the different circumstances in the pre-exilic and exilic periods resulted in different presentations of the royal agent whom God required to bring in his unchanging purpose of just rule and how in the final part of the book there is a tendency to draw these different elements into a composite presentation."

Ralph W. Klein

History and the Hebrew Bible. By Hans M. Barstad (Mohr Siebeck, 64 Euros). The seven chapters in this volume, originally published as articles in 1996–2003 begin with a lucid description of the meaning of history in the post-modern age. Traditional, analytic history, based on the sciences, has now been replaced by narrative history. Barstad takes to task those scholars who try to write the history of Israel without recourse to the Bible, since it is by far the most important source for our knowledge of the history of Iron Age Palestine. He also destroys Niels Peter Lemche's proposal that the Old Testament was composed in the Hellenistic age. The last two chapters argue against the assumption that Palestine was an empty land during the exile. Both the Bible and archaeology show that the vast majority of people remained in the land where life went on, but under harsh circumstances and with new overlords. These two chapters were originally published in 1996 and 2003. While the second adds new data and new arguments, it repeats much too much of the earlier article and the author should have combined these two articles into a new synthesis.

Ralph W. Klein

Preaching Helps

Proper 14 – Proper 21

Choosing to Remember

If you'll permit me to stretch Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:24–37) just a bit, I wonder what the one who fell into the hands of robbers chose to remember on the tenth anniversary of that fateful journey down from Jerusalem to Jericho. You know, what we remember and how we remember is our choice. *Whether* we observe an anniversary and *how* we observe that anniversary are choices we make. So what choice do you suppose the one who fell into the hands of robbers made? How do you imagine he chose to remember that awful day?

Do you think the one who fell among robbers dwelled on the attack? Did he take the day off to sit and watch the images replay again and again in his mind? Maybe he created a media event. Perhaps this one who fell among robbers returned to the spot and held a ceremony—dignitaries, a wreath, and a prayer. Maybe he wrote a book about his experience. Could it be that he simply paused silently as the clock ticked the hour of the terror?

What do you suppose he chose to think about? Was his mind so filled with the robbers, the bandits, the zealots who stripped, beat, and abandoned him, that the one who fell into their hands was consumed with anger, so that the desire for justice bled over into vengeance and the need for security whetted the appetite for war?

Were his recollections of the priest and the Levite? Passed by twice after laying there so long, did this one see in these policymakers the faults and failings—and worse, the selfishness and indifference—of the system in which he'd placed his hope and his trust?

Perhaps thoughts were of the road—the seventeen-mile, 3,000-foot, rocky descent from Jerusalem to Jericho. People fall into the hands of robbers on that road all the time. And there are roads where people are stripped, beaten and left half dead all over the world. Why should this attack get an anniversary celebration when so many other attacks go unnoticed?

Certainly, there were remembrances of the Samaritan, whose face was but a blur and whose name remains unknown. An anonymous volunteer, who made all the difference, an ally who acted unexpectedly and saved a life.

Perhaps the man's thoughts were only of himself, of how life had changed. Where once the isolated road from Jerusalem to Jericho didn't bother him, now travel made him feel uneasy, unsafe, cautious, vulnerable. Where once what the robbers fought to take from him was so important, now he was concerned with things less tangible but harder to steal. Or perhaps this one who fell among robbers spent the past decade developing complex security systems to make himself feel safer. Has that camel been in your possession the entire time or did someone unknown to you pack it?

Yes, we choose whether and what we remember because we just can't bear to

remember it all. It's just too overwhelming. So how will you as a preacher choose to remember 9/11? What images replay in your mind—the planes hitting the towers, the firemen carrying the bodies, the sixty-three babies born in the first year to 9/11 victims? Do you long to see a flag in your sanctuary and red, white and blue paraments on your altar? Or is the word from Washington only compounding your fear? Are your thoughts of the world, of all the ways that people are attacked and terrorized—the daily violence in the Middle East, the lack of fresh water in Africa. The list goes on. Or maybe you are so keenly aware that the American cocoon has been pierced, that you no longer feel as safe.

I choose to remember how quickly various groups within our country, including assorted expressions of Christianity, told us what we *should* remember about September 11 and how we *should* respond. While many saw the United States as the victim laying at the side of the road, or even as an ungrateful world's Good Samaritan, many others saw our country as the lawyer seeking to justify himself, as the priest and Levite selfishly and indifferently passing by those stripped, beaten and left half-dead, or even as the robbers. Voices asserted that, although the events of 9/11 were a shock, they should not be a surprise. Other voices countered that nothing the United States may have done makes such violence conceivable, let alone anticipated. Along with prescriptions for what to remember and how to respond came strong convictions about inappropriate recollections and offensive responses. I had a few of those convictions myself. Ten years later, we continue to be so bombarded with September 11 recollections that one writer worries that memories have become so public and so procurable that America is left numb, bereft of anything of 9/11 that is personal or profound.

Jesus doesn't tell the lawyer what to remember or how to respond. Jesus points to God's word and asks, "How do you read?" How we read Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan depends on where we find ourselves in the story. Whether we find ourselves in the robbers or in their victim, in the priest or in the Samaritan, or even in the innkeeper, God is with us. God is with us. Regardless of how we choose to remember, God always responds to us, perhaps with comfort, perhaps with challenge, but always with love and life.

As we cry with the psalmist, "Deliver me, O GOD from evildoers; protect me from the violent," God comforts us with recollections of times the Lord God, the strength of our salvation, has covered our head in the day of battle, maintained the cause of the poor, and rendered justice to the needy.

As we taste the death that is the way of this world and are terrorized by the spirit of wrath at work within and around us, we are empowered to resist by God's promise that these forces will not stand. They will fall not because of military might, increased security, national resolve, or international coalition, but because of God who, rich in mercy and great in love, makes us alive with Christ. The terror of the cross tells us that nothing, not planes crashing, not buildings crumbling, no attack of any kind can keep us from God's love. On the cross Christ does more than remember. Christ bears all our memories in the most personal and profound way, in his own body. On the cross, Christ lives and dies with us, showing us God's response to terror. God raises Jesus to new life and with Christ God raises us up. In Christ we are saved. And, more pertinent perhaps, in Christ we are safe. Not by our own doing, but as the gift of God.

And God intends this gift for all. Even as we draw lines and identify suspects and beat the drums of war, we recall God's love for the 120 thousand people of Nineveh. With Jonah we find ourselves sitting under our booths, waiting to see what will become of the city. In Christ we know. Regardless of what we choose to remember and how we choose to respond, God remains faithful. God remembers Jesus and responds with life and love, with mercy and with grace. If like the lawyer who asked about neighbors, we want to justify ourselves, we must go and do likewise. However, if we remember that we are justified in Christ, when we respond we will not *have* to go and do likewise. We just will.

My friend Seth Moland-Kovash (LSTC MDiv, 2001), who penned this set of preaching helps, reminded me that this is the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and got me thinking. Seth serves as co-pastor of All Saints Lutheran Church in Palatine, Illinois along with his wife, Jennifer (LSTC MDiv, 2004). They are the parents of Carl (age 5) and live in Rolling Meadows, Illinois, a northwestern suburb of Chicago.

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Proper 14
August 7, 2011

1 Kings 19:9–18
Psalm 85:8–13
Romans 10:5–15
Matthew 14:22–33

First Reading

The tension between that which is near and that which is far away (that which can be heard and that which is silent) runs throughout the readings appointed for today. Specifically, we are invited to join our biblical counterparts in struggling with the feeling (or reality?) that God is sometimes far away.

We begin by following Elijah to a cave and on to the mountaintop where he speaks with God about how he feels alone. Twice God asks Elijah what he is doing and twice Elijah responds, "I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." In the midst of this back-and-forth, God provides Elijah with a demonstration of God's nearness while also perhaps hinting toward an answer to the question of how Elijah could feel alone. God's nearness does not feel like Elijah expects it to feel. God's nearness does not come in the form Elijah expects. God's nearness comes in "a sound of sheer silence."

Paul writes similarly about where God and God's message might be found. God's message is not distant but instead "is near you, on your lips and in your heart." Finally, we come to Matthew's story about the disciples' encounter with fear and with feeling alone and separated from God. The disciples are in the boat by themselves and Jesus walks to meet them. We see Peter leap out of the boat and then falter. We see winds calm at the mere presence of our Lord. The Lord has indeed come near to bring peace.

But before all of this can happen, something important occurs in the set-up to the story about the boat and the waves. Jesus sends the disciples and crowds away so that he can be alone to pray. This is no mere rhetorical device by Matthew to set up the scene that Jesus and the disciples are separated so he can leap in and save the day. Earlier in chapter 14 Jesus heard of the brutal execution of John the Baptist. Matthew first reports in verse 13 that "when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself." That did not work out as the crowds followed, which set up the feeding of five thousand. So Jesus tried to get away again. Perhaps being alone and separate are not all bad?

I want to close this section with a few words on Psalm 85. The message here is the promise in the midst of the questions and doubts raised by the other readings: The Lord God speaks peace to God's faithful people. God's salvation is very near to those who fear God. Righteousness and peace have gotten so close together that they've kissed. The Lord will indeed grant prosperity. No matter what our distance might make us feel, no matter what doubts rise in our hearts from the seeming silence of God, God's salvation is near.

Pastoral Reflection

Given these initial reflections, a few homiletic directions jump to my mind, which all would play nicely depending on the perceived needs of the people. The first relates to the absence or silence of God that we all feel at various times. Perhaps this is a time to address theologically and homiletically questions of theodicy. Why does God seem absent particularly from the most painful parts of our world and of our lives? What does it mean that Elijah

heard God in the sound of sheer silence? What does that sound like in our lives? Where and how do we meet and hear God in painful times?

Another direction for this sermon might have to do with the value of silence: perhaps we are able to hear God more when other sounds are turned off or down. Jesus needed and wanted some time to himself to grieve, to hear God's love in a time of pain for him. And if Jesus needed that, who are we to think that we do not?

Whichever of these directions (or any number of others) the Spirit takes you for this sermon, it seems very important to affirm that God is indeed speaking. That is the final take-away message of each of these readings and especially of all of them taken together. God does give Elijah a message of hope and affirmation: he is indeed not alone among the faithful: there are seven thousand others. Paul affirms to the Romans that God's message is nearer to us than we seem to think. The disciples do finally encounter the power and the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In fact, they see and hear it so clearly that they are moved to worship him and proclaim him the Son of God. The final message for us is that Jesus is the Son of God and that he brings to us all those things promised by the psalmist. Whether we can always see it and hear it, it's there. Even when we feel alone, God is with us. Even when we hear discord and division, righteousness and peace have kissed. Even when all we hear is silence, God comes to us in the sound of sheer silence. When the boat feels battered by the waves, Jesus is about to step in. SM-K

Proper 15
August 14, 2011

Isaiah 56:1, 6–8
Psalm 67
Romans 11:1–2a, 29–32
Matthew 15:[10–20], 21–28

First Reading

On a first reading, it seems that there is some inter-lectionary conflict between the themes of Isaiah and the psalmist on one hand, with Jesus on the other side of the conflict. The most intriguing part is that Jesus seems to be on the "wrong" side: the side we do not like, the side that is too harsh and too closed.

Isaiah speaks a word of inclusion and universal intent for God's love and God's grace. Isaiah promises that any foreigners who hold fast to the Lord's covenant and join themselves to the Lord will indeed be brought to God's holy mountain. There will not be a racial or ethnic test on God's holy mountain, Isaiah promises. What matters is the covenant: those who "hold fast" God's covenant will be welcome without any further question. Indeed, according to Isaiah, God's house will be a house of prayer for all peoples (lekol-ha'ammim). As in English, this Hebrew phrasing emphasizes the mass inclusion—not just the people or the nations, but the *whole* of the nations, *all* of the nations. In case we were inclined to miss the point, Isaiah emphasizes the inclusion here.

The psalmist picks up that same theme in calling on all peoples (with the same phrasing) to praise the Lord for all the blessings of the earth. The psalmist knows that God has blessed the whole earth for the sake of all the nations and calls upon all the nations to return the praise and thanksgiving to God.

In this context, what are we to say about Jesus' response to the faith-filled Canaanite woman who sought healing for her daughter? Jesus first responds to her pleading in verse 24 with, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Had Jesus not read or understood his Isaiah and his Psalms? Jesus ups the ante when she persists and says directly to her, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Had Jesus' mother not taught him basic human decency and proper behavior?

Centuries of scholars, commentators, teachers, and preachers have come up with explanation after explanation for Jesus' behavior. You probably have your favorites. Probably the most common explanations revolve around the choices that either Jesus was testing her faith (and she passed) or that she legitimately affected Jesus' outlook on his own mission and opened his vision. This could either be a wholesale opening of his vision or showing him that it was now time to expand the mission (perhaps a bit sooner than he might have otherwise thought) beyond Israel. Other interpretations include that Jesus was tired and cranky, that he was using her and this encounter as a teaching device for his disciples or myriad others. No matter what, we are left with the fact that Jesus treated this woman in a way we would not accept from our own children or confirmation students.

Pastoral Reflection

As we seek to preach this Sunday, we may find ourselves hung up on what to do about the misbehaving Jesus. What shall we say about his behavior? How shall we help people to understand it or to move past it to understand that our mission is what Isaiah spoke: a mission to all nations?

But what if we took another approach entirely? What if we attempted to just bracket off these questions of what Jesus meant and why he said what he did? Even asking these questions strikes me as an assumption of privilege on our part that perhaps we should not presume. Let's take a slightly different narrative approach and begin with the question of which character we most identify with.

If we ask these questions of how Jesus did or should have responded to the Canaanite woman we are treating her as an object and placing ourselves outside of her role. We are assuming that we are in the position of Jesus or his disciples or at least the Israelites. We are assuming that we are the insiders to God's love and grace and we need to decide how far to open the door to some other outsiders.

I don't know about you, but I don't really feel like that's my primary role. I am not first and foremost an insider who gets to decide how far to open the door. I am a beggar. I may not be a Canaanite woman, but I am in desperate need of God's love and grace. I am in desperate need to hear my Savior say, "Woman/Man, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." Perhaps that can be the message of this day.

Perhaps today can be about the blessings that God has waiting for us. And about the faithfulness of the Canaanite woman and countless other faithful women and men who are a part of your congregation: people whose faithfulness and trust in God's graciousness outlasts challenges and setbacks and answers that are not satisfying. The faithfulness of the Canaanite woman lives on as does the blessing that God has prepared for all nations. SM-K

Proper 16
August 21, 2011

Isaiah 51:1–6
Psalm 138
Romans 12:1–8
Matthew 16:13–20

First Reading

From where does faith come? From where does spiritual insight come? In today's Gospel reading, Peter got the right answer in Jesus' pop quiz: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus immediately recognizes the blessedness in Peter because he had that answer within him. Jesus knows where it came from and tells us all in verse 17, "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." Peter did not learn this lesson from any book or any Sunday school class, but as a gift from God in heaven.

Isaiah speaks the same truth to "you that pursue righteousness." Isaiah reminds us of our forebears Abraham and Sarah. They were nothing special when God called them. They had not accomplished anything special or earned any particular degrees or levels of experience: but God called them. That's the key point. In verse 4, Isaiah takes on the voice of God and says "a teaching will go out from me." The direction and the source here are important. A teaching will go out from God. We as people will not provide a teaching, we will not even facilitate, initiate, or seek a teaching. It will go out from God whether we are looking for it or not.

In his own way, Paul has the same message for the Romans: the gifts of God are distributed according to God's grace and God's desires. In verse 3, Paul says that we should regard ourselves "according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." God assigns the measure of faith. In verse 6, we are given gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: some of us are given the grace and the gifts to lead, some to teach, some to prophesy. All of this is done according to God's plan and God's favor and God's grace and God's initiative.

In each of these cases and throughout all of these readings the grammar is important. I don't mean the Hebrew grammar or the Greek grammar, but the simple fact of who is the subject of the sentence. God is always the subject of the grammar of faith and grace. God gives faith. God gives grace. God chooses. God selects. God blesses. God saves.

Pastoral Reflection

If your congregation follows the traditional North American church calendar and schedule, you are in the final throes of preparing for another year of Sunday school and confirmation classes and what we have come to call the "program year." You (or other leaders in your congregation) may be desperately trying to recruit the last few Sunday school teachers and prepare the curriculum and schedules. This would probably not be a good time to say that teachers and classes are irrelevant and faith comes as a gift from God and according to God's choosing anyway.

Perhaps we *can* be reminded that faith, like all good things in this life, comes as a free gift from God. We cannot earn them by regular Sunday School or worship attendance. We cannot guarantee them by any stretch of any human endeavor. What we can do is lean more fully into God's graciousness.

In our biblical heritage, faith seems to come most fully to those we would least expect and in situations we would not expect. Faith came to Abraham and Sarah with a call to uproot and move to

a new land of God's choosing. And they followed! Faith came to Peter, the hesitant, head-strong, and cocksure disciple who appeared to not want to follow Jesus but push him in particular directions. And faith has come to us.

When we re-translate faith to trust, it changes the way we think about these things. Instead of a call to have faith in God (to believe in as an intellectual exercise or to know enough about God to make certain choices) we are called to trust God. We are called to lean into God. We are called to fall backward into God's love and grace.

That kind of trust cannot be taught in an intellectual way. It can only be modeled. Thanks be to God that we have models of trust like Abraham and Sarah, and like Peter. Thanks be to God that we have a gracious and generous God who pours out blessings and grace like an ever-flowing stream. Thanks be to God that we have a God who reveals the Messiah to us in our crucified and risen Lord. SM-K

Proper 17
August 28, 2011

Jeremiah 15:15–21
Psalm 26:1–8
Romans 12:9–21
Matthew 16:21–28

First Reading

If we take the psalm and the reading from Romans together we can easily be beat up by a portrayal of our own moral or behavioral failings. As we read through the psalm, we are confronted with this declaration of complete innocence. "I have trusted in the Lord and not faltered." "I have hated the company of evildoers." Upon reading this, I am struck to say that, while this must be nice for the psalmist, it has not been my experience of life.

Then we move on to hear Paul's exhortation about Christian behavior to the Romans. Paul spends the first eleven chapters of his letter to the Romans writing about what God has done for us. He expounds his theological understanding of faith, grace, and salvation very clearly. Only when that is finished does he turn his attention to how followers of this crucified and risen Jesus are to live their lives and how they are to live in their relationships with one another. It reads like a list of things that we can never accomplish. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (v 14). "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (v 21). This feels very much like the second use of the law: to mirror back to me knowledge of my sin and failing.

On the other hand, Jeremiah provides a profound and beautiful statement of trust in God's never-failing faithfulness even when it seems that things are hopeless. Jeremiah is surrounded by those who would hurt him and hinder his ministry. But Jeremiah has been comforted by (he has even eaten) God's words: specifically by God's calling of Jeremiah by God's own name (v 16). This adoption theology is very familiar to us from our baptismal liturgy and, in fact, from Paul's other writing. We know that we have each been called by God's own name and have been claimed into God's family by the waters of baptism. Jeremiah, without speaking in these baptismal terms, provides us with the promise that this adoption can be a comfort and strength in the difficult times of life.

Jesus speaks very clearly and forthrightly with his disciples about the difficult times of life for the first time in today's

Gospel reading. Perhaps after hearing Peter's confession that he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, Jesus thought that the disciples were ready to hear where this was all heading. Perhaps it was just time to begin teaching them this final and most difficult lesson. Whatever the reason for the timing, "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (v 21). Jesus begins the portion of his ministry that is pointed toward Jerusalem and beyond Jerusalem to the cross and the empty tomb.

Pastoral Reflection

Especially in the context of these other readings, it can be tempting for us to focus on the ways in which we as Christian disciples must deny ourselves as we take up our crosses to follow Jesus. Without succumbing to the temptation to read Jesus into the Hebrew Bible, Jeremiah clearly is experiencing very difficult and challenging times that we could parallel to Jesus' teaching about the challenges that await those who call themselves by the name Christian. Paul speaks very clearly about the responsibilities of Christians and perhaps how we should respond to those who might want to put us on a cross: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Even Jesus follows up his own passion prediction and his argument with Peter about this passion prediction with a teaching for his disciples: "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (v 25).

This may be a valid and necessary homiletic direction. It comes with challenges though. It seems to me that the emphasis on how we must pick up our own cross somehow reduces what Jesus is saying about himself and what he did. Jesus did not say that he was going to go to the cross first and that then we would follow. He'd lead the way and show us how it's done, so we would know exactly how we should behave and what we should do. Jesus did not go to the cross as an example.

Whatever your particular emphases with regard to atonement theories (substitution, satisfaction, ransom, etc.) it must be said that the core of Christian teaching for two millennia has held that there was something particular and different about what happened to Jesus. Jesus was not simply a crucifixion trailblazer to show us the way. This lection itself ends with a different proclamation in verse 28: "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The Son of Man is going to come in his kingdom. It's not about us. It's not about what might be happening to us. Jesus did not suffer on the cross to show us how to endure the suffering we might be enduring. Jesus suffered on the cross to bring an end to the suffering that is happening to us. SM-K

Proper 18
September 4, 2011

Ezekiel 33:7–11
Psalm 119:33–40
Romans 13:8–14
Matthew 18:15–20

First Reading

Responsibility is the theme that seems to tie each of these readings together like a thread. God gives responsibility to those who would live within the covenant. We

are responsible for our behavior and for the choices that we make in our life, and we are also given responsibility for sisters and brothers.

Ezekiel is given responsibility as the sentinel: the one to whom God entrusted the message that was to be borne to the people. God had a message of warning (and hope) that without repentance, destruction was going to come. But the message was still a message of hope because there was still time for repentance. Ezekiel was given charge of this message and therefore was given responsibility. God specifically charged Ezekiel to speak the message and told Ezekiel that he would be held responsible for speaking the message. If the people chose to not listen, that would not be Ezekiel's fault but Ezekiel needed to speak the message that was given to him.

Paul speaks to the Romans specifically of the obligations we have as Christians: we are obligated to love one another. This is not meant to relieve us as Christians of other obligations. Paul specifically says that this command to love one another sums up all of our other obligations and commands, rather than superseding them. We are still to refrain from adultery, murder, and theft. It is all summed up by the command/obligation/responsibility to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Jesus speaks of conflict resolution within the Christian community and lays out the responsibilities that we have in this regard. We are responsible to speak privately with the person with whom we have a conflict and then to follow this practical and detailed process of conflict resolution. But then Jesus even ups the ante on us and gives us the responsibility for binding and loosing in verse 18: "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." These are weighty responsibilities indeed for us.

A consultation of the Greek behind Jesus' statement in verse 18 will show us that Jesus is speaking of things being bound (desete) in the sense of forbidden or prohibited and of things being loosed (lusete) in the sense of being set free or allowed. Jesus is giving to us on earth the responsibility to allow or to prohibit—and to exclude from the community offenders who refuse to listen to the church: "let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (v 17).

Pastoral Reflection

What are we to do pastorally and homiletically with all of this responsibility? Perhaps the first answer comes to us as preachers as it did to Ezekiel: we have been given a message to proclaim and we will be held responsible for whether we proclaim that message or do not. How does your life and ministry reflect the responsibility which you have been given to proclaim the gospel (the good news about Jesus, the crucified and risen one)?

We can then take that to the next step and ask our congregations how things are going with them as those who have been given a message to proclaim. In our baptism we have all been given a calling to proclaim Jesus with our whole lives. So how is that going? In what ways are we living up to the responsibility? There surely are some ways. And in what ways have we failed in that responsibility and are we in need of repentance and forgiveness? There surely are some ways.

This theme of responsibility and conflict resolution and the ways we are to treat one another as sisters and brothers leads me to another biblical reference entirely. I think of Cain's response to the Lord about his murdered brother Abel in

Genesis 4:9. "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

What this set of readings does, along with a great deal of the biblical witness, is to provide an answer to Cain's presumed rhetorical question. That answer is not the one that Cain wanted to hear, and it's the answer that we often do not want to hear: Yes, in fact. You are your brother and sister's keeper. You have a responsibility toward others. You cannot be a Christian by yourself. You cannot "work on your relationship with God" in isolation and without regard to anyone else. It is all about community in the end.

Sometimes that Christian community is a gift; we can all recount the ways and the times when that is true. When we are carried through illness or grief, when we are supported in times of doubt. But the reality is that sometimes that Christian community can be a curse, and surely we can all recount ways and times when that is true as well. There are times when our faith or our very life is harmed by sisters and brothers in the faith. Jesus reminds us that it is our responsibility to continue to reach out and seek reconciliation. In the same way, the community is responsible to reach us when we are the ones at fault.

Thanks be to God!? SM-K

Proper 19
September 11, 2011

Genesis 50:15–21
Psalm 103:[1–7], 8–13
Romans 14:1–12
Matthew 18:21–35

First Reading

In their own way, each of these readings raises issues of forgiveness. We are confronted with the limitlessness of God's forgiveness and the limits that are oftentimes placed on human forgiveness. We are confronted with our own need for forgiveness as well as the question of whether we are willing to provide the forgiveness to others that they may need.

These questions first come up in what is almost a postlude to the whole story of Joseph and his brothers and how the family of Israel found themselves in Egypt. After the family was reunited and even Jacob came to live in Egypt under the blessing and provision of Joseph and his position in Pharaoh's government, the time came that Jacob died. Joseph's brothers then began to doubt that the forgiveness they had received years before was real. They began to doubt that Joseph had forgiven them for selling him into slavery (these doubts are quite understandable). So they contrived to lie again: they made up a story that Jacob's deathbed wish had been for Joseph to forgive his brothers. This time Joseph does not even confront the lie, but simply assures his brothers that God has turned the evil they intended into good and that Joseph was unwilling to place himself above that decision of God's. Without using the word, Joseph forgave his brothers.

Psalm 103 provides some of the most beautiful and poetic language to help us understand the limitlessness and the awesomeness of God's intention to forgive us. In verses 10–12, the psalmist provides a visual image for us to think about: "You have not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is your steadfast love for those who fear you. As far as the east is from the west, so far have you removed our transgressions from us."

Paul writes to the Romans in a way that attempts to bring together our thinking about God's forgiveness of us (con-

nected with the psalm) with how we treat and forgive the transgressions of others (connected with the Genesis reading as well as the Gospel). Verse 10 says "Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God." Paul implicitly says that we should not be so quick to judge or so slow to forgive when we know that we must stand also in need of God's forgiveness.

In the Gospel reading we hear Jesus teach primarily about human forgiveness in response to Peter's question about how many times we should forgive someone who sins against us. The answer is not seven times, but seventy-seven times. This means, of course, not the specific number of seven, but a multiplication and magnification of the number of perfection… Jesus is saying that we should forgive a googol number of times or perhaps a googolplex number of times.

Pastoral Reflection

A cultural date or anniversary date looms large in my thoughts at least as I reflect pastorally on these readings, and I assume in yours as well. This Sunday is not only Proper 19. It is also September 11, 2011: exactly ten years following the terrorist attacks that we know in the United States simply as September 11 or 9/11. As if that is not pastoral and homiletic challenge enough, the wisdom of the lectionary provides us with texts that are all about forgiveness. Forgiveness may not be the first concept that comes to many minds in this country when we think of 9/11.

Obviously each preacher will need to ponder how to deal with this issue based on their own convictions about the events, about what preaching is, about what worship is, about the church's relationship to the world, and based on their own context. Given all of those issues, I'd like to lay out a few questions that will be on my mind as I prepare my sermon. I do not have the answers to these question (yet, but I'm praying!) but it strikes me that they are at least some of the key questions.

- Is it appropriate or necessary to address this anniversary during the context of Sunday morning worship?
- Is it appropriate or necessary to address this anniversary during the context of the sermon? Is there a better way within worship?
- Do I have anything to say?
- Is what I have to say primarily about Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one? Or is it primarily about Osama bin Laden, George Bush, Barack Obama, or even those who died ten years ago today (or in the wars since)?
- Is there a way to talk about forgiveness not just in relation to us versus them (Americans versus al-Qaeda/Muslim extremists, etc.) but also in relation to the divisions within American society or within the church?
- Is there a way to proclaim that invites conversation and mutual reflection on these issues?
- Is what I have to say primarily about Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one?

You'll notice I repeated that last question in my list. So I guess I lied when I said I did not have answers: I believe at the very least that this question must be answered in the affirmative. I lied. Please forgive me. SM-K

Proper 20
September 18, 2011

Jonah 3:10—4:11
Psalm 145:1–8
Philippians 1:21–30
Matthew 20:1–16

First Reading

After last week's readings about God's forgiveness of us and about how we stand in relation to the forgiveness that we offer to others, we now have readings that invite us to stand a bit apart and reflect on what we think of God's forgiveness. The easy response is to say that we are in favor of God's never-ending forgiveness. But these readings invite us to take a second look and to see whether we really do embrace the forgiveness that God offers to all people.

Let me begin with the Psalm, as it provides a proclamation of and praise for God's forgiveness and graciousness in very familiar terms. Verse 8 tells us that "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." These words with some slight modifications appear a full nine times as a descriptor of God in the Hebrew Bible, beginning back in Exodus. They seem to have been an accepted list of God's primary attributes: God is the one who is full of compassion and slow to answer and abounds in steadfast love.

Jonah uses those words as well, but Jonah is alone in the entire canon in how he uses them. Jonah does not speak these attributes of God as praise, but as accusation or complaint. In the wonderful postlude to the story of Jonah and his relationship with Nineveh, we see Jonah whining after his ministry was successful. Jonah is unhappy because the people heard his half-hearted sermon, they repented, and God relented from punishment. Jonah is upset because he knew God would do this: he knew God was "slow to anger" also known as soft on sin.

In the Gospel reading from Matthew, we hear the parable of the generous landowner. We hear Jesus going further with his proclamation that things are reversed in the kingdom of heaven from the way that we generally think about right and wrong. Jesus' landowner pays all of his workers the same wage at the end of the day: whether they worked just one hour or worked all day, they got the same wage. As we might expect (and might do ourselves) those who worked all day long complained that it wasn't fair. They do not get a response from the landowner (God) that really addresses their concern about fairness. The landowner does not defend what he has done on the basis of fairness. Instead, the landowner simply says, "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" In essence he tells them that he is not concerned with fairness, but chooses to be generous.

Pastoral Reflection

Issues of justice and mercy and the relationship between the two are sometimes hard to reconcile. The challenge comes at the very start when we attempt to reconcile the two: they are irreconcilable. Justice and mercy are not related. Mercy is inherently unjust. That's the point.

When we consider this parable, it may be helpful to attempt to think of ourselves in different positions within the parable. What this parable, along with the reading from Jonah does, is to expose for us the way we sometimes think about others and their relationship to God. We sometimes think that others do not deserve the blessings that we see that they are receiving. Whether we want to admit it or not, we sometimes think

about it. So we sometimes struggle with the fact that God does not seem to act fairly.

At the same time, we are all surely glad that God does not act fairly with regard to us. We are glad that God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love in relationship with us and those we love. We are glad that God gives us the full daily wage even though we know that we do not deserve it. The tension between this jealousy of others and thankfulness for God's graciousness to us is the essence of these readings.

Perhaps a way through this tension can be found when we take the step of translating the parable that Jesus tells. Jesus is not speaking, of course, about laborers in a vineyard and daily wages. He is speaking of disciples living their lives and of the gifts that God promises to those whom God has called. In short, Jesus is really talking about the inheritance that has been promised to us in our baptism. We are joint-heirs with Christ. We have been promised, and we will receive, eternal life. We will inherit heaven. Whether we deserve it or not…which surely we do not.

It may be helpful to think in these terms because we all will inherit everything. With wages, there could be more or less. More dollars or fewer dollars. When we speak of inheriting the kingdom of God, it's an all or nothing proposition. What more could we ask for! SM-K

Proper 21
September 25, 2011

Ezekiel 18:1–4, 25–32
Psalm 25:1–9
Philippians 2:1–13
Matthew 21:23–32

First Reading

A first reading of today's Gospel lesson leads me to think about the call to be upfront and truthful: a call to say what we mean. We are called to let our yes be yes and our no be no. We are called to simply respond with truth, not like the chief priests and the elders who found themselves trapped in terms of how to respond by their desire to save face and "win" the argument. On the contrary, we are called to be like the son who went into the field and did the work of his father and not like the son who tried to look good and said he would go and then disobeyed.

A second reading looks beyond these questions of what kind of response is called forth from us to see what God is promising to us. Jesus promises the kingdom of God if we will just believe/trust in him. Whether we are tax collectors or prostitutes, chief priests or elders, pastors or bankers, we are promised the kingdom of God. What we are and who we are does not matter nearly so much as whom we trust.

Ezekiel has the same message: who our parents are and how they behaved does not matter. How we behaved and what we did yesterday does not matter. What matters is today. And what matters is where we are turning. Are we turning away from God and righteousness or are we turning toward God and away from wickedness?

God is worthy of our trust and worthy of our turning. Ezekiel gives voice

to this in a reminder that is stark and powerful in verses 31b–32: "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live." God, through Ezekiel, speaks God's intention for humanity very clearly and forcefully here. God does not want us to die and to be separated in our sin. God wants life for us.

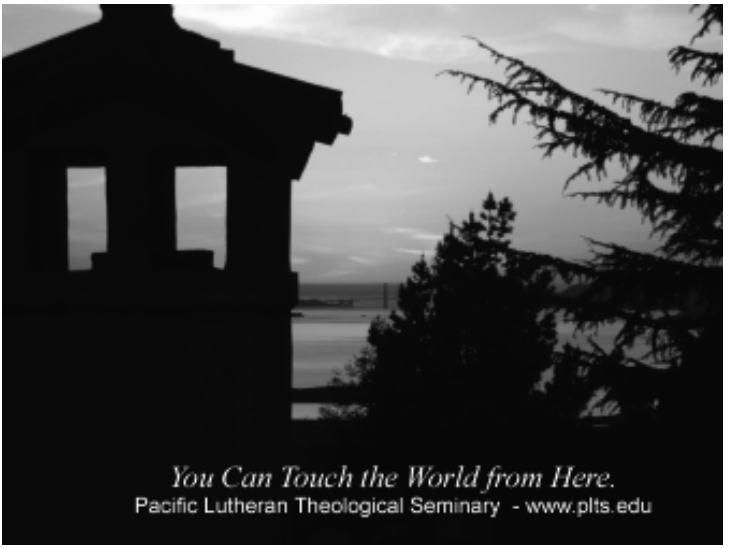
This theme may not be explicitly stated in what we have in today's reading from Philippians. This is sometimes called the Christ hymn, and is generally thought to be a quote from very early Christian hymnody. It is in some senses of the word a creed. It is a poetic statement about the very nature of Christ and about the central points of Christian faith. Christ Jesus is God but chose humility. In and through that humility, Christ is exalted to the end that every tongue should confess Jesus Christ as Lord. God wants life for us so badly that Christ Jesus went through the cross in order to call faithfulness and worship out of us.

Pastoral Reflection

Especially given the reading from Philippians, this may be a good time to proclaim and to attempt to refocus us on what is most central about our faith. It is far too easy to be distracted by lots of other questions. What behavior should we accept in the church? What behavior should we promote in the church? What behavior will help to grow the church? What behavior is killing the church? What are we called to do? Who are we called to be?

The reading from Philippians at the very least calls us to reorient that question toward: Who is Christ? Christ is the one who did not see equality with God as something to be exploited. Christ is the one who humbled himself to take on human form. Christ is the one who humbled himself all the way to the cross for our sake. Christ is the one who will one day be exalted over all heaven and earth.

The other readings provide an answer as to why that is not explicitly stated within the Philippians reading. Why would Christ have done all of this? Because God has no pleasure in the death of anyone. Because God wants us to turn and live. Because God wants us to be able to enter the kingdom of heaven along with the prostitutes and tax collectors. That would be good company indeed. SM-K



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