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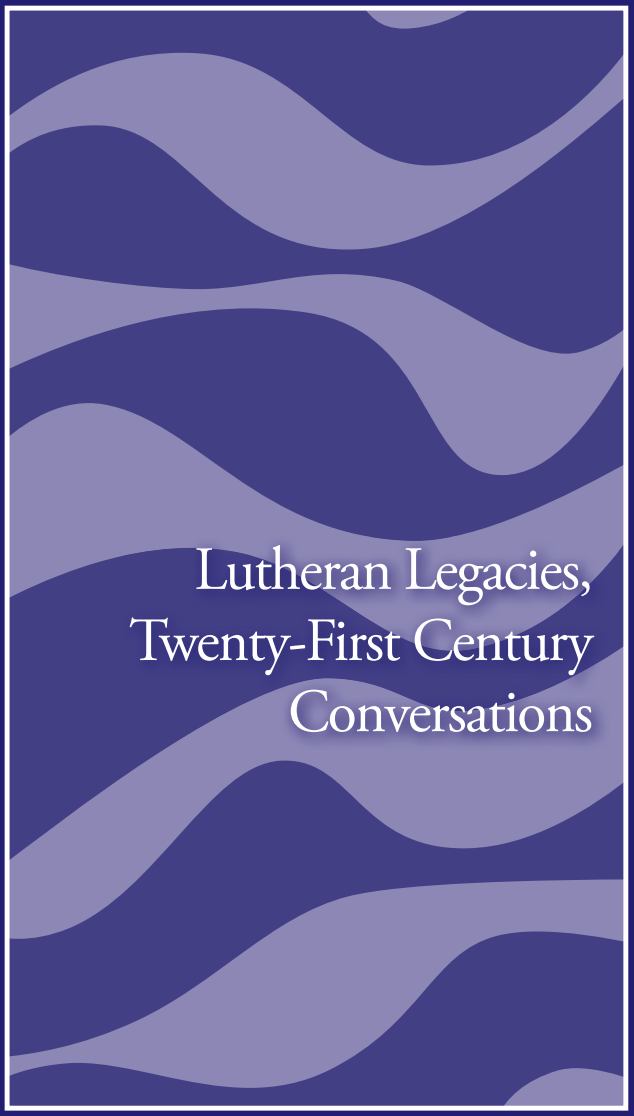

Lutheran Legacies, Twenty-First Century Conversations

CURRENTS
in Theology and Mission

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in Theology and Mission

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Editors: **Kathleen D. Billman, Kurt K. Hendel, Mark N. Swanson**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
kbillman@lstc.edu, khendel@lstc.edu, mswanson@lstc.edu
Associate Editor: **Craig L. Nessan**
Wartburg Theological Seminary (563-589-0207)
cnessan@wartburgseminary.edu
Assistant Editor: **Ann Rezny**
arezny@lstc.edu
Copy Editor: **Connie Sletto**
Editor of Preaching Helps: **Craig A. Satterlee**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
csatterl@lstc.edu
Editors of Book Reviews:
Ralph W. Klein (Old Testament)
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773-256-0773)
rklein@lstc.edu
Edgar M. Krentz (New Testament)
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773-256-0752)
ekrentz@lstc.edu
Craig L. Nessan (history, theology, and ethics)
Wartburg Theological Seminary (563-589-0207)
cnessan@wartburgseminary.edu
Circulation Office: 773-256-0751
currents@lstc.edu

Editorial Board: **Michael Aune (PLTS), James Erdman (WTS), Robert Kugler (PLTS), Jensen Seyenkulo (LSTC), Kristine Stache (WTS), Vítor Westhelle (LSTC).**

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Lutheran Legacies, Twenty-First Century Conversations

The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology expresses the intention to lift up particular charisms of Lutheran theology for the ecumenical church and the world. The editors define charisms as "entrusted gifts that continue to inspire."[1] What inspires is not mere repetition of the theological accents identified with Luther's thought, but serious wrestling with the contemporary meanings and even the theological dilemmas associated with those accents, carried on within an intercultural community of thinkers who care deeply both about the theological tradition in which they stand and the cultural, ecumenical, and interfaith contexts in which and to which theology must speak. From diverse ecumenical and cultural perspectives, the essays in this issue of *Currents* probe ways that the accents of Lutheran theology address twenty-first century complexities.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Professor of Systematic Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and Docent of Ecumenics at the University of Helsinki, takes up "The Lutheran Doctrine of Justification in the Global Context." He argues that a revised understanding of the Lutheran doctrine of justification may help Christians more adequately address the challenges of global diversity, including encounters with other religious and spiritual traditions. Drawing on several current theological and biblical investigations, Kärkkäinen re-contextualizes the setting for the doctrine of justification, reconsiders the current biblical understanding of justification, explores ecumenical advances in relating the Lutheran doctrine of justification to Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, examines the relationship of justification to the work of justice and liberation, and seeks to reconstruct a more balanced pneumatological account of justification.

In "Live and Speak about the Cross: Intercontextual Challenge for Global Christianity," Arata Miyamoto, a pastor in the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and Lecturer at Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary, takes the discussion about the importance of "contextuality" to an even deeper level. In the rich arena of global conversation, how can one contextual theology dialogue with other contextual theologies? What makes such dialogue possible? With this dilemma as a point of departure, Miyamoto explores the work of three Lutheran theologians of the cross and presents four signposts of practicing an "intercontextual theology" across contextual theologies in global Christianity. We note that since Dr. Miyamoto submitted his essay to *Currents,* his book *Embodied Cross: Intercontextual Reading of Theologia Crucis*

(Wipf and Stock, 2010) has been published, which includes and builds on the work presented here.

An important issue in the current ecumenical impasse among Christian communities concerns the relationship between the received Christian tradition and the institution of the teaching office (magisterium) within the church. In "Tradition and Institution: Lutheran Critique—Catholic Dilemma," Chysostom Frank, Full Professor at St. Vianney Theological Seminary, explores how the roots of this problem go back to the Reformation controversies and the emergence of post-Tridentine Catholic theology in which tradition came to be understood as a source of doctrine in addition to scripture and the magisterium increasingly was conceived as unassailable in its teaching capacity. Within the framework of this development, a dilemma has emerged for Catholic theology: the problem of a self-referential teaching office. Frank's essay explores historical and theological complexities in this Lutheran-Roman Catholic conversation.

Legacies may generate consequences that are disastrous in addition to those that are life-giving. In "Luther and the Jews Revisited: Reflections on a Thought Let Slip," James E. McNutt, Professor of History at Thomas More College, acknowledges how Luther's attacks on the Jews stained his legacy in ways he could have never foreseen. While seeking no revision to that conclusion, McNutt revisits the issue by way of seminal insights offered by several Luther scholars over the past quarter-century. He explores how new methodologies have deepened our understanding of the reformer's conviction of letting God be God, yet also reveal how, in the case of the Jews, Luther tragically ignored his own insights that may well contribute to more promising interfaith relations today.

It is fitting to conclude this issue of *Currents* with reflections from Stacy Kitahata, Director for Community Engagement and Professor of Intercultural Studies at Trinity Lutheran College, and Craig L. Nessan, Academic Dean and Professor of Contextual Theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary. "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread" was originally presented as a Bible study on the final day of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly at Stuttgart, Germany, on July 27, 2010. We hope that these reflections on scripture, which conclude with discussion questions, may offer readers a Bible study they may use in their own families and faith communities.

From the staff of *Currents,* Blessed New Year to our readers!

Kathleen D. Billman

Editor

1. Neils Henrik Gregersen, Bo Holm, Ted Peters, and Ted Widman, eds., *The Gift of Grace: The Future of Lutheran Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), xii.

The Lutheran Doctrine of Justification in the Global Context

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

Professor of Systematic Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary and Docent of Ecumenics, University of Helsinki, Finland.

First words: The approach and goal

This presentation argues that a "revised" understanding of the Lutheran doctrine of justification may help Christians address more adequately the challenges of global diversity, including essential themes such as justice and liberation as well as interfaith encounters with other religious and spiritual traditions. In this essay, I will take advantage of several earlier attempts to relate justification to aspects of global diversity; these attempts include:

- The investigation by some theologians and Liberationists to link Luther's theology with the concerns of justice and liberation.
- The explorations organized by globally representative teams of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to explore the relation of justification to the global context.
- The second set of resources I am utilizing is such that while these developments have not had global diversity in view, in my opinion the approaches and results are highly significant to the project at hand; these include:
  - The "New Perspective" in Pauline and biblical theological studies;
  - Ecumenical convergences and investigations between Lutherans, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics regarding the doctrine of justification and its relation to *theosis*.
- The criticism and revision of the Lutheran doctrine of salvation by Wolfhart Pannenberg.
- Constructive theological efforts to make the doctrine of justification more authentically pneumatological-trinitarian and so complement the predominantly christological orientation. This orientation also helps bring in the communal and participatory aspects of soteriology.

Having cast my theological net so wide, it means my investigation necessarily is suggestive and exploratory—and thus offers an invitation to continuing conversation. My investigation begins with (1) re-contextualizing the setting for the doctrine of justification and proceeds by (2) reconsidering the current biblical understanding of justification, (3) exploring ecumenical advances in relating the Lutheran doctrine of justification to Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, (4) examining the relationship of justification to the work of justice and liberation, and (5) seeking to reconstruct a more balanced pneumatological account of justification. I conclude by briefly summarizing the main findings and suggesting questions and themes for further discussion.

The need for a re-contextualization

Facing the necessary task of "contextualizing" the doctrine of justification—

particularly with a view to global implications—one has first to expose the nature of the contextualization of the Reformation way of understanding this doctrine. The way this doctrine emerged—as *the* defining form of soteriology—is undoubtedly related to the late Medieval culture of divinely sanctified hierarchical culture, with its emphasis on guilt, condemnation, and judgment, as well as the importance of a deep penitential attitude.[1] "Contemporary existential concerns have changed," however, says the Brazilian Liberationist Walter Altmann. "They are couched less in terms of guilt and condemnation and more in terms of the meaning of life and the prospects for material survival." [2]

At the same time, when acknowledging the radically changed and changing context of ours from that of the time of the Reformation, as theologians we also need to ask the question: Why should we attempt another, more "globally"[3] appropriate interpretation of the Lutheran view of justification? And more importantly, are there material resources and reasons behind the Lutheran doctrine of justification that support the pursuit of an interpretation better suited for the global context? If not, then we would not only be doing bad apologetics but even worse "contextualization."

I find several reasons to pursue an interpretation of the Lutheran doctrine of justification that takes seriously global diversity. First, I believe Luther and his followers who helped draft confessional statements were in fact writing for the whole world. I don't, of course, imagine naively that Luther, the man of his times with great prejudice against the culturally and religiously Other, would in any way be counted among "global theologians" in the contemporary sense of the word. What I am trying to say, instead, is that Lutherans at the time most probably believed that this interpretation of the doctrine is for all people at all times. Second, the Lutheran church has become a global church. Indeed, the majority of Lutherans can be found in locations other than Europe (and even the United States). Third, the significant ecumenical advances in the area of the doctrine of justification have already pushed Lutherans toward a revised understanding of this cardinal doctrine; the contextual challenge is a parallel process.

Justification in light of the "New Perspective" in biblical studies

The New Testament scholar J. D. G. Dunn speaks for many of his colleagues as he voices criticism against the traditional way of framing the doctrine of justification in light of the "New Perspective":

> Luther's conversion experience and the insight which it gave him also began a tradition in Biblical interpretation, which has resulted for many in the loss or neglect of other crucial Biblical insights related to the same theme of divine justice. And particularly in the case of Paul, Luther's discovery

1. See further, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 81.

2. Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 4–5.

3. For the problematic nature of using the term "global" theology, see further Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and William Dyrness, "Introduction" to *Global Dictionary of Theology*, eds. William Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ass. eds., Simon Chan and Juan Martinez (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2008), vii–xiv.

> of "justification by faith" and the theological impetus it gave especially to Lutheran theology has involved a significant misunderstanding of Paul, not least in relation to "justification by faith" itself.[4]

What, then, are the typical complaints against the traditional view? Biblical scholars maintain that that traditional view has made the doctrine too much a function of a personal, at times even existential, experience rather than looking at the biblical perspective of the need to "justify" God. Second, Lutheran doctrine is too individualistic and thus misses the communal ramifications of the doctrine. Third, the traditional doctrine sets Paul and Judaism in antithesis, making the religion of Israel virtually a degenerate religion. Furthermore, faith and good works, or declarative and effective righteousness are not only separated but also set in opposition to each other (allegedly, to protect the gratuitous nature of justification by faith).

In light of our task, what then are some of the constructive resources that may help us better orient the discussion of justification?[5] A good place to begin is to acknowledge with biblical scholars—and currently with a growing number of systematicians as well—that the metaphor of justification is just that, *a metaphor*, and therefore cannot be considered the normative symbol of salvation. It simply is not true that in Pauline soteriology, let alone in the midst of the diversity of New Testament interpretations, justification or any other metaphor should be considered the normative one. As the Lutheran Pannenberg rightly argues, justification is but one of the many ways of speaking of salvation.[6] Many metaphors are needed to embrace the inclusive nature of salvation in the biblical data. [7]

At the same time, biblical scholarship urges us to reconsider the meaning and context of the terms "justification" and "righteousness." This means moving away from the predominantly forensic understanding toward an understanding of "saving righteousness" with a view to setting things right for the whole creation and between creation and God.[8] In other words, righteousness and *shalom* are no strangers, indeed particularly in the Old Testament, righteousness "has a cosmic orientation of great breadth."[9] This redemptive justice, while not totally lacking

4. James D. G. Dunn, "The Justice of God: A Renewed Perspective on Justification by Faith," *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 43 (1992): 2. I am using the term "New Perspective" in a loose, nontechnical sense, not only referring to the (original) New Perspective on Paul heralded by J. P. Sanders, Bishop Tom Wright, and Dunn (all of whom, of course, do not speak with one voice!) but rather in a more inclusive sense that denotes various attempts to revisit the whole biblical teaching about salvation, faith, justification, law, covenant, and so forth. Illustrative of the rapid pace of changes is the title given by Professor Dunn to his recent talk at Fuller Theological Seminary, namely, "New Perspective on the 'New Perspective'"!

5. For an exploratory paper, I keep the documentation minimal and refer the interested reader to my *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification,* Unitas Books (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004), ch. 2.

6. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:213.

7. Ibid., 3:214.

8. For a helpful brief discussion, see Frank Macchia, "Justification through New Creation: The Holy Spirit and the Doctrine by which the Church Stands or Falls," *Theology Today* (July 2001): 207–211.

9. John Reumann, *Righteousness in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 14.

forensic aspects, is more about "justifying" God's saving deeds with the world in a way that is in keeping with God's faithfulness, holiness, love, and integrity.[10] Righteousness is thus a relational concept: it speaks of the way Yahweh and the Father of Jesus Christ relates to creation and humanity and how humanity, redeemed in Christ, should relate to God and other people. Consequently, this terminology is more communal than individualistic. Being relational and communal, the talk about justice and righteousness is focused on the covenant and covenant faithfulness. The focus on covenant and God's own faithfulness and justice also helps us rediscover the key biblical insight of the integral relation of justification to justice.[11]

Pannenberg has also argued convincingly that there is a need to reinterpret the traditional Lutheran understanding of the relationship between law and gospel. The Reformers mistakenly "viewed the law as an expression of God's demand in antithesis to the gospel as promise and pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins;" whereas for Paul, "we have in the law on the one side, and faith in Christ, on the other, two realities in salvation history that belong to two different epochs in what God does in history. The coming of Christ ended the epoch of the law (Gal 3:24–25; Rom 10:4)."[12] While it is understandable that Luther, against the penitential mentality of his times, mistakenly contrasted the law as the demand of God (telling us what to do and what not) and the gospel as the forgiveness of sins, that distinction cannot be maintained anymore. Among other problems, that kind of distinction blurs the wider context of the biblical idea of the forgiveness of sins which "has its basis in the proximity of the divine rule" of God and thus links together forgiveness and God's righteous demands.[13] In other words, we should understand the integral relationship between the forgiveness of sins and the desire of the forgiven person to submit one's life to the demands of the rule of God. Thus, there is also the eschatological orientation: Since the turn from the law to grace has happened definitely in Christ, this turn "must always be related to the broad context of world history in its movement by divine world rule toward the future of God."[14]

While ecumenical conversations and studies of the Lutheran doctrine of justification in relation to, on the one hand, the Roman Catholic view of justification, and on the other hand, the Eastern Orthodox and patristic concept of *theosis* have not interacted extensively with the current trends in biblical studies, there are surprising convergences there.

Advances in ecumenism: Salvation as deification and justification

Traditionally, it has been claimed that the main dividing issue between Roman Catholics and Lutherans is the differing interpretation of the doctrine of justification by faith, and that the issue between Western churches and their Eastern counterparts is the irreconcilable breach between understanding salvation in terms of justification and *theosis,* respectively. With

10. See, e.g., Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4/2, eds. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 562.

11. See further, Kathryn Tanner, "Justification and Justice in a Theology of Grace," *Theology Today* 55, no. 4 (1999): 513; for a summary statement, see also Kärkkäinen, *One with God*, 16.

12. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:61; see also pp. 58–96.

13. Ibid., 3:82–83 (82).

14. Ibid., 3:87.

regard to the first conflict, it has become a mantra that for Lutherans justification is a forensic action, God declaring the sinner righteous in God's sight, whereas for Catholics it is making the person righteous. With regard to the latter impasse, textbooks argue that for Lutherans the concept of *theosis* is almost blasphemous for several reasons: first, it approaches the idea of a "theology of glory"; second, it entertains the problematic view of human-divine synergy; and finally, it champions the idea of freedom of the will.

The New Interpretation of Luther's theology, as advanced by the so-called Mannermaa School at the University of Helsinki, has challenged the prevailing German Old School approach, as it were.[15] Significantly enough, the impetus for this new reading of Luther's theology came as a result of the dialogue between the Lutheran and Eastern Orthodox churches,[16] to be more precise, between the Russian Orthodox Church and Lutheran Church of Finland.[17] While not without its critics,[18] the Finnish interpretation has profoundly energized the conversation at the global and ecumenical level.

Having offered a detailed documentation and argumentation elsewhere,[19] I will

15. The publications of the Mannermaa School are written mainly in German (and Scandinavian languages). Not until 1998 was the first English monograph, a collection of essays by Finnish Luther scholars and edited by two leading American Lutheran experts, offered to the English-speaking world: *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, eds. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998). Recently, the key work by Mannermaa himself was made available for the English-speaking audience: Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, ed. and trans. Kirsti Stjerna (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005; orig. 1979). A succinct introduction to the methodological orientations and the main results of the Mannermaa School can be found in Tuomo Mannermaa's essay, "Why is Luther so Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research," in *Union with Christ*, 1–20.

16. A meticulous study on the ecumenical dialogues between Lutherans and Orthodox is offered by Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997).

17. Hannu Kamppuri, ed., *Dialogue between Neighbours: The Theological Conversations between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church 1970–1986* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1986).

18. For some aspects of criticism, see my "Salvation as Justification and *Theosis*: The Contribution of the New Finnish Luther Interpretation to Our Ecumenical Future**,"** *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 74–82. While I think that the Mannermaa School should engage the criticism, particularly by the German-speaking Lutheran scholarship, what I don't find helpful or constructive is the virtual dismissal of the whole New Interpretation (Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999], 221) or the leveling of fancy charges such as that of "Osianderism" (Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 48).

19. My *One with God* contains detailed discussion and documentation of various aspects of the New Interpretation by the Mannermaa School. For my other contributions on various aspects of the topics, see my "Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous: The Ecumenical Promise of a New Interpretation of Luther," *One in Christ* 37, no. 2 (April 2002): 32–45; "The Ecumenical Potential of Theosis: Emerging Convergences between Eastern Orthodox,

summarize the main insights of the New Interpretation with a view to the topic under discussion:

Finnish scholars argue that the older Luther research is oblivious to the vital distinction between "Luther's theology" (the theology of the Reformer himself) and "Lutheran theology" (the subsequent theology of the confessional documents). They want to dig into core themes of Martin Luther's own theology and not hasten to read Luther in light of his later interpreters or vice versa. Luther's own understanding of salvation can be expressed not only in terms of the doctrine of justification, but also in terms of *theosis*—or to be more minimalist, Luther's own theology cannot be set in opposition to the ancient Eastern idea of deification. Even in light of the fact that Luther himself used the term *theosis* sparingly, there are a number of other ways he refers to the same reality, such as when he speaks of union and participation.

In contrast to the confessional writings,[20] for Luther, the main idea of justification is Christ present in faith (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*). In other words, Luther saw justification as the union between Christ and the believer as Christ, through faith, abides in the Christian through the Spirit.[21] Being in Christ, one with him, the believer participates and shares in Christ and all his "goods."[22]

Consequently, justification is more than a declaration, it means a "real-ontic" (a somewhat controversial term used by Mannermaa School) participation in God through the indwelling of Christ in the heart of the believer through the Spirit. Therefore, again in contrast to the theology of the Lutheran Confessions, Luther does not make a categorical distinction between forensic and effective justification, but rather argues that justification includes both. In other words, in line with Catholic theology, justification means both declaring righteous and making righteous. This happens because Christ living in the heart of the believer makes the Christian a "christ" to the neighbor. The renewed believer begins to act like Christ. This is not to say that Luther leaves behind the idea of *simul iustus et peccator* but that this idea is put in the context of Christ "absorbing" all sin in a moment and beginning the renewal, which, in the daily repentance and return to the grace of

Protestant, and Pentecostal Soteriologies," *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 23, no. 2 (2002): 45–77; "The Holy Spirit and Justification: The Ecumenical Significance of Luther's Doctrine of Justification," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (2002), 26–39; "Salvation as Justification and Deification: The Ecumenical Potential of a New Perspective on Luther," in *Theology between West and East: Honoring the Radical Legacy of Professor Dr. Jan M. Lochman,* Frank Macchia and Paul Chung, eds. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2002), 59–76.

20. I am of course aware of the fact that even in the Confessions, justification is at times talked about in terms of the change of life—or at least an implication is there. However, in the main they insist, and often in contradistinction to the Roman position, on the forensic interpretation.

21. Materially, Pannenberg (*Systematic Theology*, 3:215–16) says the same with his idea of the "ecstatic" existence in Christ through faith; interestingly, in this context Pannenberg makes an approving comment on the Mannermaa School approach, while acknowledging that this view is an alternative to the prevailing trend in Luther research (n. 368)

22. This is clearly spelled out by Luther already in his 1519 Sermon on Twofold Righteousness (included in the *Formula of Concord* [Solid Declaration, Article III, "Righteousness," paragraph 32]).

baptism, continues the rest of one's life.[23] The "christ-making" also has profound implications for the Christian community: it is a "hospital for the incurably sick" to respond to the poor, sick, depressed, and weak in themselves.

Ecumenically it is of highest significance that many of these key themes presented by the Helsinki scholars (as well as the "New Perspective" in biblical studies) seem to be reflected in the Joint Declaration between the LWF and the Vatican in 1999. [24] The document speaks of many metaphors of salvation, justification being one of them (#11). Importantly, it speaks of "Justification as Forgiveness of Sins and Making Righteous" and emphasizes that "These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated, for persons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Cor 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself" (#22). This is not to minimize the many remaining differences but rather highlight the significance of the emerging (#5).

Both the biblical studies' contributions and the insights from Catholic-Orthodox-Lutheran ecumenical advances point to the integral relation between justification and doing just and right deeds, i.e., the relation of justification to justice.

Justification, justice, and liberation

According to the Reformed Moltmann, "It is amazing that Protestant theology has failed to note the analogy between God's righteousness which 'justifies' and God's justice which 'executes justice.'"[25] Similarly the Episcopalian Kathryn, when speaking of righteousness and mercy in the context of covenant relations, argues for the integral link between justification and justice: "As a natural consequence of their restitution as God's faithful covenant partners, they should now keep the law, that is, do justice…earlier. Doing justice in this sense is how covenant faithfulness is expressed in human social relations."[26]

While the link between justification and acting justly can be established on the basis of biblical orientations, there is much in the typical Protestant and Lutheran notion of justification by faith that may also resist it. This was illustrated well in the work of the LWF task force, which back in the 1980s investigated the relationship between justification and justice. According to the report, there was a clash of cultures among Lutherans between the party that "took a classical point of departure from the Scriptures and confessions, seeking to make a careful distinction between justification and justice" and the one in which "there was a strong emphasis on the concrete experiences of oppressed classes, races, and women and the actions to overcome their oppression as a point of departure for theological reflection, seeking to show the interdependence of justification and justice."[27] Another consultation in 1998 by an LWF team titled "Justification in the World's Context" took its point of departure from Luther's 1521 pamphlet "On the Freedom of a Christian" in order to reflect on the implications of justification to current social and political issues at the

23. See also Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:218.

24. For a detailed discussion, see Kärkkäinen, *One with God*, 99–108.

25. J. Moltmann, "Justice for Victims and Perpetrators," *Reformed World* 44, no. 1 (March 1994): n.p. (http://warc.ch/pc/rw941/01.html; accessed 9/25/09).

26. Tanner, "Justification and Justice," 517.

27. Mark Thomsen, "On Relating Justification and Justice," *Word & World* 7, no. 1 (1987): 7.

global level.[28] That little piece of Reformation manifesto was seen as an inspiration to the current struggle of "rediscovering the liberating power of the central message of justification with regard to the life of the poor" to take seriously the cries of the oppressed and those living amid inhuman circumstances. In other words, human justice, which in itself is an expression of God's justice, cannot be reduced to the "pneumatic reality of grace, justification, faith to a mere portent," but must take some concrete form in the world of suffering and injustice.[29] In relation to the same treatise of Luther, Moltmann concludes: "For justifying faith liberates men and women from the compulsion of evil, from the law of works, and from the violence of death, setting them free for unhindered and unmediated eternal fellowship with God."[30] This freedom in turn drives the Christian, as mentioned above, to do the works of Christ, to care for the poor, to feed the hungry, to resist the structures of injustice, and facilitate freedom and liberation.[31]

Some Liberationists have similarly voiced their opinion about the link between Luther's doctrine of justification and that of justice and liberation.[32] The Brazilian W. Altmann surmises that "justification by grace and faith implies a radical principle of equality among human beings and of the valuing of each one of them before God."[33] The Korean Paul S. Chung puts Luther in a proper perspective with regard to liberation. While his discovery of justification is a message of liberation from the burden of enslavement, "a move from domination toward the gracious forgiveness of God," the challenge of Luther is that he was hardly able to relate spiritual liberation to socio-political liberation.[34] Indeed, his doctrine of two regiments in many ways says the opposite. Liberationists in Latin America, Africa, and beyond have lamented the severing of liberation and justification at the personal level from that at the socio-economic and political level.[35]

One of the neglected aspects in Christology—relevant to not only justice and liberation but to the whole question of the nature of salvation—is the focus on Jesus' earthly life. Whereas classical liberalism's quest for the historical Jesus

28. The main results and contributions are to be found in *Justification in the World's Context,* ed. Wolfgang Greive, Documentation 45 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2000).

29. See further, Wolfgang Greive, "The Significance of Justification in the World's Context: Towards a New Interpretation of the Doctrine of Justification," in *Justification in the World's Context*, 13–14. See also Nelson Kirst, ed., *Rethinking Luther's Theology in the Context of the Third World* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1990).

30. J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 115–116.

31. See further Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 128.

32. See Richard Shaull, *The Reformation and Liberation Theology: Insights for the Challenges of Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

33. Altmann, *Luther and Liberation*, 5.

34. Paul S. Chung, *Martin Luther and Buddhism: Aesthetics of Suffering*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications/Wipf & Stock, 2008), 115.

35. See Chung, *Martin Luther and Buddhism*, 117. This is not to say that Luther did not speak to the issues of justice and poverty. He did that; think of treatises such as *Brief Sermon on Usury* (1519) or *The Sermon on the Magnificat* (1521). What I am saying here is that he did not establish a link between justification and justice in a way that we, later interpreters, would have wished.

truncated Christology to Jesusology, the tendency in particularly Protestant theology has been the opposite. The "justifying" and salvific aspects of Jesus' earthly ministry as healer, friend, exorcist, and teacher of God's righteousness have been downplayed—and kept apart from any discussion of justification by faith. This plague may indeed go back even to early theology. As Moltmann brilliantly observes, in ancient creeds—unlike the Gospels—"there is either nothing at all, or really no more than a comma, between 'and was made man, he suffered'…." To rectify this omission and to highlight the Savior's work in healing, justice, and liberation, Moltmann would expand the "comma space":

> Baptized by John the Baptist,
>
> filled with the Holy Spirit:
>
> to preach the kingdom of God to the poor,
>
> to heal the sick,
>
> to receive those who have been cast out,
>
> to revive Israel for the salvation of the nations, and
>
> to have mercy upon all people.[36]

Although one has to be extremely cautious in adding to the creeds, we could just imagine how radically the spiritual life and outlook of Christians and Christian communities would change should this "revised" creed be recited as part of the liturgy! Among other viewpoints, this addition also highlights the important role of the Spirit in the pursuit of justice and justification, the focus of the next section.

36. J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, Margaret Kohl, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 150.

A trinitarian-pneumatological account of justification

The Pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia states bluntly: "If justification is to offer a liberating word in an increasingly graceless world, the doctrine must be reworked precisely at this point of neglect, namely, at the relationship between justification and the work of the Spirit as the giver of new life." Therefore, he suggests, an attempt has to be made in terms of opening "the doctrine to the full breadth of the Spirit's work in and through Christ to make all things new."[37] What Macchia is rightly aiming at is a vision of justification which—in a properly trinitarian framework—would empower and energize the justified and renewed person to work in fulfillment of the demands of the kingdom in all areas of life, with a view toward final consummation. I would add one more important task for such a constructive work: justification should be framed in a way that would help link the individual person's union with Christ with the fellowship of believers, thus including communal aspects as well.

As is well known, one of the main differences between Eastern and Western theologies has been the prominence of a Trinitarian/pneumatological outlook in the East. Somewhat ironically, the Protestant *ordo salutis*, while usually under pneumatology, has tended to be one-sidedly built on christological categories in the sense that the Holy Spirit has to do only with the "subjective" reception of the "objective" work wrought about by Christ. This is, however, "soteriological subordinationism": While in no way diminishing the work of the Son, the Spirit's work cannot only be considered "subjective," in other words, secondary in the accomplishment

37. Macchia, "Justification through New Creation," 202–203.

of salvation. It was through the Spirit that the Father raised Jesus from the dead (Rom 1:4), the act that led to our justification (Rom 4:25). Christ's cross requires the Spirit's resurrection and vice versa. In that sense, we should speak of the "objective" work of the Spirit as well!

Thus, the doctrine of salvation cannot be expressed in christological terms alone but requires pneumatological grounding as well. This is what Pannenberg is doing: he places the talk about soteriology under the telling heading "The Basic Saving Works of the Spirit in Individual Christians" in his discussion of pneumatology and ecclesiology.[38] Moltmann similarly has criticized the traditional Reformation/Lutheran view for not paying due attention to the role of the Spirit in salvation. Referring to passages such as Titus 3:5–7, which speaks about the "washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly," Moltmann emphasizes that "'regeneration' as 'renewal' comes about through the Holy Spirit" when the "Spirit is 'poured out.'" Through the Spirit, we become "justified through grace."[39]

Echoing Pannenberg's approach (but independently, as far as I know), Paul Hinlicky puts it succinctly: "So justifying faith is for Luther a rapture or ecstasy, a personal Pentecost."[40] As such, faith is always participatory and communal, the work of the Holy Spirit. All of these emphases come to the fore in Pannenberg's trinitarian-pneumatological account of soteriology, based on the underlying idea of the believer's ecstatic being in Christ:

> The work of the Holy Spirit lifts individuals ecstatically above their own particularity not only to participation in the sonship of Christ but at the same time also to experience of the fellowship in the body of Christ that unites individual Christians to all other Christians. This is not just a matter of lifting up the individuality of Christians into the social union of the church. What will come to light is that raising up to existence outside the self in Christ (*extra se in Christo*) does not simply assure individuals of their freedom in Christ but in so doing brings them to the place of believer's fellowship. Not just the individual but the church, too, in its liturgical life has its existence outside itself in Christ. In this way it shows itself to be a fellowship of the Spirit.[41]

Framing soteriology in a proper trinitarian-pneumatological way—building on the idea established above, namely, justification as "the presence-in-Christ" or "presence-of-Christ in us"—gives superb resources for linking salvation with community and communion. Elaborating on those implications would take us to the doctrine of the church, so that task has to be left for another essay.

Reference to the Holy Spirit, the eschatological Spirit, also reminds us of the importance of the reference to future, final consummation. While not a prominent theme in Luther, neither the eschatological nor the anticipatory dimension is lacking. In his later work (1536) "The Disputation Concerning Justification," Luther has this orientation clearly in mind as he speaks of

38. The heading is on p. 135 of Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3.

39. Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 146. See also Kenneth L. Bakken, "Holy Spirit and Theosis: Toward a Lutheran Theology of Healing," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1994): 410–411

40. Paul R. Hinlicky, "Theological Anthropology: Toward Integrating *Theosis* and Justification by Faith," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 60.

41. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:130.

God who "sustains and supports them on account of the first fruit of his creation in us, and he thereupon decrees that they are righteous and sons of the kingdom."[42] That is the anticipatory aspect, and here there is the culminating part: "For justification is healing for sin, which slays the whole world eternally and brings it to destruction with its infinite evils."[43] With this—as well as insights from the contemporary understanding of justification in the biblical canon, as discussed above—Macchia sets forth this lofty goal:

> Luther's understanding of justification begs for greater exploration into its accomplishment ultimately through the Spirit's final work in new creation on a broad cosmic scale. Such an exploration needs to exploit Luther's understanding of justice as redemptive justice that God's victorious reign will establish through the transformation of creation brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ.[44]

Last words: Insights and tasks for further discussion

I will draw together and highlight key insights of the discussion in order to facilitate reflection on the implications for global contexts and suggest some tasks and challenges for further discussion.

Justification, while the preferred Lutheran way of conceiving salvation in Christ, is neither normative nor the only legitimate metaphor of salvation. The implication is that the Lutheran theology of salvation—let alone Christian theology as a whole—has the freedom and the responsibility to seek metaphors of salvation appropriate for any given cultural and religious context.

Justification, while not the only metaphor of salvation, has also undergone a significant reformulation in light of biblical and systematic studies. Its meaning goes well beyond the limited forensically-oriented "setting right my relationship with God" to encompass the communal[45] and participatory aspects, including the cosmic vision of "setting right" things in God's creation and in relation to humanity. While humanity's salvation is a focal point of any talk about justification, it is also a profound statement about God who is faithful, righteous, and merciful. Holy in character and judgment, the God of the Bible is faithful to God's covenant and merciful in dealing with humanity and creation. Being a statement about God, justification is at the same time a dynamic concept in that it both anticipates the coming of the rule of God, already present in the seeking "first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33) as people submit their lives to the demands of the kingdom; this seeking for righteousness points to the coming eschatological consummation. Thus justification embraces the idea of continuous "making righteous" by God and the energizing and empowering work of the Spirit. This links justification with

42. Martin Luther, "The Disputation Concerning Justification," Theses #22 (Third Disputation), *Luther's Works,* Vol. 34: *Career of the Reformer IV*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan et al. 55-volume American edition on CD-Rom (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999; orig. 1960), 154.

43. Luther, "The Disputation Concerning Justification," #29 (Fourth Disputation), 156.

44. Macchia, "Justification through New Creation," 205.

45. Radically altering the traditional order of discussion—in which soteriology follows Christology and precedes ecclesiology—Pannenberg includes discussion of soteriology under the doctrine of the church (ch. 13, "Messianic Community and Individuals," in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3).

the pursuit of justice and liberation.

Part of the freedom of theological exploration is to use a number of metaphors of salvation in changing contexts. In the postmodern culture of the West, the most urgent need may be the meaningfulness of life. In the traditional African and Asian cultures, there is often a felt need for liberation from the powers. The metaphor of justification, when used in a more elusive way (for example freed from one-sided forensic connotations) and in tandem with others such as reconciliation, empowerment, and redemption, may have much more potential in reaching out to people in changing contexts.

While the post-Enlightenment culture of the Global North suffers from and caters to individualism, most cultures of the world are authentically communal. The release of justification from the prison of a hyper-individualistic and forensic framework significantly helps Christians in Asia, Africa, and Latin America—as well as among emerging postmodern communities of the West—to relate salvation to family, tribe, community, and the people. The dualistic culture of the post-Enlightenment West has also severed human life from creation and cosmos. A revised account of justification with a cosmic and dynamic orientation may similarly assist Christians in different contexts in finding a more holistic view of God's salvific *shalom*. Coupled with creative use of parallel terms such as *theosis* to speak of union with Christ—or highlight the union aspects of the doctrine of justification in its revised form—may help better address various types of needs such as the following:

- It has been suggested that in some African contexts the idea of *theosis* (or union) may provide a helpful parallel with the traditional motif of "vital participation."[46] Would a pneumatologically loaded concept of salvation be suited for this conversation?
- Would the Christian concept of salvation framed through the lens of deification offer theological bridges to the Hindu worldview and religion in which the cults of the deified dead add something new, and "deification" is looked upon as the means of death uniting the human being with God, rather than separating from the divine?[47]
- What about postmodern spiritualities of the Global North in terms of crystals, signs, horoscopes, and generic angels? Or a semi-spiritual approach to the care of the environment? Would a holistic, cosmically oriented account of justification fare better in this discourse?

The traditional fear of "works-righteousness" that has too often paralyzed the Lutheran understanding of the relation of faith to love or faith to works could be overcome through the lens of the revised understanding. In other words, it can be established that Luther's doctrine of justification with its idea of the "real presence of Christ in the believer" (or the believer's ecstatic being in Christ through the Spirit) naturally leads not only to the change of life but also energizes the Christ-like work for others. If justified sinners are "christs" who do the works of the Savior, it means a new boost to ethics, neighbor love, and seeking justice and liberation. This is more

46. V. Mulago, "Vital Participation," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth eds. (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1969), 157; see also Hartmunt Schönherr, "Concepts of Salvation in Christianity," *Africa Theological Journal* 12, no. 3 (1983): 160.

47. See. Stuart H. Blackburn, "Death and Deification: Folk Cults in Hinduism," *History of Religions* 24, no. 3 (1985): 255–74.

than *imitatio Christi* in the classical sense of the word; it is about Christ working in the believer to do the works of Christ! One can only imagine the need in various global contexts, including the Global North with its inner-city poverty, crime, and unemployment, for such a lifestyle of love and the work of justice and liberation. In that sense, it can be said that the Lutheran doctrine of justification can be liberation theology at its best.

The significance of the possibility of relating the Lutheran doctrine of justification in an irenic and complementary way to the Roman Catholic notion of justification and Eastern Orthodox belief in deification should be acknowledged both in terms of ecumenism and the global situation. Ecumenically it means the possibility for Christians of various church traditions to give a joint testimony before the world about salvation in Christ. Joint testimony does not require full agreement about everything soteriological, let alone agreement in all things theological and ecumenical. What it means is an emerging convergence and common basis—which is available in the current ecumenical situation. With the majority of Christians in all denominations to be found in the Global South, the possibility of mutual understanding and joint testimony is of immense value. Such shared testimony also contributes to interfaith dialogue: the only credible way for Christians to give a testimony to people of other religions about salvation in Christ is to speak in a united voice—or at least not to make efforts to anathemize or discredit the use of diverse Christian metaphors and approaches.

An urgent question for me personally is how would Luther's doctrine of justification fare in an interfaith context? As far as I know, specifically *Lutheran* attempts of relating justification to other religions have not been carried out—or if they have, they have escaped my notice. I found it interesting that the important and insightful book by Paul S. Chung (Reformed by confession but professor in a Lutheran seminary as well as one-time pastor to a Lutheran congregation), *Martin Luther and Buddhism,* does not address this issue either. Yes, there is a long chapter (3) titled "Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Justification in Context." But that chapter, while discussing historical and contemporary developments in the theology of justification, leaves behind the doctrine of justification when focusing on interfaith issues and instead takes up themes such as divine suffering, the theology of the cross, and the two-kingdom doctrine.

Any advance in the theological understanding of salvation understood in an inclusive and holistic sense is also a significant step ecumenically and globally as Christians are finding each other and becoming prepared for a common witness with each other and dialogue with the religious Other.

Live and Speak about the Cross: Intercontextual Challenge for Global Christianity

Arata Miyamoto

Pastor in the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Hakata Church and Lecturer at Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary.

The idea that Christianity is a "world religion" may raise ambivalent feelings today for many Christians. On the one hand, contemporary discussion about mission has been sensitive to the history that the commission to a world mission in Matthew 28 has been often mingled with the theology of empire in this post-Constantinian era. On the other hand, we tend to forget the fact that not until the twentieth century did a "truly worldwide church" appear as actual fact, not as a theological self-understanding of the church.[1] In this connection with the global spread of Christianity, my concern, as the one nurtured in the context of Christianity as a super-minority in Japan, focuses on the challenging issue of how Christians understand others and collaborate for the reign of God. What theologies kindle mutual understanding with respect to difference as difference? At the same time, while counting on the unity of Christianity, it is hopeful to see the diverse perspectives that contextual theologies present. Diversity is welcome, but this is also the challenge I see: how does each contextual theology open itself to other contextual theologies?[2]

Firmly set within the global theological context, I will argue in this article that a theology of the cross works from an intercontextual perspective. Exploring three theologians of the cross in the North American context, I find that their theologies of the cross prompt us to conceive of a type of dialogue engaging multiple contexts for theology across the boundaries of a single context. First, I will explicate what a theology of the cross is through the study of the three contemporary theologians of the cross. Then, I will summarize the significance of the intercontextual perspective in terms of a theology of the cross.

A theology of the cross in context

Each of these three contemporary theologians of the cross, Mark Thomsen, Mary Solberg, and Vítor Westhelle, offers a fine example of practicing a theology of the cross in that all have seriously explored Luther's *theologia crucis*, but done so in and through their own contexts.[3] As a conse-

1. Justo L. González, *Christian Thought Revisited: Three Types of Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 125–145.

2. I fully addressed these questions in my dissertation, *Intercontextual Reading of* Theologia Crucis: *Toward a Theology of Embodied Wisdom,* submitted to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in 2009.

3. *Theologia crucis* is rooted in Luther's

quence of their contextual developments, I find in them an orthopraxis approach to Luther. I argue that the orthopraxis approach, by which they are synthesized with Luther's theology of the cross, bears a new dimension of Luther in a global context. The orthopraxis of *theologia crucis* helps me not only to develop my contextual reflection on Christian faith, but also to practice an intercontextual reading of the cross across contextual borders.

Cruciformed *Missio Dei:* Mark Thomsen

Perspective

Mark Thomsen proposes a theology of the cross that takes the global context of the twenty-first century seriously from a Lutheran perspective. In doing so, his theology of the cross grasps a new perspective of Christian mission.[4] While he positively appreciates that Lutheran missiological themes are rooted in biblical theology, he also recognizes the contextual and theological distance between the sixteenth-century Reformation in Germany and the twentieth-century global context. Like Luther, he starts his theology of the cross by focusing on a theology of revelation, but he expands that perspective from Luther's personal experience of justification by faith into the eschatological movement of *missio dei*. The theology of the cross enables us to participate in *missio dei* in this established global world where a reality of tremendous suffering is hidden in the theology of glory. He does not reduce the theology of the cross merely to a kind of atonement theory or theological program or a doctrine of the church. Rather, it functions as "the primary key for interpreting the whole of Christian thought and praxis."[5]

Conversation with Luther

Thomsen mainly takes up three aspects of Luther's theological heritage in considering the contextual theology of the cross. He contends that Luther's theology helps contemporary Christians to construct a missiology in the broken web of the world. First, he observes that Luther recognized the brokenness of humanity in relation with God. Justification by faith designates that God loves the world and all sinners, not because of their own efforts, but because of God's grace. Salvation is a gift from God. Second, Thomsen gains insight from Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Luther declined the medieval Roman Catholic hierarchical ecclesiology, in which the Pope took responsibility for mission. Thomsen argues that this shift from a single authority for mission to an egalitarian distribution of responsibility is important to do the cruciformed *missio dei* in a global context. While the church is primarily understood as a congregation—community of saints—not an institutional church, missiology should not be constructed from a single place to others, but should be a multi-centered missiology practiced by congregations, making it possible to focus on local realities and needs in the sense of mission.

Finally, Thomsen embraces the radical

early works, but I primarily explore contemporary theologians who take Luther's contributions for their constructive theological proposals seriously. From this perspective, the theology of the cross does not primarily designate a particular theological discourse *about* the cross. Rather, it means the certain disposition of a theologian (Christian) who starts doing theology from the foot of the cross. The theology of the cross connects to the conviction that the cross is where God was revealed in a unique way.

4. Mark Thomsen, *Christ Crucified: A 21st Century Missiology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2004), 39.

5. Ibid., 22.

acceptance of sinners based on Luther's theology of creation: "*finitum capax infiniti.*" This formula for the real presence of Christ "*in, with* and *under*" creation led Luther to affirm God's presence in the world. Thomsen is also convinced that this worldly commitment to mission for justice and human well-being is essential to join *missio dei*. The cross is the place where divine work appeared in a paradoxical manner. "In his theology of the cross Luther emphasized that salvation was God's gift through Jesus, the Christ, whose suffering and death made justification and the conquest of death a reality."[6] It is a theology that makes known to us divine love in this broken world. Thomsen calls it the "divine metacosmic love."

Revelation in the midst of a broken world

Thomsen's theology of the cross is a theology of revelation focusing on divine metacosmic love. Following is a brief summary of his theology of the cross based on this "divine metacosmic love." First, the cross of Jesus is the consequence of the movement of the reign of God that Jesus launched. The understanding of the cross is rooted in the historical event of Jesus' life and ministry, and his followers. This movement was not aimed merely at individual conversion in a modern evangelical sense. Rather, he defines conversion as "conversion to the kingdom of God or the *mission dei*, God's vision of a new creation."[7] Second, Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God was also the proclamation of divine solidarity with life, pain, and suffering in the world. Third, Jesus' ministry of the proclamation of the kingdom of God occurred in the midst of the battle with embodied evil. Thomsen acknowledges that "sin as embodied evil has incredible power in the world."[8] The cross sheds light on the depth of suffering caused by embodied evil in the world. While the theology of the cross does not allow eliminating historical concern from any theological words, it does consider seriously incarnation and resurrection to establish a historical perspective. From this perspective, Thomsen argues, "Jesus was not sent to die: he came to live and challenge Satan and all his powers."[9]

Fourth, that God took the incarnation to the death on the cross means that the divine activity is nonviolence against violence. Jesus is victimized by violence as well as the mass of "crucified people." This is what Yacob Tesfai means by scandal.[10] The "*cruciformed missio dei*" does not hesitate to recognize vulnerability in God. The life, ministry, and death of Jesus transparently show divine vulnerability. Therefore, unlike the Hellenistic tradition of divine nature, Thomsen asserts that the vulnerability of God does not stop at suffering. Rather, through God's own suffering, God shows the depth of this love for human beings in miraculous ways. The depth of this love "embraces

6. Ibid., 17–18.

7. Ibid., 23.

8. Ibid., 25. Gustaf Aulén rediscovered this element in Luther's theology of the cross at the beginning of the twentieth century, which is rooted in the church fathers. However, the difference between Aulén and Thomsen lies in the fact that Thomsen does not overlook the decisive element, that the battle ground with Satan is not merely mythical, but a reflection of the real world, a real struggle with embodied evil in people's lives.

9. Ibid., 26.

10. Yacob Tesfai, ed., *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspective on the Cross and Suffering* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994).

not only victims but also victimizer."[11] In this vulnerable form, the theology of the cross can speak about all in all in reconciliation with the crucified God. Finally, the theology of the cross is a signpost of God's unconditional love and grace. It entails openness to the diversity of a multiplicity of human beings. As Thomsen writes so succinctly, "Placing the finality of Jesus within the metacosmic Abba of Jesus does not minimize the mystery of the Incarnation, but transposes it into an intercultural and interstellar symphony."[12]

Thomsen's theology of the cross is primarily a theology of revelation. The content revealed is connected with the form of revelation. The knowledge of God on the cross is not propositional knowledge; rather, it entails something that is beyond our form of knowledge. What divine metacosmic love means is that the love of God pervades into the bottom of the world.[13] This divine metacosmic love entails a historical form of Jesus' crucifixion, which is the revelation in the midst of struggling and agony. Therefore, this revelation is not merely *logos*, but the heart of God. The heart of God is mirrored in creatures cruciformed. Divine activity leads our broken world and history to divine consummation of the creation. What Jesus' life, ministry, and death presented is the cruciformed *missio dei*. But, how do we know these things? Thomsen's theology of the cross hints at this question, "Participate in the cruciformed *missio dei*!" It points to discipleship inscribed by the cross.

Thomsen develops his theology of the cross in a global-mission context. This context is also the place where the symbol of the cross has been under criticism in terms of conflation of imperialism, colonialism, triumphalism, expansionism, exclusivism, and so on. While he is keenly sensitive to these issues, he still develops the cruciformed missiology by using a paradoxical revelation in the cross. Focusing on the metacosmic love of the Abba that Jesus proclaimed, even Good Friday can be a profound moment of God's self-manifestation of love *in, against,* but *for* the world. He expresses a new frame for mission in the post-world mission world in the midst of massive suffering and injustice. Doing so in a North American context, Thomsen also invites people to participate in this divine cruciformed mission with vulnerable love.

Epistemology of the cross: Mary M. Solberg

Thomsen inextricably connects a theology of the cross with the life and ministry of Jesus and presents the heart of God embodied in Jesus' life and death. The cross is a place both to uncover the reality of suffering and to reveal the compassionate pain of God. Only in the paradoxical connection can Jesus' cross be the revelation of God. But how does one come to the paradoxical revelation of the cross? How does revelation relate to the human faculty of knowing? Luther proposed that experience, not speculation, makes it possible to receive the knowledge of God. Reflecting on Luther's existential struggle with the knowledge of God, Solberg proposes her own theology of the cross by way of a theological epistemology.

Solberg proposes a way of knowing ethically how to live with others from her constructive theology of the cross. She considers Luther's theology of the cross as a theology of event, in which his epistemology was broken down and led him to "call the thing what it actually is." She expands the event of this "epistemological break" to develop as theological ethics,

11. Thomsen, *Christ Crucified*, 30.
12. Ibid., 33.
13. Ibid., 84.

and she calls it the "epistemology of the cross."[14] The epistemology of the cross is a heuristic devise in order to practice knowing ethically with others on the basis of the connection between knowing and living. On this point, she asserts that her epistemology of the cross can be in solidarity with secular liberation movements in terms of intellectual praxis, by way of prompting our "hermeneutics of suspicion" with regard to epistemology.

What is Luther's Theology of the cross in her context?

Solberg argues that the dynamism between revelation and knowing, which appears in Luther's theology of the cross, brings about three developments in his lived context. First, Luther's theology of the cross functions as a critique of power. Luther's knowing (discovery) of justification by reason of divine agency led him to an epistemological break. This break changed the way he saw the church, its theology (theology of glory), and the system of grace (indulgence). Here, he finds the rejection of divine agency replaced by human knowledge. With this recognition, he could not avoid confronting the dominant power. The critique of power is a primary sign of a theology of the cross. Second, she asserts the function of announcement. The theology of the cross engages in announcement of divine agency in the event of the cross. At the same time, divine agency has committed to our knowing and living in our own cross situations, illuminating "God's disposition toward humankind."[15] Therefore, the theology of the cross announces that, "by coming to the world in the human suffering form of Jesus, God is revealed as one who loves and suffers with humanity."[16] Finally, the theology of the cross functions as equipment. The function of equipment means "the way we live."[17] The knowledge of God through Christ is revealed in an unexpected way in the living context of Luther, who was struggling from the double abnegation of his personal suffering and his "success" in practicing monastic life. When he abandoned his own way to accomplish salvation and accepted actual divine agency within himself, he knew the way to live with God ethically. Knowledge of God was no longer just information, but embodied knowledge in his life. This understanding leads Solberg to contend that "living, not salvation, is what both theologians and theology ought to be concerned about."[18]

In her project, Luther's theology of the cross converges in a theological epistemology. Solberg rightly sees in the conversation with Luther that God reveals oneself and works *within* that self. That the self-revelation becomes the knowledge of God means that it requests human commitment: "compelling knowledge." However, the agency who brings this knowledge remains God. Solberg's epistemology, through her study of Luther, shows that knowing is accomplished by the Other's working. To know something about God means to know something that God has already worked for and within the self.

14. Mary M. Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997).

15. Ibid., 80.

16. Ibid., 81.

17. Ibid., 84.

18. Mary M. Solberg, "What an Epistemology of the Cross Is Good For," in Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 140.

The epistemology of the cross

Solberg develops her epistemology of the cross with four components that concern 1) power; 2) experience; 3) objectivity; and 4) accountability. When one gets some information, the epistemology of the cross presents an epistemological agenda toward knowing ethically. This epistemology enables us to rethink critically information in relation to power. It leads us to the question of whether the knowing-process excludes experience: "Lived experience is the locale and the medium of all knowing."[19] Therefore, the epistemology of the cross is willing to open its way to other ways of knowing, leading to a rejection of a single-minded objectivism.[20] Solberg does not simply discard the use of objectivity, but she carefully proposes a strategic objectivity, while agreeing with Harding's proposal of "strong objectivity." She writes that "peculiar strength rests on the participation of many knowers, and among them, begins with the least favored, and a commitment to critical examination of the causes of belief, especially those that have long passed for 'objective truths'."[21]

For Solberg, what is at stake is not a simple equality among knowers, but rather lifting up voices that are marginalized by the dominant voice. The principle is not simple egalitarianism, but a strategic affirmation of liberation theology: the "preferential option for the poor and the oppressed," which means that not until we recognize the partiality of our knowledge can we understand this preferential option. The partiality, not the wholeness that objectivity is willing to guarantee, is the signpost of an epistemology of the cross. The emphasis on partiality in a paradoxical way includes not only openness to others but also an acknowledgement of selves concealed even by subjects.

The epistemology of the cross is the other side of a theology of revelation, because revelation never occurs in a vacuum. Rather, it is an event in which Luther came to an "epistemological break" in terms of God, the self, and the world. Solberg clarifies that the other side of Luther's way toward knowing God in his life and suffering is the theology of the cross. Whenever revelation is spoken, one becomes entwined in an epistemological issue in a question about knowing and knowledge. Like Luther's theology of the cross, the epistemology of the cross seeks embodied knowledge in human's ordinary lives and bodies. It is partial, but it retains embodiment. Because of this partiality, the epistemology of the cross can be open to other's knowledge in the sense of "strong objectivity." Not until our epistemological frames are shaken in encounters with the other are we led to a different picture of reality. The theology of the epistemology strategically rejects the will to obtain a single-objective "truth," and passionately opens one's own partiality of knowledge to others. Her critical reflection on Luther's theology of the cross is congruent in its critique of power, the strategic acceptance of partiality of knowledge, and openness to others in terms of knowing. In a word, it is the other side of the accountability of knowing with Other/others. Revelation of the cross is nothing more than the knowledge of God revealed "in" us, not in any other place.

19. Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge*, 112.

20. Ibid., 112–113.

21. Ibid., 121–122. See also Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (NewYork: Cornell University Press, 1991).

Between worlds: Vítor Westhelle

Overview

Placing a theology of the cross in a postmodern context, Westhelle addresses a unique issue. The cross is not primarily *our* event, it is *Jesus'* cross. There is something that cannot be dissolved into *our* knowledge even if it can be meaningful for others. How does a theology of the cross take into consideration the relation between *our* and *his* across the boundaries of time and place? How can we listen to the voice of the cross?

From the beginning, Christianity has been engaged in interpreting the cross event of Jesus. It is a history full of the "use and abuse of the cross."[22] Theology seeks the meaning of the cross, and at the same time, conceals other possible dimensions of the cross. We come to know the limitations of our knowledge through the cross. Our way of looking into the cross relates to our way of viewing our world. In this context, Westhelle clarifies a basic condition of the cross and the world; it is conditioned by representation. A theology of the cross discloses one's own world and at the same time, conceals it. While maintaining the fact of our limitations, he seeks to touch on divine drama in the midst of the cross in the analogy of the Shabbat in the Jewish-Christian tradition. It is not a new discourse or a new theological content. Rather, his theology of the cross is a kind of letter that invites readers to seek cracks in our world through the divine work of "faith desiring." The swinging rhythm between "God died and God lives" cuts into our intellectual swinging rhythm between disclosing and concealing.

Luther's theology of anfechtungen/ tentatio

As scholars have already argued, Luther's theology is inseparable from his experience of suffering.[23] In the tradition of scholasticism traced to Aristotle, human experience should be disregarded in theological inquiry because any experience is entangled with contingency and therefore does not deserve to be related to the search for truth.[24] The Hellenistic binalism was active in Luther's age, and even today. Considering the history of theological method, Luther's reflection on his own suffering is revolutionary in that he cuts through the binalism by drastically deconstructing the medieval theological method and reconstructing his own way by doing theology from his own suffering context. This made Luther replace "*contemplatio*" with "*tentatio"* in the medieval tripartite rules for theology from *lectio, oratio,* and *contemplatio* into *oratio, meditatio,* and *tentatio.* The translation of *tentatio* is *anfechtungen* in German, meaning "trial, test, and being under attack." Westhelle summarizes this theology of *tentatio/anfechtung*: "A way of doing theology, a disposition that grows out of the very experience of *tentatio*."[25] A theology of the cross is neither a theological form nor one section of Christian doctrine. Rather, it exposes the crack in any discourse of God, human beings, and the world. Therefore, Luther preferred a "theologi-*an* of the cross" to a "theo-*logy*

22. This phrase is the subtitle of Westhelle's book, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

23. See Kurt Hendel, "Theology of the Cross," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24, no. 3 (1997): 223–231.

24. Oswald Bayer, *Theology The Lutheran Way,* eds. and trans. Jeffrey G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 28–32.

25. Westhelle, *The Scandalous God,* 36.

of the cross." A theology of the cross is the "practice of stepping into the middle of a battle against suffering."[26]

The epistemic *key*

Creatively connecting a theology of the cross with a postmodern critique of the régime of truth, Westhelle proposes a new key for a theology of the cross apart from conventional keys. That is the *epistemic* key. Traditionally, a theology of the cross has been practiced in response to two sorts of questions. Each of them is exemplified by Anselm and Abelard. Each has one's own question: the *apoteletic* key (accomplishment) in Anselm and Abelard's "moral key."[27] The *apoteletic* key raises the question of "what the cross is in and of itself."[28] On the other hand, the moral key raises another question, "What does the cross move me to do?" Each question provides a framework to respond to human questions. Both are important to reflect on the traditional trajectory about the cross. However, Westhelle brings a third key, which does not emerge from these keys. He calls it the *epistemic* key. The question that the *epistemic* key brings appears by distinguishing a theology of the cross from a theology *about* the cross. This key is a kind of "epistemological gesture," which Westhelle considers as an indispensable element of a theology of the cross as it "places the question of the relationship between cross and suffering on another key."[29] "Why did Jesus die? Why do people suffer? What is the relationship between these two questions?"[30] The *epistemic* key does not exclude the other keys. Rather, Westhelle attempts to insert this key into any question about the cross because the key itself implies an answer.

Westhelle simply answers that the reason Jesus died was because of his naming suffering as it is: "Jesus died on the cross because he named the law that kills and practiced the healing that restores. He did it by stepping precisely into the margin of the law…by transgressing it."[31] The suffering of Jesus derived from his "naming ministry." When Westhelle makes such an assertion, he actually recognizes the limits of the world, and the limits of the discourse. Discourse is different from the reality to which the discourse points. In itself, discourse is neither good nor evil; it is the condition of *our* world. The problem is that when we inhabit one certain world framed by discourse/knowledge we are not aware of this limitation. One system of knowledge excludes the other. The cross event itself presents the problem of frame.

Jesus practiced transgressing the frame of *his* world by which he and his people lived and died. He exposed the "law that kills." The *epistemic* key that Jesus had already practiced is a "strategic invitation in which one is led to the margin of the text, to the frame of the picture." That is the power of fragmentation rooted in the "knowledge of Christ." Jesus practiced the "knowledge of Christ" in the sense of the "subjective genitive" of a double knowledge of Christ. The abyss of the cross sheds light on the abyss of our knowledge. However, only from the abyss can the knowledge of Christ appear in us: "The possibilities of divine justice in the midst of this world manifest themselves precisely where these economies and regimes break down or are transgressed."[32] The *epistemic* key distinguishes and at

26. Ibid.
27. Westhelle, *Scandalous God*, 42.
28. Ibid., 76.
29. Ibid., 84.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 85.
32. Ibid., 42.

the same time connects Jesus' cross with the crosses of innocent people. His cross is the consequence of his ministry in a way that boldly asked why they suffer. Jesus' "naming ministry" is resonant with Foucault's concept of "*parrhesis* (to speak the truth boldly)" and Gandhi's "*satya-graha* (truth-force)" in that they all place themselves at the margin of the system and speak truth at the cost of their lives. All of them transgress the frameworks of knowledge that killed their people. This is the insurrection of the *word of the cross* (the *logos tou staurou*) in the context of people's suffering. Westhelle also proposes a new method of doing a theology by following the spirit of the Reformation. It alludes to a theological paradigm shift.

The paradigm shift of faith/theology

Westhelle presents the reformulation of his theological methodology from faith understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*) to faith desiring. Anselm's phrase, *fides quaerens intellectum,* which is a popular definition of theology in the Western tradition, uses the verb, *quaero* as a transitive verb. However, Westhelle reforms this formula into its intransitive understanding. That is, *"faith seeking" or "theology is faith desiring."* Here, faith is not an object of theology. Nobody can possess, analyze, or objectify it. Westhelle's theology of the cross strikes at this point. The theology of the cross does not deal with any object that faith seeks. Rather, faith desiring retains "the intransitive desiring in solitude (which is desiring nothing but *faith itself*)," while the *apoteletic* key responds to "an external object (promise and hope)" and the moral key to a "pure relationality as its object (which is love)."

First, that faith is subject means that I/we are not the subject in a usual way. This represents his acceptance of intransitive activity that cannot be reduced to an independent human subject. Westhelle does not necessarily exclude the definition of faith in the sense of objective or subjective atonement. However, the third element of *faith desiring* functions to shed light on the other elements. Faith desiring remains the subject as it is. Epistemologically speaking, what we can do is nothing independently. We cannot point to it like "here it is, there it is." Faith is neither object nor human notion, but "a divine work in us which changes us and makes us altogether different."[33] This designates the core of Luther's justification by faith. Faith alone, but this is not the attribute of pious humans or even a trustful attitude in that place. What we can do is to live a "receptive life (*vita passive*)."[34] Faith desiring is divine action actualizing in the moment of absence. For Westhelle, the cross of Jesus reveals a double manifestation of the world in God (the world's rejection of God) and God in the world (God's presence in the world). On the one hand, the justice of Christ comes to the end of death in the cross of Jesus. That is, the power of the world rejected and killed him. This is the condition of the world that kills human beings. On the other hand, faith desiring is present in the moment of absence. The swing between "God died and God lives" turns into "hope against hope" in the moment of absence that the women who witnessed the resurrection of the crucified Jesus in the gospel embodied. The moment

33. Martin Luther, "Preface to the Acts of the Apostles," *Luther's Works* vol. 35, *Word and Sacrament,* E. Theodore Bachmann, ed. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 370–371.

34. Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way,* 23. Bayer finds Luther's revolutionary definition of faith. Faith is the passive life only for God's action. This is neither knowledge nor action.

of absence is the moment of faith desiring, but this does not mean *overcoming* absence. Rather, it is the *affirmation* of absence. This is the affirmation that the resurrection is that of the crucified Jesus who spoke of the knowledge of Christ for them. Faith in Jesus Christ is embodied in those women who practiced "a labor of love and mourning." Westhelle calls it a "practice of resurrection." This is the other side of a theology of the cross.

Faith desiring is unconditional, but the cross is a particular space where faith desiring works. At least Christianity is rooted in the particular historicity of scars and the particular scars of history. These scars came from a "theology from the cross." Following the biblical witness, we also follow the disposition of their knowing something about God, the world, and human beings from the foot of the cross. In this sense, the cross is *at-one-moment*. It is unrepeatable. The *at–one-moment*, by reason of this *at-one-moment*, sheds light on other *at-one-moment*-s of absence through the unconditional divine gift of faith desiring. Our life and death swing between the moment of absence and the moment of faith desiring. A theology of the cross is a way of life in which there is nothing without the "third" of faith: intransitive divine presence within us. For this reason, Westhelle ponders Shabbat as a precious moment of *theoria*, in which the *theoria* is different from its Aristotelian distinction. It is *theolia* or *contemplation* in a way that makes it possible for us to "see" divine activity in the moment of absence, the moment that we come to the end of our own *praxis* and *poiesis*, and even *theoria*.

Aspects of an intercontextual perspective

As I have explored these three theologies of the cross, I have come to appreciate how much their contextual theologies of the cross have tried to tackle the complicated web of religious, cultural, political, economic, and theological contexts, while trying to maintain the interconnection with other contexts within their theological developments. In this complicated scenario I want to highlight the features of an intercontextual perspective that arise from their theologies of the cross.

Dialogue

The first aspect is that these contextual theologies of the cross open themselves to other contextual theologies naturally. Their theological developments, despite the different theological perspectives, show commonality in that they incessantly engage in dialogue with theological or intellectual others. In other words, these theologies of the cross assume that a single context does not exist alone. Although their particular location is in North America, their perspectives open to other contextual issues, such as global mission theology, religious pluralism, Latin American liberation theology, feminist theology/philosophy, postmodern philosophy, postcolonial critiques, and so on. Their theological perspectives cannot bind them into a single context. Even the "North American context" is not a closed context demarcated by national or geographical boundaries. Rather, as Robert Schreiter names the interconnection of contextual theologies as a "global flow," these three theologian's perspectives can flow through global theological movements.[35]

35. Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), 15–21. Flow is originally a term of sociology and anthropology. Schreiter explains that the global theological flow, which is represented by liberation, feminism, ecology, and human rights, is a kind of circulating movement with anti-systematic meaning.

The important point is that their contextual methods for theologizing are necessarily interconnected with other contextual theologies in a non-systematic way, showing an alternative to a universal theology that attempts to cover the earth with a single principle like the Enlightenment project. I prefer the term "ubiquity" rather than "universal" in this global theological flow. Their intercontextual perspectives can be ecumenically connected with a "new catholicity" in the sense that Schreiter proposes: "Each is rooted in its own context, but these four flows enjoy a mutual intelligibility within their discourses and to a great extent even among them."[36] The ubiquity of liberation theology is theologically grounded in its ability to communicate beyond boundaries in a way that makes each contextual theology enter into conversation with others on the basis of its own orthopraxis. This is what I mean by "intercontextual reading."

Orthopraxis Luther

They also practice a dialogue with their theological tradition as Lutherans, Luther's *theologia crucis* in particular. Their way of reading Luther is not to canonize Luther's text, but to engage in a dialogue with the great heritage of Luther in order to rethink the tradition from their own theological perspectives. Although they evaluate Luther differently, they agree that they start with Luther's theology of the cross to seek the knowledge of God, human beings, and the world. Luther's theology of the cross helps them to think about God in the midst of the cruelty, limitations, demonization, and idolization of the world. However, it is more important than the commonality of the contents to see the commonality of their *disposition* toward doing theology. In other words, the three theologians find the intersection between Luther and their liberative perspective in a theological method (orthopraxis) rather than mere theological content (orthodoxy). They read Luther in light of orthopraxis. Therefore, Luther's theology of the cross, in light of orthopraxis, is relevant to Segundo's comment on methodology: "The one and only thing that can maintain the liberative character of any theology is not its content but its methodology."[37] Specifying Luther's theology of the cross with respect to orthopraxis, they take Luther's orthopraxis as a theological method into account. That is an indispensable point that makes it possible to enact an intercontextual dialogue.

Re-connection with tradition

These diverse contributions to a theology of the cross come to a point where they renew Christian tradition. Justo González proposes a typology to present three types of Christian thought and suggests *Type C* has potentiality for twenty-first century theological thought. According to González, the Western theological tradition has been driven by *Type A*, whose main category is "law" represented by Tertullian, and *Type B*, whose main category is "truth," represented by Origen of Alexandria. However, he proposes *Type C* as the one that has been almost left behind in Christian tradition in the West, and whose concern is directed into the pastoral-historical matters represented by Irenaeus. However thin the tradition of *Type C* is, González contends that it is not extinct in the Christian tradition. In fact, he finds the reemergence of *Type C* in the twentieth century in Karl Barth's theology, Lutheran theology in Sweden, the liturgical renewal in the Second Vatican Council, and liberation theology.[38] Re-

36. Ibid., 20

37. Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology,* trans. John Drury (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 39.

38. Justo L. González, *Christian*

garding Luther's theology, he considers the mixture of *Type A* and *Type C*. González argues that although the forgiveness of sin, Luther's main concern, is dominant in *Type A*, Luther also sustains and develops *Type C* in his sacramental theology and Christology by emphasizing the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Unlike *Type A,* which understands sin legalistically, *Type C* understands sin as a condition under subjection to Satan. Thus, salvation is not forgiveness, but liberation from the power of Satan with Christ as liberator. Christ is incarnated in flesh, recapitulates, and finally overcomes the fate of humanity captured by evil power. Salvation is implemented by believers who participate in the death and resurrection of Christ. It relies on the present reality of Christ. As Irenaeus shows, *Type C* presents salvation in the history of salvation from incarnation through resurrection to eschatological consummation. González argues that the rediscovery of *Type C* theology may well "provide the church at large with unexpected possibilities, and even open the way to new (and the rediscovery of ancient) understandings of catholicity and Christian unity."[39] I understand the theologies of the cross that Thomsen, Solberg, and Westhelle present as those compatible with *Type C*.

Embodiment of theology

Finally, all of them lift up the most precious feature of Luther's theology for the intercontextual theology of the cross, that is, theology as wisdom. They employ Luther's theology of the cross in their theological methods in that they reject a metaphysical method to seek knowledge of God, human beings, and the world. Rather, when knowledge is connected with the cross, the knowledge of God is interconnected with the knowledge of human beings or the world. They reject the Aristotelian conviction that truth is not influenced by "experience" and "history." In the case of the Aristotelian-scholastic tradition, this character of knowledge is connected with divine impassibility, omnipotence and omnipresence. However, what Luther rejects by his theology of the cross is the "pure rational theology" which cannot link our experience and history in terms of God's revelation. In this regard, Luther says theology is "experiential wisdom."[40] The revelation of God is nothing out of the world. In other words, revelation is an event that happens in the human experiential world, and it then brings the embodiment of knowledge to our perception of God. Human reason cannot perceive the embodiment of knowledge because reason cannot trust anything contingent in this world in seeking truth and God. Therefore, Luther finds the limitation of human reason in theology because God is not a timeless, eternal, and unchangeable object outside our experience and history. Luther's theology of "wisdom" does not exclude *scientia,* but rather includes it. Wisdom is "a path that unites theory and practice and grounds both in the sense of a receptive life."[41] Wisdom, not *scientia*, encourages us to sense revelation in our life and experience and participate in the divine intervention as we live and experience. This insight connects other contextual theologies methodologically.

Thought Revisited, 123. Regarding Lutheran theology in Sweden (Lundensian Lutherans), see Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A.G. Hebert (New York: Collier Books, 1986).

39. González, *Christian Thought Revisited,* 123.

40. Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way,* 29.

41. Ibid., 28.

Prioritizing "wisdom" over "science," Luther's theology of the cross affirms orthopraxis. It is neither *theoria* nor *praxis*. It does not merely allow us to approach the suffering God, but compels us to start with the knowledge of God from the cross when we reflect on Luther's words: "Christian theology does not begin with the highest good, as all other religions do, but with the lowest depths, with the womb of Mary and Jesus' death on the cross."[42] Luther's theology of the cross is firmly grounded in his own experience, represented well by these words: "The cross alone is our theology [CRUX sola est nostra Theologia]."[43]

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to show how three contextual theologians opened to other contextual theologies with the four signposts of an intercontextual theology of the cross: dialogue, orthopraxis, tradition, and embodiment. The collaboration of a theology of the cross with the intercontextual perspective enables us to understand our own theological issues rooted in context, whether social or cultural, individual or collective, and religious or secular.[44] In conclusion, a theology of the cross prompts me to engage in intercontextual reading of contextual theologies, and conversely the intercontextual perspective deepens my understanding of a theology of the cross in the plurality of theological context.

42. Ibid., 27.

43. Martin Luther, "Operationes in Psalmos (1519-1521)," *Dr. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1892), 176.

44. In my case, the intercontextual perspective makes it possible to read a diversity of theologies of the cross in the Asian context in a way that makes me aware that each theological perspective has its own context, but is connected with other contexts. In my dissertation, I take up the theology of the pain of God in chapter 2, a theology of the cross in Buddhist context in chapters 3 and 4, and a comprehensive theology of the cross presented by Korean theologian, Paul Chung, in the final chapter.

Tradition and Institution: Lutheran Critique–Catholic Dilemma

Chrysostom Frank
Full Professor, St. Vianney Theological Seminary

In his *magnum opus, Tradition and Traditions*, the first volume of which was published just before the Second Vatican Council, Fr. Yves Congar argued persuasively that the Council Fathers at Trent had explicitly rejected the proposal that the truth of the gospel is found *partly* in scripture and *partly* in the church's traditions, the so-called *"partim…partim"* theory. The Conciliar definition substituted the more neutral "*et*" ("and") to describe the relationship between scripture and tradition.[1] The result of the inclusion of this more neutral phraseology, however, was that after the Council the inherent ambiguity in the definition enabled Catholic theologians to interpret Trent's teaching *as if* it had indeed taught a two-source theory of revelation, a position which seemed to many Catholics to provide a strong alternative to the Protestant critique. The two-source theory, in fact, became the dominant way in which Catholic theology would speak about the relationship between scripture and tradition up until the Second Vatican Council, and it was this (in)famous *partim…partim* theory which Protestants attacked not only as blasphemy but also as opening a Pandora's box containing all sorts of novelties that arose in later tradition without any scriptural warrant.[2]

The problem, as we have come to realize several centuries later, is that this post-Tridentine Catholic theology constituted, as Fr. George Tavard has shown, a critical break with the earlier theology of the Fathers and medieval schoolmen in which scripture and tradition were understood as co-inhering.[3] Fr. Congar

1. "…*perspiciensque hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis* ***et*** *sine scripto traditionibus*" ("seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books **and** the unwritten traditions"). Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., *Tradition and Traditions: The Biblical, Historical, and Theological Evidence for Catholic Teaching on Tradition* (San Diego: Basilica Press, 1966), 164 ff. [originally published in two volumes in 1960 and 1963; the Second Vatican Council opened in 1962]. Cf. Carl E. Braaten's assertion that Trent did indeed teach a *partim-partim* theology. Braaten, *That All May Believe: A Theology of the Gospel and the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 21. Here, I think, Braaten has overstated his case with regard to Trent itself, although he is correct in identifying what occurred in post-Tridentine Roman Catholic theology.

2. Braaten, *That All May Believe,* 21. See also *Scripture and Tradition. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX*, eds. Harold C. Skillrud, J. Francis Stafford, Daniel F. Martensen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 31–32.

3. *Holy Writ or Holy Church: The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1959), 3, 11, 20, 22, 244 ff. See also Carl E. Braaten, "A Shared Dilemma: Catholics and Lutherans on the Authority and Interpretation of Scripture," *Pro Ecclesia* vol. X, no. 1:65.

has similarly argued that prior to Trent there was "a tightness" to the relationship between scripture, tradition, and church that operated quite differently from the thought of most post-Tridentine churchmen. "If there is one position which the Fathers consistently maintained," Congar argues, "it is the position that links inseparably Scripture, the Church and Tradition. Far from considering these three realities to be in opposition, they saw them as united and inseparable." "For the men of the Middle Ages, all knowledge comes from Scripture because in it is contained what God has told us of the conditions, the end, and the laws of our life." The Fathers and medieval schoolmen acknowledged the material sufficiency of scripture and at the same time affirmed that scripture is only understood correctly in the church and in its tradition.[4]

If "classical" Catholic theology was more *scriptural* than some of its modern variants, it is also true that "classical" Lutheran theology was more *traditional* than is sometimes thought. The understanding of tradition by the sixteenth-century Lutheran theologian, Martin Chemnitz (1522–1586), for example, was perhaps the most positive and extended Lutheran articulation on the subject.[5] In his *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Chemnitz posits eight different kinds of tradition, the first seven of which can rightly be accepted by the evangelical party. Only the *eighth* kind is to be rejected. This last kind of tradition includes those things that pertain to both faith and morals but cannot be proven by any testimony of scripture and which the Synod of Trent nevertheless commands to be received and venerated with the same reverence and devotion as the scripture itself.[6]

Chemnitz' concern with this eighth kind of tradition, which he saw Trent as espousing, was that it would give theologians and bishops what he called "comprehensive license" to invent whatever they pleased "freely and with impunity" under the name of "tradition." A two-source understanding of revelation would, moreover, lay the groundwork for justifying "whatever the present Roman Church believes, holds and observes," while relieving the magisterium of the burden to demonstrate that its current tradition really is the apostolic tradition.[7] In other words, Chemnitz' concern was that the institution of the teaching office would in the final analysis become *self-referential*. This, it seems to me, was the heart of this part of the theological controversy during the sixteenth century.

4. *Tradition and Traditions,* 112, 117.

5. During the twentieth century, Lutheran theology has increasingly articulated the *sola scriptura* principle within the broader context of the interconnectedness of church, scripture, and tradition. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue has, moreover, clearly shown that Lutheran theologians, while giving primacy and ultimacy to sacred scripture, do not want to isolate it from the tradition, the teaching office of the church or the Christian community as a whole. See, e.g., Gustaf Aulen, *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 69–71; Carl E. Braaten, "The Problem of Authority in the Church"in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 61–62; *Scripture and Tradition: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX*, 29, 50; *The Apostolicity of the Church Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity*. The Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006), 37–38, 190.

6. An English translation can be found in Fred Kramer, ed., *Examination of the Council of Trent*. Part 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 272.

7. Ibid., 220, 274.

The issue was not so much the relationship between scripture and tradition, but how scripture and tradition were being understood and exegeted by the contemporary teaching office within the church. Chemnitz was quite clear that the church does indeed have a *teaching office* and that God wants to have the ministry of the word in the church. This, then, means that "the church must be heard *as teacher.*" At the same time, faith and worship continue to rest on the word of God and not on human authority.[8] In other words, there is a magisterium in the church, but this magisterium is the *servant* of the word of God, not its master.

The problem of the relationship between the church's teaching office, scripture, and tradition which Chemnitz had articulated so clearly in the sixteenth century is not a dead issue. It continues to constitute a legitimate ecumenical problem. Whatever the weakness of Chemnitz's position, his questions are not without theological weight. Developments in the modern period, moreover, have demonstrated that his fears were not entirely unjustified. Fr. Congar has argued that in the modern period Catholic theology increasingly moved away from an understanding of tradition as content and deposit received from the apostles to an accent on tradition understood as the *transmitting organism,* which resides primarily in the magisterium of the church. The Fathers and early canons of the church, he argues, came to be considered less as inspired organs of tradition themselves and more as *witnesses to a tradition,* which consists in the *present teaching of the* magisterium[9] In other words, the means by which the faith is proclaimed—the teaching office—in the modern period has tended to overshadow the content of the faith, with magisterium assuming a more and more autonomous and absolute value.[10] In 1865, Henry Edward Manning, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, for example, would go so far as to argue that any appeal to antiquity in order to find the truth of things is both "treason and

8. Ibid., 257. This theme, significantly, was affirmed in Catholic theology for the first time at a magisterial level at the Second Vatican Council in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*: "But the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter, however, is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet this Magisterium is not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it." *Dei Verbum*, 2:10. The 2006 Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Document, *The Apostolicity of the Church*, 194, also attempted to deal with this issue by bringing together Lutheran and Catholic concerns with regard to the relationship between the church's teaching voice, scripture, tradition, and the Christian community. It affirmed the legitimacy of the teaching office to formulate doctrine while also asserting that the magisterium is not to be considered as an isolated and autonomous ministry.

9. *Tradition and Traditions*, 182.

10. Yves Congar, "The Magisterium and theologians—a short history," *Theology Digest*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Spring 1977), 18. Catholic Romanticism in the form of the Tübingen School of Theology helped to shape the understanding of the relationship between tradition and institution during the modern period and to push it in the direction in which tradition increasingly became identified with the voice of the magisterium. See *Symbolism*, trans. James Burton Robertson (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 259, 266–267 and Michael J. Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation. Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 316, 328–329.

heresy." His justification for this claim was his conviction that the voice of God is to be found in *the contemporary teaching voice of the church*. This implied for Manning that in a strict sense the church has no antiquity; rather, it "rests upon its own supernatural and perpetual consciousness."[11]

This push to identify the magisterium as the criterion and standard reached its zenith in the period just before the Second Vatican Council. Pope Pius XII's 1950 encyclical, *Humani Generis*, embodied this push. There the pope asserted as essential elements of Catholic teaching the following positions: 1) the teaching office of the church in matters of faith and morals is the "proximate and universal criterion of truth for all theologians"; in other words, scripture and tradition as criteria are further away from us, while the magisterium is the closer and more immediate face and criterion of truth; 2) even what is called the "ordinary teaching authority" of the magisterium, as found in encyclical letters, demands consent; 3) the task of theologians is to show how the doctrine of the *"living Teaching Authority*" is found either explicitly or implicitly in the scriptures and tradition "in that sense in which it has been defined by the church"; 4) Christ has given the right of authentic interpretation of the deposit of faith, not to each of the faithful and not to theologians, "but only to the Teaching Authority of the church"; and 5) it is a false procedure to try to explain "what is clear" (i.e., what the living magisterium teaches) "by means of what is obscure" (what is found in scripture and tradition).[12]

Pope Pius XII's teaching is what Fr. Joseph Ratzinger in 1969 identified as the principle of "*solo magisterio*" ("by the magisterium alone"). In his commentary on *Dei Verbum* 2:10 , Fr. Ratzinger compared this text of the Second Vatican Council to what he describes as the "antithetical" way in which Pope Pius XII had articulated the relationship between the papal magisterium and the rest of the church with regard to the work of keeping the word of God pure within the life of the church. If one compares the *Dei Verbum* text with the corresponding section of *Humani Generis,* Ratzinger argues, we can see the progress that was made by the Council.[13]

> The problem of the relationship between the church's teaching office, scripture, and tradition which Chemnitz had articulated so clearly in the sixteenth century is not a dead issue.

11. *The Temporal Mission of the Holy Ghost or Reason and Revelation* (New York: P. J. Kennedy, 1905), 227–228.

12. *Humani Generis*, 18–21. This encyclical can conveniently be found on the Vatican Web site: http://www.vatican.va

13. "The Transmission of Divine Revelation" in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder: 1969), 3:196.

In contrast to the older, pre-Vatican II understanding of the place of the magisterium in relation to both church and tradition, Ratzinger put forward a more dynamic and inclusive understanding of the relationship between the word of God and the church, and consequently the place of the teaching office within this context. He asserted that the church and its understanding of revelation is moving forward toward the fullness of the divine word in the church in the *eschaton,* that is, there is a *deepening in our understanding* [emphasis added] which will only be fulfilled in the Age-to-Come. Moreover, it is important to realize, he argued, that the "progress of the word in the time of the church is not seen simply as a function of the hierarchy, but is anchored in the whole life of the church." It is the entire spiritual experience of the church that "causes *our understanding* [emphasis added] of the original truth to grow and in the today of faith extracts anew from the yesterday of its historical origin what was meant for all time and yet can be understood only in the changing ages and in the particular way of each."[14] This emphasis on the connection between community and magisterium was taken up in the 2006 Lutheran-Roman Catholic study document, *The Apostolicity of the Church*: "The magisterium is in constant interaction with those instances of testimony to God and his revelation. It must, above all, take account of the reality of the inerrant faith of the people as a whole…"[15] In the ecclesial process of understanding, which is the "concrete way in which tradition proceeds," the work of the magisterium is only one component, not the whole.

The magisterial function is certainly a "*critical*" component, but it is not what Ratzinger calls a "*productive*" component.[16] By this, he seems to be saying that the magisterium does not give us new bits of information to which we would not otherwise have access. Ratzinger further asserted that the risk of a "false orientation" in *Humani Generis* cannot be dismissed. One can hardly deny the problematic character of that position which regards only scripture (and I would add, tradition) as being unclear in contrast to the clarity of the teaching office:

> Again a comparison [of *Dei Verbum* 2:10] with the previous text from *Humani Generis* (DS 3886), which underlies it, shows the progressive nature of the revision that the Council [Vatican II] has carried out here. For the first time a text of the teaching office expressly points out the subordination of the teaching office to the word, i.e., its function as a servant. One can say, it is true, that there could never have been any serious doubt that this was in fact the case. Nevertheless the actual procedure often tended somewhat to obscure this order of things, though it had always been acknowledged in principle. Thus the risk of a false orientation cannot be dismissed when *Humani Generis* (which incidentally quotes Pius IX on the point) declares that it is obviously wrong to seek to clarify what is clear by the help of what is obscure—which means in the context that it is not the teaching office that can be clarified by Scriptures, but only, on the contrary, Scripture by the teaching office.[17]

To reduce the task of theology to the proof of the presence of the statements of the teaching office in the sources is,

14. Ibid., 3:186.

15. *The Apostolicity of the Church*, 194.

16. "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:186.

17. Ibid., 3:197.

Ratzinger argues, to threaten the primacy of the sources—scripture and tradition—themselves and ultimately to destroy the *serving, ministerial*, character of the teaching office.[18] Or, as James Hanvey has put it, when the magisterium determines the tradition, the preservation of which authenticates the magisterium, what is generated is solipsistic discourse in which the magisterium becomes self-referential in order to demonstrate that it is consistent and unchanging.[19] This, of course, was precisely what Martin Chemnitz had already in the sixteenth century both warned against and feared!

Chemnitz' concerns over the centuries have repeatedly been taken up by Lutheran theologians. One of the most balanced and best articulations of this can be found in a small 1964 monograph, *Roman and Evangelical*, by the Swedish Lutheran theologian Per Erik Persson. Within the modern period, Persson argues, the Catholic understanding of the role of tradition has undergone a major shift from what it was before the Reformation. The criterion of the correctness of a doctrine no longer consists in the fact that the doctrine can be found in scripture as explicated and interpreted within the tradition. Rather, the truth of a doctrine consists in that it is actually being proclaimed by the church *today*. It is the church's *current consciousness of faith*, incarnate in the teaching office of the church, which is the primary criterion or canon of truth. This, Persson argues, is the deepest gulf between Lutherans and Catholics.[20] The Catholic position can be seen most clearly and most concretely in the new Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption. With both of these dogmas, it was the *current faith* of the church that was the decisive factor, rather than either scripture or the historical tradition.[21] The result of this is that one no longer asks what the word of God has said, but what the church through the voice of the magisterium is *now saying*.[22] The inherent danger in this way of thinking is, as Ratzinger also acknowledged, that the primacy of scripture within the on-going tradition of the church is threatened and that the magisterium can too easily become something other than *servant to the word of God,* listening to and preserving that word against error.[23]

This problem of the relationship of the teaching office to the theological sources has been, it seems, a burr in Ratzinger's theological saddle over the decades. During the 1980s, while Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, he raised it again in *Principles of Catholic Theology* while discussing the concept of tradition

18. Ibid.

19. See James Hanvey, "Tradition as Subversion," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 6, no. 1 (January 2004): 56.

20. *Roman and Evangelical* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 28. The assumption, of course, is that this current consciousness of faith is somehow present in scripture and tradition. Within this new framework, scripture and tradition do not cease to be normative, but they are the *regula fidei remota* and are normative only in the sense defined by the teaching office. The teaching office is the primary canon of faith, the *regula proxima fidei*, as Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* spelled out.

21. Ibid., 30–36. In the final analysis, what this means is that the teaching office to its own voice through the centuries, since it is the creative, life-giving and constitutive principle of the church. When one listens to this teaching office, then, one hears the voice of the Spirit.

22. Ibid., 52–54.

23. "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:197.

in relation to the Fathers of the church. Like the Lutheran Persson, Ratzinger acknowledged that one of the directions taken by a more recent Catholic theology of tradition, principally in connection with the Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950, has been an attempt to fill the lacunae in the historical foundation of these dogmas by means of systematic reflection. The result of this effort has been the proposition that to prove that "a predication belongs to tradition it is not necessary to adduce proof that reaches all the way back to the beginning; it is sufficient to take a cross section of the church's *awareness of faith* [emphasis added] at any given time in her history." This understanding is based on the belief that "whatever the whole church holds to have been revealed has been revealed and belongs to the authentic tradition of the church." Such an understanding is precisely what Persson regarded as the deepest gulf between Catholics and Lutherans. Ratzinger himself acknowledges this as a problem. Implicit in the primacy being given to the contemporary consciousness of the church, what we find, he argues, is a "*dehistoricizing*" of the concept of tradition, a minimizing of the importance of the Fathers of the church, and so a severing of the connection between the concept of tradition and patristic theology.[24] This acknowledgment by a Catholic theologian, who is now Pope, needs to find its way more decisively into ecumenical dialogue.

The Second Vatican Council certainly placed the relationship between the teaching office and the word of God, as contained in scripture and tradition, in a new context.

From our place in the twenty-first century, we can now ask another question: did the Second Vatican Council shift the Catholic understanding of authority enough to provide an adequate answer to the problem raised by Persson, Ratzinger and others? The Second Vatican Council certainly placed the relationship between the teaching office and the word of God, as contained in scripture and tradition, in a new context. On the one hand, *Dei Verbum* attempted to overcome the "two source" theory of revelation by asserting that sacred tradition and sacred scripture are bound closely together and "communicate one with the other." They flow out of the same divine wellspring and come together in some fashion to form "one thing." They make up a single "sacred deposit of the Word of God."[25] Within this framework, the Council Fathers, as Ratzinger points out, identified scripture as the very word of God itself, while describing tradition in *functional* terms—in terms of what it *does:* it "transmits in its entirety the word of God" entrusted to the apostles by Christ and the Spirit: "For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under

24. *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Sister Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 138–139.

25. *Dei Verbum* 2:10.

the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known."[26] As Ratzinger puts it, tradition "hands on the word of God, but *is* not the word of God."[27] The task of tradition is to "preserve [scripture], explain it, and make it more widely known." This means that tradition is "not productive, but "conservative," ordained to serve as part of something already given.[28] It is the job of the magisterium, then, to provide an authentic interpretation of the word of God present in scripture and transmitted by tradition. At the same time, however, and for the first time in the history of magisterial statements, Ratzinger asserts, *Dei Verbum* explicitly affirms that the magisterium is "not superior to the Word of God, but is its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it."[29]

Many of these same ideas were taken up afresh in the 2006 Lutheran-Roman Catholic *The Apostolicity of the Church.* It is affirmed that:

> Catholics have taken hold anew of the patristic and high-medieval conviction that Scripture contains all revealed truth, which leads to a significant distinction. The many "traditions" are the forms of life and practice which apply God's word and are observed out of fidelity to the community of faith. Scripture *is* the inspired word of God, while tradition is the living process which "*transmits* in its entirety the Word of God entrusted to the apostles by Christ and the Holy Spirit" (DV 9). *This transmission is not the source of new truths by which the content of inspired Scripture would be supplemented*, [emphasis added] but it does give rise to the elementary expressions mentioned in no. 150, which are not simply "human traditions," for they express and render certain the biblical content of faith.[30]

The Second Vatican Council, in its document *Dei Verbum*, adjusted the way Catholics talk about the relationship between tradition, scripture, and the magisterium of the church. The accent now falls on their connectedness rather than on their autonomy. They are so inter-dependent, *Dei Verbum* asserts, that one cannot stand without the others.[31] Yet, Ratzinger argues, one of the great ironies of history is that by firmly insisting on the unity and indissoluble inter-penetration of scripture, tradition, and the teaching office—an ecumenical olive branch in the direction

26. Ibid., 2:9.

27. "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:194.

28. Ibid. *Dei Verbum* 8-10. This tradition that comes from the apostles, the Council Fathers acknowledged, has a dynamic character—it "makes progress in the Church, such that there is growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on."

29. "For the first time a text of the teaching office expressly points out the subordination of the teaching office to the word, i.e., its function as servant. One can say, it is true, that there could never have been any serious doubt that this was in fact the case. Nevertheless the actual procedure often tended somewhat to obscure this order of things, though it had always been acknowledged in principle." "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:197.

30. *The Apostolicity of the Church*, 190–191.

31. *Dei Verbum* 2:10.

of a Catholic form of the *sola scriptura* idea—the Council's teaching on this matter aroused the strongest opposition from Protestant theologians. They interpreted the Decree's formulations as moving away from the meaning and intention of the Protestant idea of *sola scriptura* and as simply compounding the problem of how and whether sacred scripture can serve as a critical principle in relation to tradition and the church.[32]

One of the great weaknesses of *Dei Verbum's* discussion of tradition, Ratzinger argued, is its "final comprehensive formulation of tradition as the 'perpetuation,' the constant continuation and making present of everything that the Church is, of everything that it believes." Tradition is thus identified with and defined as the "being and faith of the Church."[33] The danger that lurks in this statement, according to Ratzinger, is that it fails to take into account that not everything that exists in the church is a legitimate tradition, "a true celebration and keeping present of the mystery of Christ." There is "distorting" as well as legitimate tradition. This means that tradition must not be considered only "affirmatively" but also "critically." The Council of Trent, centuries earlier, had not been able to give a positive account of the criticism of tradition, and the Second Vatican Council, in Ratzinger's words, "has unfortunately not made any progress, but has more or less ignored the whole question of criticism of tradition." Thus, the Council missed "an important opportunity for ecumenical dialogue."[34]

This leads us to the real problem: is Catholic theology left with an unresolved dilemma? Scripture is the word of God. Tradition transmits the word of the God but also contains elements which are distorting. The teaching office has the task of listening to God's word, preserving God's word, and discerning what truly belongs to God's word. On the one hand, the teaching office is described as being a *servant*, and not superior, to the word of God understood as the co-inherence of scripture (content) and tradition (function). On the other hand, this living teaching office alone has the task of authentically interpreting the word of God.[35] Is this a sleight of hand which ultimately leaves the teaching office still unassailable, still beyond criticism and beyond any real accountability to either scripture or tradition? Is the language of "servanthood" to the word of God simply rhetorical inasmuch as no one other than the magisterium itself can assess whether magisterial teaching is, in fact, faithful to the word of God or not?

32. Ratzinger, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 3:191–192.

33. Ibid., 3:184. *Dei Verbum*, 2:8.

34. Ibid., 3:184–185. In *Principles of Catholic Theology,* 89–90, Ratzinger acknowledged once again the ambiguity inherent in tradition; it is the "foundation of man's humanness," but it is also "everywhere mingled with those things that deprive [human beings] of [their] humanity." Tradition is "contaminated" and bears within itself the "seeds of antihumanism." This realization is the one area in which the church shares the spirit of the modern age. In his response to the problem inherent in tradition, Ratzinger appeals to Jesus as being both "liberal" and "pious" (Ernst Käsemann's description), as both upholding and criticizing tradition. Moreover, there is only one saving tradition, he argues—the tradition of Jesus himself, Jesus' relationship to the Father. This is the criterion by which we evaluate everything else. *Principles of Catholic Theology*, 93–94, 97–98. Here we may have an important point of contact between Ratzinger and the Lutheran insistence on the centrality of the christological mystery as a critical norm for evaluating all traditions.

35. *Dei Verbum*, 10.

The problem is clearly inherent in the 1998 commentary on the Profession of Faith to be taken by anyone on assuming an office exercised in the name of the church. This commentary was issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of which Cardinal Ratzinger was Prefect at the time. The commentary reasserts the centrality and authority of the living teaching office for Catholics. Everything taught by the magisterium as having been divinely revealed, including the Marian dogmas and the dogma of the primacy and infallibility of the Roman pontiff, is to be accepted "with firm faith." Anything which has been "definitively proposed by the church regarding teaching on faith and morals," that is, whatever is understood as connected to revelation by a logical or historical necessity, including the reservation of priestly ordination to men alone and the declaration of Pope Leo XIII on the invalidity of Anglican ordinations, is to be firmly accepted and held to. Any teaching which either the pope or the college of bishops enunciates when they exercise their authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act, is to be adhered to with religious submission of will and intellect.[36]

Has this commentary, in effect, restored the *solo magisterio* theology of Pope Pius XII? Does it mean that the criterion for understanding the gospel, truth, and theology is always the *current interpretation* of the magisterium? Does it mean that the Lutheran critique and joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic ecumenical statements have neither been sufficiently heard nor digested? Does it mean that being a faithful Christian means first and foremost fidelity to the *viva vox magisterii*, rather than to the *viva vox evangelii*? While some Catholics will assert that there can never be a discrepancy between these two voices, other Catholics and certainly nearly all Christians outside the Catholic Church may well see a possibility at any particular moment in history of conflicting loyalties between faithfulness to the Christian tradition and faithfulness to the institution of the teaching office within the church.

It seems to me that the question of this possibility of conflict continues to constitute a dilemma for both ecumenical theology and for any Catholic theology that desires to be more than a mere commentary on pontifical teaching. The problem for Catholic theology when it takes seriously the Lutheran critique is how to affirm the place and value of the teaching office while at the same time refusing to allow it to become a self-referential institution which endangers the primacy of the sacred scriptures as embedded in and transmitted through the tradition of the church. How can theology rightly acknowledge the gift and responsibility of the magisterium while at the same time affirming that the gospel—the apostolic truth contained in scripture and handed down, confessed, preached and celebrated within the Christian community (tradition)—is the criterion and judge for faith and life?[37] This is certainly not an easy question. Perhaps its answer lies only in the future when the ecumenical task is once again taken up as crucial to the life of the church by both theologians and pastors.

36. See the 1998 *Profession of Faith and the Oath of Fidelity on Assuming an Office to be Exercised in the Name of the Church* and *Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These can be conveniently found at www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/cdfoath.htm

37. See Congar "The Magisterium and Theologians: A Short History," 20.

Luther and the Jews Revisited: Reflections on a Thought Let Slip

James E. McNutt
Professor of History at Thomas More College.

Historical and theological work on western anti-Semitism cannot proceed far without the emergence of Martin Luther's legacy. Any discussion of the roots and ramifications of Europe's perceptions and conduct toward Judaism and the Jews must eventually confront the reformer's "paper trail." Indisputably, Luther's vociferous attacks on the Jews in the later years of his life left an indelible stain on his career and, in ways he could have never foreseen, played a tragic role in anti-Semitic propaganda on the eve of the Holocaust.

Generations of historians and theologians have labored through the context and sources concerning Luther's Jewish problem, with Thomas Kaufmann's essay, "Luther and the Jews," standing as the definitive historiographical treatment to date.[1] By consensus, Luther's writings on the Jews created a painful stumbling block not only to those who by confession bear his name, but to Christianity as a whole. The following seeks no revision of that conclusion, but rather revisits the issue by way of seminal insights put forth by several prominent scholars over the past quarter-century. In briefly reviewing newer methodological approaches to the historical Luther, this essay seeks to better grasp the manner in which the reformer himself approached the question of God, and how, in the case of the Jews, this very fallible man fell prey to theological hypocrisy. Ironically, woven into Luther's legacy of hate were threads of theological discourse that may well contribute to positive ecumenical relations today. Two years before his ultimate explosion against the Jews, while enmeshed in the labors that shaped his entire human experience, Luther culled from scripture a radically theocentric perspective on Judaism that stood in stark contradiction to his later assertions. Extracting from St. Paul *de facto* human ignorance in matters of divine mystery, he confessed a salvation rooted only in God's hidden purpose. Tragically, the reformer failed to apply these exegetical considerations to the Jewish people. Our challenge is to take up those thoughts Luther let slip, and in doing so, avoid in our day the failure so damning in his own.

Half a century ago, Henrich Bornkamm lamented the narrow theological focus of Luther research that contented itself with concentrating on the first decade of reform.[2] Exemplified by Roland Bainton's *Here I Stand,* Luther's thought—often stripped of historical contingencies

1. Thomas Kaufmann, "Luther and the Jews," in *Jews, Judaism, and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, eds. Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 69–104.

2. Heinrich Bornkamm, "Probleme der Lutherbiographie," *Lutherforschung Heute*, hrsg. Vimos Vajta (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlaghaus, 1958), 15–23.

and broader social context—was said to be fully present by 1525. Bainton allotted only fourteen pages to the last sixteen years of Luther's life, and justified his stance by claiming that the last quarter of Luther's life was "neither determinative for his ideas nor crucial for his achievements."[3] Though taking nearly a quarter of a century, a new school of scholars eventually rose to Bornkamm's challenge and began intensive research into the final two decades of Luther's career. Their efforts initiated a new era in Luther studies by providing a fuller and more dynamic portrait of the reformer's work within his sixteenth-century environment.[4] Martin Marty's recent biography embodied the tendencies of this approach, masterfully presenting Luther's theological themes in the social settings of "monastery, home, church, university, and empire."[5] This new perspective made evident that Luther's vilification of the Jews could not be isolated from the broader framework of his theology, and, in turn, his theology could not be adequately grasped apart from the contingent circumstances enveloping the man himself.

With regard to Luther "the man," the contribution of the late James Kittelson proved seminal. For Kittelson, Luther's genius found expression in the lifelong dynamic of contextual theologizing, not in artificially constructed systems or isolated fragments of thought elevated to the status of timeless truth.[6] This was not to imply that Luther's confession lacked inner consistency, only that ever new and often unforeseen circumstances confronting the reformer shaped the very expression of his thought. This perspective, however, carried profound ramifications. Insistence on Luther's historicity and rejection of timeless artificial systematization dealt a fatal blow to the iconic image of Luther as an ethereal divine oracle; what Kittelson called a "*Luftgebilde*."[7] However disconcerting to some Lutherans, this perspective provided the opportunity to engage Luther on a different level from that at which he was often presented. Rather than an abstract source for selective theological talking points, we are confronted with a fallible human making his way day to day, confessing and teaching to the best of his ability amidst ever evolving conflicts. Consequently, critical engagement with Luther must not just consider his specific

3. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950), 373.

4. Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 1483-1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). Mark U. Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–46* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983). Leif Grane, "Luther's Cause" *Lutherjahrbuch* 52 (1985). H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). Helmar Junghans, "Interpreting the Old Luther (1526–1546)," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 9 (1982), 271–281.

5. Martin Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2004), xiv.

Bainton allotted only 4 percent of his text to Luther's last sixteen years, while Marty allotted 24 percent to the same period.

6. James. M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 15–17.

7. James M. Kittelson, review of *Die Theologie Martin Luthers nach Seinen Predigten*, by Ulrich Asendorf, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54 (April–July, 1990), 235.

assertions, but grapple with the events motivating those assertions. To this point Kittelson argued:

> In thinking about *Luther der Mensch*, the issue is not simply one of gathering all these many citations about what one might call his interior life, *but approaching them from a proper point of view.* Surely this point of view is his public career as reformer, professor of theology, and in particular as advocate of what he called "the theology of the cross." To him this theology was not just an occasion for joy at having been liberated from sin, death, and the devil—although it was that at its end-point—*but it started as a theology that viewed humanity, and his own, in all its agony*.[8]

Kittelson's comments harken back to the hermeneutical scheme of Pauline scholar J. C. Beker, who suggested that the genius and particularity of Paul's theological method was his ability to correlate his primordial experience of the Christ event, or coherent center, to the emerging questions and controversies within his communities. Paul's gospel achieved incarnational depth and relevance in the ever-shifting human situation.[9] Beker's paradigm fit Kittelson's view of Luther the professor and preacher who worked through a broad spectrum of issues, but did so from a core existential understanding of the cross. Marty touched this same point by asserting that, for the reformer: "All his other studied and formal teachings…radiated from the core teaching of the forgiveness of sins, like rays from the sun. From that center he had to take on the surrounding world again."[10] Thus emerged a lifelong struggle of applying the coherent center of Christ's justifying death to the contingent circumstances of church polemics and daily human life, with the cross revealing the nature of God's relationship to creation, and in turn determining the manner in which the creature could speak theologically.

Acknowledgment of Luther's humanity, and placing his words and actions into the framework of coherence and contingency, allows us to jump the ecumenical fence and find correlation with Edward Schillebeeckx' provocative approach to critically evaluating theological language:

> …[T]here is no other basis for human talk about God's transcendence than our 'contingency,' i.e., our limitations—our changeable, precarious human history. Religious language with its own spirituality draws its material from the experience of our human creaturely limitations as a possible (never compulsory) 'disclosure' of deeper dimensions, which can nevertheless be experienced.[11]

Schillebeeckx touched two important points: legitimate religious expressions touching the matter of divine transcendent truth are possible, but such expressions emerge from historically circumscribed, human experience. Seen in this manner, Luther can be heard proclaiming the gospel in a specific, yet limited, religious fashion: as a human being having profound insight regarding the nature of God and humanity. Luther's message resonated not only within the fabric of his own society,

8. James M. Kittelson, "Luther der Mensch," *Concordia Journal* 17 (October, 1991), 389. Emphasis mine.

9. J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 35.

10. Marty, *Luther*, 127.

11. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1993), 8.

but critically correlated, addresses the human community today.[12] Any valid correlation, however, must grapple with Luther on his own ground and within his own time, and from that perspective, we now turn our attention to the reformer's greatest failure.

Few Lutheran scholars have spoken as bluntly on Luther and the Jews as Eric Gritsch. The strength of this noted Reformation historian's argument was his engagement of Luther based on the reformer's own time-conditioned theology. In a paper delivered during the Luther celebrations of 1983,[13] Gritsch situated the reformer within a sixteenth century marked by a long history of European anti-Semitism. From the Crusades, blood libels, and segregationist policies of the Fourth Lateran Council to the scathing propaganda that blamed the Jews for natural disasters and occult atrocities, Europe witnessed a hardening of hearts toward Jews on both ecclesiastical and popular levels. Luther's century inherited a legacy of expulsions, lynch mobs, massacres, and superstitions, all of which produced anti-Jewish sentiments ranging from verbal abuse to open murder.[14] Gritsch shared how, within this cauldron of anti-Judaism, Luther produced several pamphlets pertaining to the Jews. The two most prominent works were the ostensibly positive, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew,* in 1523; and the notorious verbal explosion of 1543, *On the Jews and Their Lies.*[15] In the first pamphlet, Luther avoided the rampant hate-filled rhetoric of his day and essentially blamed the papacy for the Jews' rejection of Christianity. Defending the Jews as brothers of Christ, Luther seemed convinced that with the true gospel finding voice, Jewish conversion would soon follow. To his dismay, the following years saw no progress to that end, and in time Luther grew bitter over the lack of acceptance of Christ. Convinced of Jewish arrogance, Luther finally absorbed the spirit of contemporary bigotry, and unleashed his own vicious attacks on the Jews.[16]

For many interpreters of Luther this is where the story ended. While all deplored his vitriol against Jews, they pointed to his time and argued that his anti-Semitism was neither racial nor unique.[17] Not content to let the matter rest, and avoiding anachronistic scrutiny based on modern sensibilities, Gritsch challenged Luther's bigotry with the reformer's own theology, revealing in the process an inconsistent and fallible man. Gritsch concluded, "Luther succumbed to the evil of anti-Semitism through a theological failure of nerve."[18] Luther anchored his theology on the conviction that the justification of the sinner was the work of God, rooted in no other

12. Marty's preface puts the case well. *Luther, xi-xv.*

13. Eric Gritsch, "Luther and the Jews: Toward a Judgment of History" in *Stepping-Stones to Further Jewish-Lutheran Relationships,* ed. Harold H. Ditmanson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 104–119.

14. Ibid., 104–107.

15. *Luther's Works.* American Edition (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress Press, 1958–1986) [Hereafter *LW*]. "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," *LW* 45, 199-229; "On the Jews and Their Lies," *LW* 47, 137–306.

16. Gritsch, 109.

17. Bainton reflected this position, cf. *Here I Stand,* 379–380. See also Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 273–274. Walther von Loewenich, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work,* trans. Lawrence W. Denef (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 348–352. More recently, James A, Nestingen, *Martin Luther: A Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003), 104–107.

18. Gritsch, 115.

reality than God's will. It carried no logic other than *Deus vult*. Gritsch emphasized that, "it was not Luther's theological style to impose logical conclusions on God."[19] In the face of empirical doubt and suffering, faith distinguished between the actual existential condition as it imploded on the self, and the word of God that promised salvation apart from all visible realities. What the person experienced meant nothing. What mattered was the theocentric conviction to "let God be God." All this flowed from the theology of the cross where—against all reason and observation—God redeemed the world.

For Luther, all things changed when the subject turned to the Jews. Here he willfully refused to countenance God's hidden sovereignty regarding the present condition or future salvation of the Jewish people. In direct contradiction to his manner of theologizing regarding God's actions in Christ, empirical observation provided Luther access to the hidden will of God toward the Jews. He confidently asserted that, due to "fifteen hundred years of exile, of which there is no end in sight…[one] may in good conscience despair of them. For it is impossible that God would leave his people without comfort and prophecy for so long."[20] Luther continued by claiming, "*It does not make sense* that they [the Jews] should suffer such misery for fifteen hundred years for unknown sins…"[21] "It does not make sense"? To the reformer's confident logic, Gritsch responded:

> Luther no longer let God be God. Instead, he got caught up in the answers he himself so stubbornly had warned against. Apparently for Luther one can now know the hidden God with regard to his plans for the Jews: God had rejected them and is in favor of their rejection in the world he created![22]

Gritsch saw a double standard in that, "[s]uddenly the proper distinctions, so brilliantly maintained with great theological sagacity in the midst of storm and stress, disappeared from Luther's vision."[23] Luther failed to leave the matter of the Jews in God's hands, as he did in matters of divine omnipresence and other mysteries of divine majesty and power.

Thomas Kaufmann's evaluation of this issue, while providing the same historical context as Gritsch, provided a more precise locus of the reformer's "failure of nerve." When Luther's anger flashed at Jewish failure to accept the gospel, Kaufmann, like Gritsch, saw Luther surrender to the popular and prevalent anti-Jewish rhetoric of the age. Kaufmann, however, saw Luther's polemical shift emerge from not only the external societal concerns of Jewish influence, but also from the reformer's interior "burden of conscience." Convinced that God would punish societies that tolerated blasphemies, Luther sought to not only unburden the German lands from Jewish vices, but also "cleanse and exonerate my conscience." [24] For Kaufmann,

> Luther wished to make a personal confession with his Jewish writings as well…The relief of his conscience that Luther wished to achieve through his sharp renunciation of the Jews, presupposed that he now regarded as a burden his own earlier position on the "Jewish question," which had been accepted by evangelical governments and Protestant preachers as a strategic policy of toleration with the goal of

19. Ibid., 110.

20. Ibid.

21. For the extended quotation see, *LW 47*, 96–97. Emphasis mine.

22. Gritsch, 116.

23. Ibid.

24. Quoted in Kaufmann, 91, n. 75.

> Jewish conversion, and which had been understood, perhaps from the Jewish side on occasion, as "an opportunity for self-assertion."[25]

Put simply, Luther believed he had been too lenient earlier with such a stubborn people, and his conscience could not bear a passive approach to those who defamed Christ. The evidence put forth by the multitude of anti-Jewish writers convinced him that their accusations were valid. The floodgates opened, and the venom of *On the Jews and Their Lies* poured forth. With his conscience formed by empirical evidence and logical inference regarding the mind of God, Luther concluded that the Jews, being damned in the spiritual sphere, could not be tolerated within the earthly sphere. Luther's "burdened conscience" engendered a "failure of nerve," providing him a pious throne from which to hurl violent deprecations against his enemies. Luther's logic abandoned the theology of the cross, spawning a detested "theology of glory." Here he contradicted his own nineteenth thesis issued at Heidelberg years before: "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things that have actually happened (or have been created.)"

In the end, Luther's hatred of the Jews caused him to cross the "great divide" between the way of glory and the way of the cross.[26]

The tragedy of Luther's "failure" deepens when confronted with sources revealing Luther coming face to face with this very issue of letting God be God regarding the Jews. Martin Brecht called attention to the Protocols for the Bible revision of 1541, most notably the extensive protocol from 1541 on the revision of Romans 11.[27] Here Brecht found Luther extracting from the text a more promising view of the Jews: "The Jews are not denied life, and the door of grace is not closed."[28] Such grace, according to Luther's reading, was available to the Jews until the end of the world, thus, "the Jews are not to be abandoned entirely, this is his [Paul's] earnest affirmation."[29] In fleshing out the meaning of Paul's remarks on God's "inscrutable judgments" and "unsearchable ways" in Rom 11:33, the reformer placed the fate of the Jews unequivocally within the mystery of God's hidden purpose. According to Luther, "The outcome… remains open. There God says 'Go, preach, baptize; who knows what I will do with the Jews, Gentiles. I do not share my will with you. Let God alone, we cannot fathom his decrees.'"[30]

Luther's reading of the text remained consistent with his central conviction of God's justification of the sinner. It embodied the essential dynamic of Luther's thinking in that it expressed a theological assertion—potential Jewish salvation—by way of proper awareness of the hidden God. As with the theology of the cross, the will of God cannot be known from visible phenomena, thus the Jews must be placed directly into God's hands. This profoundly theocentric conclusion so clearly consistent with letting "God be God" found no further elucidation in his future statements on the Jewish question.

25. Ibid., 91–92.

26. For Heidelberg quotation and "great divide," see Gerhard O. Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 72–73.

27. Martin Brecht, *Preservation of the Church,* 340.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

Tragically, his tirades embodied the exact opposite. By taking the path of vilification premised on observable phenomena, Luther squandered any gains made from his exegetical study. Here was a thought let slip, a seminal insight not pursued. Luther chose the popular path; the path crowded with vicious hatred of Jews, which simply imbibed the prevalent spirit of the day. Luther's conformity reminds one of the words of the German Jew, and victim of the Nazi regime, Kurt Tucholsky: "Nothing is more difficult and nothing requires more character than to find oneself in open opposition to one's time and to say loudly: No."[31] When it came to his own agony and the theology of the cross, Luther could say no, and stand against the power of the pope and emperor. Yet, when it came to the "other" of his day, he failed to follow through, bringing a stain to his theological legacy. In the end, Luther's guilt is not imposed by modern criteria, but by his rejection of his own liberating way of approaching the human question of God.

Luther's primordial insight into the nature of God and humanity corresponded to a much earlier human realization that, "If you, Lord, mark our sins, Lord, who can stand?"[32] This was nowhere more evident than when Luther discussed the cross of Christ. Knowing the depths of his own personal unworthiness before the reality of a righteous God, Luther could only confess that no degree of human knowledge or pious humility could convey the human to the divine. The very visible humiliation of the cross revealed the hidden truth that any bridge that might be termed "salvation" must be built by God. Indeed, this was the theocentric truth Luther extracted from Paul's letter to the Romans in 1541. Yet, with regard to Judaism, he failed to grasp that the cross is not a status bestowed, but a reality defined.

For Christians, the cross reveals a creator God who bestows mercy on whomever God so desires. Luther's coherent center of justification, implemented in various contingent circumstances over the course of his career, stressed the utter passivity of the person in order to magnify the grace of God and soothe Christian consciences. Yet, when the issue turned to the Jews, Luther failed to acknowledge the creator's right to mercy. The cross became a standard by which Luther deemed himself worthy to mark the sins of the Jewish people. Martin Marty put it well:

> The once uncertain monk in these kinds of cases had become so comfortable with his certitude that it took on the character of the very self-centered security, the intellectual and moral self-assurance, against which he always warned. It served as his license to threaten others.[33]

The tragedy of Luther's fleeting glimpse was that he indeed touched upon the radical sovereignty of God as the only viable Christian context for speaking on the fate of the Jews. Yet he lost his nerve. However, we need not allow Luther's failure to preclude our faithfulness to the word as he—if only for a moment—saw it. Donald J. Dietrich has issued a challenge to contemporary theology that touches in a most profound fashion the issue at hand.

> Since anti-Semitism was introduced so early in the church's history, I would like to suggest a way to theologically re-enter

31. Quotation found in Jack Forstman, *Christian Faith in Dark Times: Theological Conflicts in the Shadow of Hitler* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1992), 11.

32. Psalm 130:3, *New American Bible* (Washington, D.C.: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 1970).

33. Marty, *Luther*, 173–174.

> the conversation between Christians and Jews. At the most fundamental level of theology, Christians need to emphasize God more than they have. They need to emphasize Jesus Christ the Savior more within the context of God's relationship to humanity. Christians too frequently center everything on Jesus, to the detriment of the God who sent him, guided him, and sustained him. Jesus subordinated himself to God's will in order to rule, co-serve, care for, and bring to fulfillment humanity and the universe in which humanity lives.[34]

Dietrich's seminal point correlates with the insight Martin Luther stumbled upon in 1541, and seeks to implement the theocentric manner of thinking about God that the reformer confessed, but later rejected. From a Christian perspective, Dietrich's challenge in no way lessens the power of the cross or its centrality to human history, nor does it sacrifice the principle of justification by faith alone, since that confession casts the human–divine relationship back into its proper milieu: the sovereignty of God.

Christian triumphalism has fostered and propagated anti-Judaism, spilling an ocean of both ink and blood in denigration and persecution of those who "rejected God's salvation." We Christians of today, however, must ask what happens when the confession of God's ultimate love in the cross becomes a pedestal for human spiritual pride. Those who by confession bear Luther's name should know that we have no "status" before God, only graced perception of our creaturely limitations. We claim a future shaped not by conjecture, but by faith in letting God be God. Are our fellow humans worthy of less?

What of Judaism today? What of adherents to differing religions or lifestyles, or any group some Christians deem "the other"? The cross places Christians in humble relation to humanity in general, and specifically to the people of the God of Israel. The cross of Christ can never be a human weapon, because it revealed that only God can be the basis of what we humans call salvation. Such an approach to the question of God and humanity invites no insipid notions of non-judgmental "I'm ok—your ok" ecumenism. Rather, it takes the matter of God with utmost seriousness, placing the issue of ultimate salvation, not in the hands of the creature, but rather acknowledging the creator whose ways are not our own.

Martin Luther's human experience still offers provocative insight to theological discourse, yet his anti-Semitic legacy cannot be undone. We cannot pick and choose isolated assertions in order to diminish the damage done. We may, however, confront the failure of a fallible man and learn what paths not to take. Perhaps the first lesson is that any attempt by the human to mark the "sins" of another by means of a perceived status, or on the grounds of observable phenomena, leads to death, both spiritual and physical. This of course is no news to millions of Jews and other victims of religious prejudice and hatred. *Go, preach, baptize; who knows what I will do.… I do not share my will with you. Let God alone, we cannot fathom his decrees.* Luther let this thought slip through his hands and heart. We need not do the same.

34. Donald J. Dietrich, "A Need for a Critique of the Institutional Church ," in *Catholics, Jews, and the Prism of Conscience.* eds. Daniel Terris and Sylvia Fuks Fried (Waltham: Brandeis University, 2001), 66–67.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

Stacy Kitahata

Director for Community Engagement and Professor of Intercultural Studies at Trinity Lutheran College

Craig L. Nessan

Academic Dean and Professor of Contextual Theology at Wartburg Theological Seminary

Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.
Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.
Alas for the day!
For the day of the LORD is near,
and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.
Is not the food cut off before our eyes,
joy and gladness from the house of our God?
The seed shrivels under the clods,
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are ruined because the grain has failed.
How the animals groan!
The herds wander about because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep are dazed.
Joel 1:14–18

The prophet Joel summoned the people of God to a fast: "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast" (Joel 2:15-16a). Joel harkened the people of God to repent and weep at the outbreak of famine. A plague of locusts threatened to devastate the land and to leave the people bereft of the basic necessities of life, including even grain for an offering to God. Not only human life was in danger but also the beasts of fields. All creation moaned at the lack of grain for daily bread. In that moment, the prophet called the people to fast as a sign of repentance.

Brothers and sisters, the testimony of the law and the prophets makes stunningly clear God's command to feed the hungry, to share our daily bread, so that all people have enough to eat. Nothing is clearer in God's word than the witness about justice to the poor. Moreover, we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). This same Savior taught his disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," the theme verse of our Lutheran World Federation Assembly. How do we dare to continue to pray this petition when we do not mean it? We are living in just such a time when many Christians, including many from North America, continue to pray for our daily bread but do not mean it.

Today is the day for us to declare a

1. Originally presented as a Bible study on the final day of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly at Stuttgart, Germany on July 27, 2010, this Bible study is offered in the hope that readers may find it useful for Bible study groups in their own ministry sites.

fast, here and now. Today is the day for the affluent of this world to declare a fast from praying the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," because every time we pray without repentance we are convicted of gross hypocrisy. Today is the day for the affluent to proclaim a moratorium on praying this petition for daily bread, until we pray it not only with our mouths but also with our lives. Prayer is never only about handing requests over for God to fulfill them. Prayer is at the same time the affirmation of an agenda for the life of the church. If we dare to pray for daily bread, then we at the same time must commit our own life energies to this purpose. Insofar as we continue to pray the petition about daily bread without real commitment to the alleviation of hunger, we need to stop doing so.

Here are three reasons why it is spiritually dangerous for affluent Christians, including many from North America, to continue to pray the petition for daily bread. First, the affluent do not really believe that God is the source of daily bread. Instead, we are convinced that it is by our own labor and effort that we "earn" our daily bread. If we were honest we would admit that we really believe it is through our own sweat and our own hard work that we deserve our paycheck and through this income can purchase for ourselves daily bread. Really, God has little to do with it. The economic order runs according to its own mechanisms.

Second, the affluent do not really believe that daily bread is for "us." Instead what we really mean to pray is, "Give me this day *my* daily bread." How expansively do you pray the petition for daily bread? Do you include in the "us" and the "our" all your sisters and brothers who again this day do not have the most fundamental necessities of life: basic nutrition, adequate water, clothing, shelter, and rudimentary medical care? If the affluent were honest, we would need to admit how narrow the concern of our churches is in praying this petition. Truly, I would need to admit that I pray mainly for myself. All my hungry sisters and brothers across the globe are rarely in focus as I pray. Moreover, the needs of the entire creation for sufficiency fall entirely away in my praying for my needs.

Third, the affluent do not really mean to pray for "daily" bread. Instead, we want food abundance for every day in the future—not merely enough for today but also for every tomorrow. We want extra money in the bank and full grocery stores and low prices to guarantee we will always have enough. Not only do we want bread for all the days to come, but also infinite supplies of oil to run our automobiles, cheap products to stock the shelves of our discount stores, and a wide selection of consumer choices to satisfy every desire. To pray earnestly for daily bread would mean we would become dependent on God to provide only for what we need for this very day, like the Israelites depended on God for manna in the wilderness. No, what the affluent really want and pray for is financial security to live out their days without regard for dependence on God or sharing with the neighbor.

If the affluent were to fast from praying the fourth petition for daily bread, consider how the prayer would continue, after a pause, immediately with the petition: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." By declaring a fast on praying the petition for daily bread, we would be summoned instead to confront directly our need for repentance and forgiveness in relation to the needs of our hungry sisters and brothers. Now the form of our prayer would become: "Your kingdom come….Forgive us our

sins…" The affluent of this world have many collective sins that contribute to the failure of the global economy to satisfy the most basic requisites of neighbor love. We have heard about many of these sins at this assembly: illegitimate debt, abuse of the creation, or disregard for the needs of women and children.

If the affluent were to fast from praying the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer, this does not mean that the petition would not be prayed, however. Rather, the affluent would fall silent to listen to the voices of their poor sisters and brothers as they would pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." The affluent would be reduced to silent penitence while we listen to our hungry sisters and brothers pray for daily bread in our presence. Those who pray the prayer for daily bread out of urgent need would raise their voices to God, until the day all the rest of us would be moved not only to pray for daily bread but also to share daily bread. The absence of this petition for daily bread could make it even more present. Until such a time as the whole church of God is united in its genuine commitment to daily bread for all of the world's people, the affluent should fast from the petition, listening to the praying of the poor.

> We, too, have been gathered at the well, around our bowls, empty, yearning, filled with promise. We have met Jesus here.

But how is it that we, affluent Christians from North America, could ask such a prayer of sisters and brothers who hunger? Fasting, and praying: Is this what brings justice and equity? Will prayers fill empty stomachs and provide sufficient nutrition for learning and growing? No!

It is not enough that the affluent fast from the petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," even if we are thinking deeply about its implications, even if we are sorry for praying without awareness, even if we repent of all the ways we have exploited the earth and all her people. It is not enough for the suffering poor to pray and plead. The world needs reparations and restitution, not just regrets and requests! Where is there life-giving transformation, so that we do not have to keep drawing out apologies (resolutions) again and again?!

Let's look deeper into the story in John 4 as our model for action. Jesus travelled out of his way, leaving behind his own people bickering and competing over baptisms, to meet with a woman of Samaria. At the historic Well of Jacob, he lays out a full agenda of the way things should be. As we continue our life journeys, we can explore further the ways in which God is calling us to live as renewed people proclaiming and carrying out God's comprehensive plan of transformation!

Besides the woman and Jesus, there are other characters in this story—the disciples, and the woman's community of Sychar. Each responds from their experience of the encounter with Jesus. As we have heard and seen, living water is good news for the Samaritan woman. It fills her with the courage to leave the well that she and her people have known for generations

and to proclaim the good news of a new order of life to the whole community of Sychar.

Jesus' encounter with the woman is not such good news for the disciples. Their world is turned upside down. Seeing Jesus engaging with the woman, the disciples are so stunned they cannot even speak to him. They gather, befuddled and incapacitated by the enormity of the message Jesus embodies. The men of Sychar are so astounded by the news that they want to know more. They come out to the well to see and hear for themselves. Compelled by the woman's testimony and after seeing and hearing directly for themselves, the community invites Jesus to stay with them. And he does.

We, too, have been gathered at the well, around our bowls, empty, yearning, filled with promise. We have met Jesus here. Here, as we have confirmed to one another at this font, the good news of new life is for us as well. Here we have gathered at the well of our communion. We have been refreshed by living water flowing from the lives of one another, our sisters and brothers. Like the woman, the disciples, and the community of Sychar, we have heard and experienced news that turns our perceptions and assumptions inside out, upside down. Good news for some has been "not-so-good" news for others. Haves and have-nots, sinners and sinned against, affluent and struggling, Dalit and privileged, fed, underfed, and overfed—with vast differences in perspectives and experiences, and with great discrepancy in access to, and influence of, social and economic power—yet one in Christ Jesus.

Like all the characters of the biblical account, we are invited to leave behind whatever false assumptions about the world we brought with us at the beginning of this week and we are invited to embrace the new world we have been shown over the course of these days together. We are called to live out the encounter with Jesus so fully that we, too, are transformed into refreshing springs, overflowing with living water for our communities and the world. We respond with fasting, praying, action, and advocacy.

In Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman every social and religious convention is overturned. Jews talk to Samaritans and handle the same vessels. Issues of worship that had divided people for centuries, a social and economic system that relegated women to positions of property rather than full personhood, all of this is overturned. Through it all, Jesus points to what really counts, what is at the root and heart of his entire message: The good news is for all, disciples are found among every people, true worship is evidenced in spirit. Distinctions due to language, race, or ethnicity; discrimination based on sexual life or gender; disparities in politics and economics—these have no place in the reign of God.

Like the communities of Jews and Samaritans, the women and the men—like every other community in need of reconciliation—we are called to leave from this well and declare, "Come and see someone who told me all about myself," and to embrace that as good news. We depart from here together, with courage to respond with our whole lives to the world's cry for daily bread, to experience hope where once we saw only despair, to work for justice where once the odds seemed too long, to speak and to fast from speaking, so that action for change surges up from the depth of our spiritual springs. There is much work to be done in this world. As a global Lutheran Communion, like the woman and her community, we are sent to be life-giving, to offer our very selves as testimony, food for the hungry, and springs of living water for a dying world.

Jesus Christ is the living bread who has come to feed all the people of the world (John 6:35). Jesus Christ revealed God's will both by feeding the hungry and by telling his disciples, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). Jesus Christ left his disciples a meal of bread and wine in which he promised to be present. At Jesus' table we dare to believe that all people are welcome and that here there is enough for all: enough forgiveness; enough mercy; enough love; enough food. As the living bread from heaven, Jesus Christ promises, "Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). At the Eucharist, the church receives from Jesus Christ living bread to feed all the people of the world.

From this font we are sent as living water; our Communion is a well of life for the sake of the world. We go, extending the table of the Lord beyond our places of worship and into the communities where we live. We go, proclaiming good news that reaches beyond our local communities to the ends of the earth. We go as living water and bread of life.

The prophet Isaiah proclaimed ages ago the nature of the fasting God requires of God's people:

[They ask] "Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers.
Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?
Is not this the fast I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn.
Isaiah 58:3–8a

Discussion questions:

A. What would it mean for you to fast for the sake of the world's hungry people?

B. When have you experienced good news for others as not-such-good-news for yourself? How have you seen these different experiences of the gospel transformed in the community of faith?

C. What assumptions that you have about the world and the way it works does this encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well invite you to reconsider?

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Lutherans Read the Bible with the Ecumenical World
Dr. Justo L. González

The Bible is not an exclusive word and those who share in its messages are related to one another. Hein-Fry in 2011 will give us an opportunity to enter into dialogue with a variety of Christians outside U.S. Lutheranism about engaging the Bible through global and ecumenical perspectives.

Dr. Justo L. González, a native of Cuba, is a retired professor of historical theology. After completing his PhD in historical theology at Yale University in 1961, he he taught at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico for eight years. He then taught for another eight years at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. For the last thirty years he has focused on developing programs for the theological education of Hispanics, resulting in the founding of the Asociación par la Educación Teológica Hispana (AETH), the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP), and the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI). His books, which include *The Story of Christianity* (2 vols.) and *A History of Christian Thought* (3 vols.), have been translated into nine languages. Besides his PhD degree from Yale, he has received four honorary doctorates.

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Book Reviews

Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross. By Theodore W. Jennings Jr. ISBN-13: 978-0800663506. ISBN-10: 0800663500 Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. x and 265 pages. Paper. $24.00.

The "classical" interpretations of the atonement have been under close scrutiny for a full generation. Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* (1969) was the first high-profile work that critiqued both the "substitutionary satisfaction" theory of Anselm and the "moral influence" theory of Abelard. Aulén himself preferred the "ransom" (*Christus victor*) narrative he identified with the early church and Luther. Since Aulén, the critical analysis of the substitutionary/satisfaction trajectory has continued through feminist observations regarding the dangers associated with reading the violence of the crucifixion back into the heart of (a dishonored) God, especially the sociological horrors (for example, abuse of the vulnerable, reification of patriarchy) which this atonement model can, in theory, inscribe. The last round of discussions has been influenced by the wide-ranging anthropological theories of René Girard concerning the roots of cultic sacrifice and its legacies in organized religion as well as wider cultural narratives that condone violence of various kinds.

In *Transforming Atonement*, Jennings is well aware of this revisionist engagement with the classic "models" of the atonement. Indeed, he sees his own work as pushing further the boundaries of the discussion. He does this by basing his own reconstructive efforts in the "political" dimensions of the crucifixion. In the concluding discussion of whether or not it is wise to continue to use the term "atonement" to describe the reconstruction he advocates, Jennings notes:

> Because of the way it must begin by taking seriously the execution of Jesus as one deemed subversive of the political order imposed by Rome, we might term this something like the *political model* of atonement. Or when we consider the implication of religious structures in the execution of Jesus and in the maintenance of any and all forms of domination, we might term this a *nonreligious* or *secular* view of atonement. (226)"

Jennings' work incorporates recent New Testament investigations that understand the earliest Jesus movements as actively resisting the exploitative social structures (both "religious" as well as "political") that were established by a Roman imperial ideology ruthlessly enforced. The fact that the liberative and trangressive social ministry of the historical Jesus led to the *Roman* cross is where Jennings grounds his own understanding of the atonement. It is further informed by Paul's insights into the revelatory power of the cross in the Corinthian correspondence as well as the narrative theology of Mark. Both Paul and Mark, Jennings points out, are clear that the cross not only judges Rome but also serves to create alternative social formations. Jennings' "political model of the atonement," then, calls for (1) resistance to structures of domination, and (2) the formation of a heterogeneous society (Jew and Greek, free and slave, male and female) based on non-competitiveness, mutual respect, and advocacy for the powerless. The zero-sum game of the outside world that privileges power, prestige, and domination are to be replaced by a "counter-culture" formed in opposition to the politics of empire in the church of the Crucified One.

There is much that is wonderful about this book. It is well-informed by readings from 2/3rd world theologians. Jennings' detailed recovery of the political dimensions of the cross is as refreshing as is his ability to differentiate clearly different kinds of suffering (see "The Cross and Suffering," 105–124). His understanding of the reconciliation God effects in the atonement is appropriately grounded in a reading of New Testament texts that recovers both the painful reality of a humanity alienated from God and the dogged persistence of a *merciful* God (rather than a God defined by a wrath that needs propitiation). Jennings' ongoing argument that the cross is easily misused in Christian discourse is persuasive given the church's past triumphal use of it.

Yet, in spite of all that is wonderful in

this book, as a Lutheran there is also much that makes my feet shuffle. "Sin" is defined, largely, in sociological terms; "sinners" are those who have been marginalized by the discourse of power, whether political or religious. Jesus (and the cross of Christ), Jennings notes, stands in solidarity with the powerless, as should the church by being a cruciform community marked by justice and mercy. Missing here is a sense of the universality of sin and the *simul* of the Lutheran tradition, a tradition that is deeply suspicious of the church ever being defined in terms of what Luther called the "active righteousness" of its members. Also, from a New Testament perspective, the "background" descriptions of early Christianity, once they stray outside of the sophisticated description of the power-politics of Rome, fall a bit short. The analysis of "sacrifice" in antiquity understands Girardian theory better than the ancient reality; the notion that "mystery cults" are formative to the ethos of early Christianity is a somewhat dubious claim. The relentless hermeneutic of suspicion that is directed toward church tradition also, in the end, wears a bit thin for someone who has found more in most church "doctrines" than first meets the eye. Unfortunately, Jennings will at times content himself with superficial descriptions of church theology that serve mainly as foils for what he has determined are more adequate articulations. This criticism of the book is not to suggest that "the tradition" is always right, especially in such matters as the status of Jews or women before God. Yet, even given such massive flaws of the past, there is more than repression and bigotry encoded in the church's confession of faith.

This book represents a further evolution of some of the more interesting and important discussions about the atonement that have occurred since Aulén. To its detriment, this discussion is often not very well versed in Luther's dialectical theology of the cross nor always well informed about the "traditional" thinking concerning the atonement that takes *all* kinds of human sin—especially the cardinal sin of idolatry—as seriously as it takes the mercy of God. In short, *Transforming Atonement* could have better taught the church about its own atonement traditions had it not been as dismissive of them in what has now become a rather predictable manner.

Erik M. Heen
The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

Signs of God's Promise: Thomas Cranmer's Sacramental Theology and the Book of Common Prayer. By Gordon P. Jeanes. New York: Continuum, 2008. 328 pages. ISBN-10: 0567031896. ISBN-13: 978-0567031891. Paper. $49.95.

Gordon P. Jeanes takes up the question of Cranmer's sacramental theology, examining it in light of history and liturgical studies. Jeanes particularly wants to contest the notion that Cranmer did not have a distinct theology, and that he and his work were hopelessly compromised by trying to please too many "publics" at once, including the crown and fellow theologians. While Jeanes allows that Cranmer was influenced by continental reformers, including Zwingli and Bucer, he finds that "Cranmer was a man who knew his own mind, and who had worked hard over the years to discover his own theological view" (11). Indeed, Jeanes contends that Cranmer worked out his mature sacramental views as much in conversation with Scripture and St. Augustine, as with his contemporaries. Cranmer's thinking then decisively influenced the composition of both the 1549 and 1552 prayer books; Jeanes holds these are primarily the work of Cranmer himself, seen in the striking consistency of theological perspective throughout.

Jeanes claims that Cranmer held that sacraments are signs, "signifying the working of God" (140). Interestingly, for Cranmer, this must itself imply the actual absence of that which is signified, otherwise the sacrament would not be signifying, but would be the thing itself. Thus, Cranmer's sacramental thinking steers clear of Lutheran and Roman Catholic notions; yet, because they actually signify the working of God, he would not endorse Zwinglian or Bucerian notions which seem to imply only an accidental relationship

between the sacrament and God's act. While Cranmer has never quite stood as the fountainhead to the Anglican tradition in the way that Luther and Calvin do to their respective traditions, this conclusion establishes Cranmer's theology as rather ambiguously related to subsequent developments in sacramental theology in the Church of England and Anglican Communion.

One of the real contributions of Jeanes' book is that he examines Cranmer's thinking about both baptism and communion; previous accounts have tended to neglect baptism. Those working in the history of liturgy, Anglican historical theology, or Reformation history will welcome this volume. Others with some relevant background would also appreciate Jeanes' work, whether Lutherans looking to understand Anglican history and liturgy better, or Anglicans wishing to continue thinking through the contested notion of Anglican identity.

Jason A. Fout
Bexley Hall Theological Seminary,
Columbus, Ohio

Dignity, Dogmatism, and Same-Sex Relationships: What Science and Scripture Teach Us. By Gilbert O. Rossing. Eugene, Ore.: Resource Publications, 2009. ISBN-10: 1556359993. ISBN-13: 978-1556359996. xiii and 239 pages. Paper. $28.00.

This is a timely book, appearing concurrently with the controversial decisions made by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) at its 2009 Churchwide Assembly concerning ministry policies and the possibility of rostering, under certain conditions, otherwise qualified individuals in committed same-gender relationships. Gilbert Rossing is a Lutheran minister who served thirty years as pastor of ELCA congregations in the states of Washington, Oregon, and Texas. He therefore understands firsthand the context of pastoral ministry in the congregation. An even more important credential is his own struggle to understand the dynamics of homosexuality in relationship to his own two gay sons. As a consequence of the experiences of his sons, Rossing entered into a deep intellectual quest to comprehend same-sex relationships historically and scientifically, biblically and theologically. This book is the fruit of that labor of love.

Rossing contributes to the reader's learning in multiple ways. First, he articulates clearly the fundamental categories needed to negotiate the complexities of sexual identity and gender connectivity. Thereby, the author makes a vigorous case for the inherent value of sexual love, whether directed toward an opposite- or same-sex partner. Rossing argues that the relationship of marriage should be opened to all loving couples, regardless of sexual orientation. Those who are only beginning to explore the notion of same-sex marriage will be challenged by this argument to reexamine conventional beliefs and consider a new paradigm for understanding the importance of marriage for those to whom it has been denied by law and religious custom.

Historical and scientific arguments are also offered for rethinking traditional biases against homosexual individuals. Drawing upon analogies from the controversies surrounding abolitionism and a geocentric cosmology, Rossing argues that it is now time to overcome "procreative bias" in thinking about human sexuality. He examines key biblical texts and theological arguments, employing a deliberate hermeneutical method of distinguishing law and gospel. One of the chief expressions of God's work among human beings is basic respect for the dignity of one's gay or lesbian neighbor.

The book concludes with a chapter that examines significant ethical principles to guide the life of the church in its deliberation of homosexuality. For example, Rossing provides provocative readings of the Genesis narrative on the knowledge of good and evil, image of God, and the injunction that "it is not good to be alone." He argues for the value of intimacy as a core human need of all people.

This book is sure to challenge all those involved in the ongoing debate about homosexuality and the church. For those who in principle favor the direction of the ELCA

policy decisions, there is much that is original about the arguments of this book. For those who find themselves wondering about or challenging the ELCA's direction, Rossing offers a personal and intellectual challenge. This is advocacy scholarship at its best, directed at one of the burning issues of our times.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Christian Community in History. Volume 1: Historical Ecclesiology. Volume 2: Comparative ecclesiology. Volume 3: Ecclesial Existence.
By Roger Haight. New York: Continuum, 2004/2005/2008. x and 438/ix and 518/xvii and 300 pages. Cloth. $34.95/$34.95/$39.95.

Roger Haight, S.J. has produced in this trilogy one of the most extensive and authoritative works on ecclesiology in this generation. The first two volumes trace the history of ecclesiology, beginning with the earliest church and extending to the end of the twentieth century. Haight operates with a methodology that pays attention both to social-anthropological and theological dimensions as he examines major movements and figures, following a chronological sequence. He is keen to identify the central principles of "historical ecclesiology" that undergird the respective views of the church in order to draw from the various streams in a comparative analysis in his third volume.

In Volume 1 Haight describes the historical development and summarizes principles of historical ecclesiology for the earliest church, the pre-Constantinian church, the post-Constantinian church (300–600), and the church in the Middle Ages, both under the Gregorian reform in the early medieval period and in light of conciliarism in the late medieval period. In Volume 2 he continues the historical overview, dealing with the ecclesiologies of Luther, Calvin, Anglicanism, Anabaptists, Baptists, and Tridentine views from the Reformation period and the time immediately thereafter. From the nineteenth century, Haight focuses on Schleiermacher and Möhler, describing the larger trends in relationship to these key figures. From the twentieth century, he concentrates on the Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches (especially the document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*), Vatican II and its aftermath, liberation theology and the basic ecclesial communities, Orthodox Christianity (Zizioulas), and Pentecostal ecclesiology. In every case, Haight is judicious and fair in his presentation of the particular viewpoints. This work is encyclopedic in its scope and provides the reader with rich perspective for reflecting on the development and evolution of varied ecclesiologies over the course of history.

Haight is not content, however, merely to document the continuities and changes in the understanding of the church over the ages. Instead, his work has a distinctive ecumenical character, which comes to expression most fully in Volume 3. In this constructive section of his project, Haight aims to prompt reflection on commonalities among the diverse ecclesiologies that can promote increasing ecumenical rapprochement in the future. Here he creatively constructs arguments about the nature and mission of the church, the organization of the church, church membership, the activities of the church, and the church in relation to the world in the effort to define the character of "ecclesial existence."

With ecumenical purpose, Haight challenges the churches to ask (in a manner that parallels the methodology of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*) to what extent each communion can identify with the portrayal of the church articulated in these pages. While it is an ambitious quest, the ecumenical process would be well served by responding to Haight's challenge. Very significant, especially because of his Roman Catholic perspective, is the suggestion that the churches begin to claim "partial communion" based on the major similarities that they may share, yet without full agreement. The notion of partial communion, as a step toward claiming the greater measure of unity marked by full communion, is a very significant contribution developed by Haight in this work. Instead of focusing the most energy on making distinctions that perpetuate division, he challenges

the churches to set aside *adiaphora* in order to affirm themes that are already shared in common. This approach allows for and even affirms pluralism in ecclesiologies, while at the same time fostering the process of unity toward mutual participation in the *missio Dei.*

This work is highly recommended for serious study of the doctrine of the church. The first two volumes provide an excellent description of the distinctive ecclesiologies embedded over the centuries in church history. The final volume contributes both a methodology and a proposal for continued progress in ecumenical understanding. Taken together, the elements of this project provide a path toward continued ecumenical progress in the twenty-first century, including possibilities for future inroads between Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. This project deserves major attention by all those involved in ecumenical dialogue and from those concerned about increasing ecumenical cooperation.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

A Vexing Gadfly: The Late Kierkegaard on Economic Matters. By Eliseo Pérez-Álvarez. Foreword by Enrique Dussel. Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2009. ISBN-10:1556359608. ISBN-13:978-1556359606. xxii and 236 pages. Paper. $26.00

As one reads *A Vexing Gadfly*, the state church in Denmark during Søren Kierkegaard's time and the powerful, prosperous American Christianity of our own time seem strikingly similar. The book argues that Kierkegaard's criticism of Christendom involved criticism of the economic system that supported it. Pérez-Álvarez focuses on Kierkegaard's last writings, which were sharply devoted to truthfulness.

Kierkegaard saw Denmark's real god as money and its real religion as what we now call "consumerism." He understood himself as a Socrates-like gadfly, constantly accusing the status quo of idolatry. Because it pervaded their lives, Danes did not recognize their systemic sin, even though it was killing them. It was also killing others. Kierkegaard commented, "The more I have, the less another has" (45). A special section of this book shows how Denmark's prosperity in its Golden Age depended on the Caribbean slave trade.

Kierkegaard noted that this religion was practiced, preached, and validated especially in church. The church provided legitimacy to a state of affairs that benefitted only the wealthy and well-educated. From its pulpits, the church cloaked sin in respectability and baptized consumerism. God's forgiveness became a meaningless but comfortable pronouncement. Since the pastors and professors of the church were paid well for their role, Kierkegaard called all preaching "indulgence preaching" that waived penance for a fee.

The wealth and prestige of the clergy and academics were marks of anti-Christianity for Kierkegaard. Real Christianity was based on Jesus, not as a transcendent, unattainable goal, but as a genuine, poor person. Kierkegaard thought Jesus meant it when he said, "Follow me." Doing so would plunge one into public shame and loss of respectability because of commitment to the poor and the "ugly." What if we tried it?

Carolyn Schneider
Texas Lutheran University

Briefly Noted

In ***The Church in Antioch in the First Century C. E.*** (T&T Clark International, $70), Michelle Slee examines the problem of the entry of Gentiles into the church of Antioch. Her three sections discuss 1) Acts and Galatians, 2) the Didache, and 3) The Gospel of Matthew. She argues that the conditions laid down in Acts 15 actually originated in Antioch, that the Didache was written to mediate the problem in Antioch after the time of Paul, and that Matthew's church was Torah

observant, but also welcomed Gentiles. Antioch was the key location that determined the positive attitude to Gentiles.

Edgar Krentz

The Pocket Timeline of Islamic Civilizations (Interlink Books, $13.95) presents a concise overview of major Islamic civilizations and dynasties. Included are both familiar civilizations such as the Mamluk, and Ottoman, with less familiar dynasties such as the Ilkhanids, primarily of Iran, and the Zengids of central Asia. Each civilization is described in one to three pages with beautiful accompanying photographs of pertinent sites and artifacts. This brief book gently challenges common presuppositions that the Islamic world is monolithic or unsophisticated. An excellent accompanying twelve-page fold out timeline graphically reinforces key points and presents new information. This book would be a helpful addition to a parish library that has a section for understanding other religions.

Ann Fritschel
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Jerry Sumney's ***The Bible: An Introduction*** (Fortress, $42.00, ISBN-13: 978-0800653742) is a basic introduction to the Bible. Well illustrated, with maps, useful sidebars and charts, questions for discussion, and brief English bibliographies for further study, its intended audience seems to be parishes and students in introductory college courses. It will serve those two groups well.

Edgar Krentz

K. K. Yeo, professor of New Testament at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary (Methodist), provides thirty-two prayers based on New Testament passages, accompanied by black and white illustrations by Claire Matheny in ***The Spirit Intercedes: The New Testament in Prayers and Images*** (Wipf & Stock, 2009. $16.00. ISBN-10; 1-60608-794-0; ISBN-13: 978-1-60608-794-7). Fresh, in modern language, challenging, provocative, they will be useful as prayers to use and stimulus to writing one's own original prayers.

Edgar Krentz

All the People in the Bible. By Richard R. Losch (Eerdmans, $26). From Aaron to Zophar, Losch provides a guide to the saints, scoundrels, and other characters in Scripture. He includes people not mentioned in the text (Seleucid emperors, Hasmonean kings, Alexander the Great, etc.), who had a profound effect on the history of biblical times. After 451 pages of lively-written biographies, Losch adds an additional 122 pages that list every last individual, even those mentioned only in genealogies (he counts 28 people named Azariah), and gives a thumb-nail identification of each and a guide to the pronunciation of their name. Ideal for church libraries.

Ralph W. Klein

James VanderKam's ***The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*** (1994) served a generation as a trustworthy introduction to the Qumran documents. Now the revised second edition (Eerdmans, $21.00, ISBN-13: 978-0802864352), which takes into account the research of the last fifteen years, will do that for the next five years. Its seven chapters provide basic information, cover the field, give excellent guidance to modern literature and are accessible to interested non-specialists. A good read, I heartily recommend it.

Edgar Krentz

This third edition of ***The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues*** by Victor Furnish (Abingdon, 2009, 172 pages, $17.00) updates a work recognized in its first two editions. Furnish revised his chapters on "Sex, Marriage, and Divorce," chapter 2; "Homosexuality," chapter 3; and "Women in the Church," chapter 4; provided a general introduction on interpreting Pauline ethics and added a new chapter on "The Church in the World." Challenging and helpful, this deserves wide reading.

Edgar Krentz

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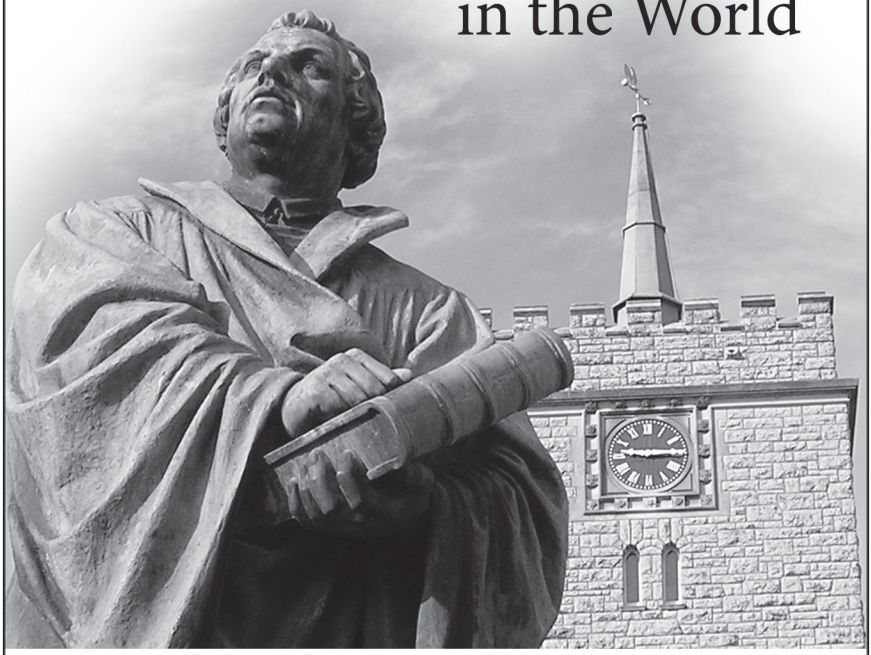

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Preaching Helps

Fourth Sunday in Lent – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Holy Saturday

In the Apostles' Creed, we confess that Jesus "…was buried; he descended to the dead." The lectionary remembers this part of the creed with readings appointed for Holy Saturday, as opposed to the Great Vigil. This year, I wrote for two publications—*New Proclamation* and *Feasting on the Word*—on those readings. [1] At first I felt sort of silly writing commentary for those readings, since hardly anyone, if anyone at all, will preach on Holy Saturday. Yet, when I opened the publications, I was impressed, not with my writing but with the contribution that this never-celebrated feast day makes to our life of faith. For on this day, we can pause to contemplate that Jesus lies bound by death in the tomb's dark prison, as we all will be at the end of our life and as so many are as part of their daily life. If we can dare to imagine Lamentations as the word of Christ, the lament becomes Christ's personal reflection on his passion. This Jesus vividly and personally understands what it is like to experience God as enemy, even tormenter, something that many will attest to based on their own personal experience. First Peter portrays Jesus proclaiming the gospel to the dead, so that they might live in the spirit as God does (4:6). This is certainly a hopeful image of Christ for one worried about the fate of a loved one who has died. In the gospel reading, Jesus is lovingly laid to rest by Joseph of Arimathea, who risks both blasphemy and treason to bury this enemy of church and state honorably, lavishly, even royally. The insurrection of resurrection is already underway!

My point is not that we need to add another service to Holy Saturday morning, though the preacher in me is tempted. My point, especially to myself, in preparing to preach Holy Week and Easter is to look for what I tend to overlook, things like Jesus' burial, which often gets reduced to little more than a necessary step between crucifixion and resurrection. I am not saying that we should make Holy Week and Easter preaching about someone or something other than Jesus. I am simply suggesting that the subplots and overlooked scenes in Christ's passion and resurrection might invite us to enter into the paschal mystery (Christ's death and resurrection) in new ways and so encounter new possibilities for preaching. How might I use the "triumphal entry" to lead the congregation into the events of Holy Week? What does it mean that sharing Jesus' bread means sharing in Jesus' death? What difference does it make that Gethsemane was a place packed with pilgrims camping out because they

1. Craig A. Satterlee, "Holy Week," in *New Proclamation Year A 2011: Advent through Holy Week,* ed. David B. Lott (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2010), 234–236; "Lamentations 3:1–9, 19–24: Homiletical Perspective," in *Feasting on the Word: Lectionary Commentary Series, Year A*, Vol. 2, eds. Barbara Brown Taylor and David L. Bartlett (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 305-309.

either could not afford or were unable to find lodging in Jerusalem? My questions reveal what I tend to overlook. So the first step for every preacher is to uncover what she or he is missing in the readings, and then to spend time there.

In this series of "Preaching Helps, Pastor Josh Ehrler guides us from mid-Lent well into Easter. Josh graduated from LSTC in 2005 and continues to serve his first call, a two-point parish in southeastern Minnesota. The congregations are diverse in population and location; First Lutheran is centered in the small community of Hope; Pontoppidan Lutheran is an open country congregation with an average worship age of 45. Both congregations are about fifteen minutes outside of Owatonna, Minn. They are congregations whose primary emphasis is service for their neighbors and outreach that extends around the world. Before moving to Chicago to enter the M.Div. program, Josh was an urban forester for a suburb of Denver, Colo. He climbed trees, managed parks, and supervised planting programs for neighborhoods. Even though his harness is a little closer to the ground these days, he still climbs trees for parishioners and neighbors. His congregation is getting used to seeing him swinging from limbs and playing with chain saws in the air. Josh is involved in a variety of synodical ministries, most notably serving as the Synod Coach Coordinator. He and his team of coaches walk with congregations through the renewal process. The coach team is slated to become a pilot or mentor program for other synods of the ELCA that hope to start their own coaching ministries to developing, redeveloping, and healthy congregations. Josh has a place in his heart for rural congregations. Josh is married to Amy and they have two children, Kendra and Caleb.

I have been asked why I am not keeping liturgical seasons together—in this issue, we begin on the Fourth Sunday in Lent and conclude with the Sixth Sunday of Easter. I am following the secular calendar (April and May) to accommodate page counts and publication details and the need to keep each issue about the same length. Perhaps blending the liturgical seasons will help us uncover things we miss when we respect the "boundaries" between Lent, Holy Week, and Eastertide.

However it happens, I pray that our crucified and risen Christ encounters you in unexpected and powerful ways as you preach and minister and, most important, in your own life and in the lives of those you love and call family.

Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

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

Fourth Sunday in Lent
April 3, 2011

1 Samuel 16:1–13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8–14
John 9:1–41

First Reading

God approaches his servant Samuel in the first reading with a simple statement. "Get over it. Saul's kingship is over." Samuel has been with Saul since the beginning of Saul's reign, which was inaugurated with God's promise to the Israelites that it would fail (1 Sam 8:8–18). God's expectations came to pass and Saul lost his authority with God, though he got to keep his seat of power as a lame-duck ruler. Samuel must now grab his gear and hit the road, led once more by God, to discover the next great king. For the sake of the kingdom of God, Samuel was called to put aside any fear or sadness and follow God, trusting that the Lord would provide what the nation was seeking.

Psalm 23 stands out for its blessed voice during funeral rites. In the book of Psalms, it is bracketed by Psalm 22, which begins with those famous words that Christ declares from the cross, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabbachthani?*" Psalm 24 is joyous and assured as the writer declares, "Lift up your heads, O gates!" Between suffering and exaltation the darkest valley of Psalm 23 dwells, as well as the banquet table of our Lord.

Ephesians 5 carries forward a potential subtheme of the day, darkness and light, including the necessary invitation to dwell in the light. The first impression for any of us could be one of warning. Either we stay in the light of Christ or we are doomed to darkness. Or, some readers may be tempted to use these words as a way to challenge a neighbor not living up to arbitrarily contrived standards. Those interpretations are easy to grasp. Fortunately, we can drive through the surface interpretations and wonder what it means to live in the light of Christ. We can consider how being a child of the light is not as simple as being in or out with God, but that Christ's presence transforms our interactions with neighbors, friends, colleagues, and classmates.

John 9 moves the congregation further down the trail of darkness and light, as well as the distinction between pointing fingers and acknowledging self in sin. Though the man born blind is a natural centerpiece, Jesus' frustrating dialogue with everyone surrounding this brief encounter is what resonates more loudly. Some fail to believe the promise Christ offers. Others spiral into fruitless theological debates. Even the man's parents display their pride when they move away from their son as soon as his experience becomes public. Darkness abounds for those who are able to see yet cannot or will not. Faith is revealed through words, not sight, when the man born blind declares, "Lord, I believe."

Pastoral Reflection

Thanks to the lectionary, we are treated to an open invitation to preach Psalm 23 from two vantage points. It appears both this Sunday—still two weeks away from Holy Week—and the fourth Sunday of the Easter season. It is a rare and splendid occasion to speak of transitions between liturgical seasons. We also are being handed an opportunity to contemplate how we the people encounter God through scripture at different times of the year.

Because this Sunday is in Lent, a season of following our Lord with more questions than clarity, Psalm 23 is a natural

reading on which to reflect. Liturgically the congregation has not quite made it to the cross. However, the shadow of the cross looms across every word and action of this day. We hear Psalm 23 in the unique voice of the shadow of death and our anticipation of the darkness that will descend.

Because of the frame of the Lenten season and the words of the psalmist, we can walk with our brothers and sisters into the depths of darkness. We can name out loud the self-made traps of sin, greed, pride, and how we actively seek salvation through self-destructive behaviors. We can speak to damaged relationships and the pain that we have inflicted, as well as the pain that has been cast upon us by the powers and forces of our world.

In short, we can pour it all out on the table set before us by our Lord with integrity and honesty and without judgment. Psalm 23 implies hordes of demons and armies of darkness that are crowding in around the author, but we would be missing something if we painted our suffering as merely coming from beyond our control. We inflict our own pain and burn our own bridges with God and others. We know the depths from which we, and all God's people, cry out for relief.

The good news is the promise that upon this table that bears our sin and shame, the clutter will be swept away and God will set forth a new meal. We are not to the cross, yet Christ sets out a supper every week adorned with his body and blood. Christ invites God's people to take in the renewing bread of life and the wine that bears good fruit through our relationship with God. From the table Christ provides comfort for our pain, recreation for our brokenness, and an unfailing light that pierces our darkness. It is Christ, determined to reach our cross, who leads God's shattered and threatened people through the bleakest valleys to a new and splendid life. JSE

Fifth Sunday in Lent
April 10, 2011

Ezekiel 37:1–14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6–11
John 11:1–45

First Reading

Ezekiel spans the history of the Israelites from before the Exile to the time when the rulers and major players of Israel were hauled off to Babylon. By chapter 37, the promise of downfall has come to pass and the suffering has begun. Ezekiel's tone shifts as his audience has been transported from their own land to a foreign terrain. Condemnation from God is transformed into compassion, which reflects God's unwavering love for a people who have brought about their own destruction. Despite their sin, and its resultant distress, God stays close to the people and goes with them as they are carried off. God then begins the re-creation that has also been promised (Ezek 28:25–26). We can read this vision as the first in a three-part rebuilding process: first life is restored, then the nation of Israel as one body is renewed, and then the Temple—God's dwelling in the world—is rebuilt (chapter 40).

Rom 8:6–11 sets us up to create logical systems to describe faith. If/then statements flow with ease from Paul's pen and make it seem that if we only follow the system, then we will be right with God. We could even apply this process to our neighbors and friends, though they likely would not appreciate our good intentions. Paul does not seem to be moving in this direction anyway. He is writing to an

established Christian congregation, one that he may have not met before he sent this letter to them. With that in mind, his statements are less prescriptive and more descriptive of their life as faithful followers. Instead of developing a process to identify sanctification, Paul is helping his Christian friends to consider how their ministries reveal that the Holy Spirit is already active through them.

John 11:1–45 is another marathon reading; we might want to invite the congregation to sit for a spell. Of course, the story of Lazarus preaches itself. Drawing the connection between Lazarus and Jesus is natural and one the congregants are making anyway. This text is also littered with questions that any reader could be thinking and would be worth naming. Why did Jesus not respond immediately? Why did he need Lazarus to be dead, dead, dead before showing up? Why does Jesus weep when he knows how this would all take place? Clashing at the gates of any relationship with Christ are unresolved and unfulfilled questions formed out of life experiences, which can be offered up to our Lord as incense. However, also standing in the fray of this confusion is Christ, who may not offer logical and satisfying answers, but who gives endless compassion and who knows the depths of our suffering.

Pastoral Reflection

In the St John's Bible, commissioned for St John's Abbey and University, the illustration for Ezekiel 37 shows piles of bones, broken glass, glasses strewn about and cars lying in pieces. Each is meant to reflect a modern interpretation of Ezekiel's vision. For instance, the bones come from pictures of mass graves from Serbia, the glasses are based on images from the Holocaust and the abandoned, fragmented cars represent ecological destruction.

Another image that comes closer to home for many modern American Christians may be empty churches scattered throughout the rural landscape. Once places of vibrant singing, where children played, these structures have become hollowed shells that leak and old playground equipment that sways only with passing breezes.

Every year churches in the flats of the Dakotas, the mined hills of Pennsylvania, and the once bustling streets of the metropolis are shuttered, mourned, and surrendered to the passage of members and time. The buildings then stand alone, often with the nameplate still bolted to the front steps like a grave marker. What could Ezekiel say to these churches, or to the communities down the road who are fretting and wondering about their own future?

"And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people" (37:13). In this reading, Ezekiel stands not as the voice of God but as the voice of his people who are shrouded in doubt and pain. God asks an impossible question: whether these bones, this damaged earth, these mass graves, and these empty churches can live. Ezekiel can't answer the question. Though it sounds like a softball pitch back to God, Ezekiel's words in verse 3 can also reflect the doubt and hopelessness that colors the words of anyone who cannot see past the loss.

Thus it is God who acts and God who gives life. It is God who brings the winds from the corners of the earth, reflecting the winds that once meant chaos over waters and now mean the brewing of a new creation. It is God who exhales breath into the collapsed lungs, expanding the dried bellows and bringing a new song that will be sung. It is God, not humanity, who renews and redeems. Ezekiel provides the space to speak questions that no one

wants to hear out loud. And in that space where the harbingers of death are named, God rushes in with the promise that God's life-sustaining presence will not fade, even if time and sin take flesh and bone—as well as bricks and wood. JSE

Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday
April 17, 2011

Isaiah 50:4–9a
Psalm 31:9–16
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 26:14—27:66 or Matthew 27:11–54

First Reading

Isa 50:4–9a is one of three "suffering servant" poems or songs found in the book (49:1–6; 52:13—53:12), though the descriptor "suffering" comes more from the reader than the author. The servant is clearly threatened, attacked, and harmed, likely because of the difficult words from God the servant proclaims. However, there are no statements of pain or disappointment. We do not hear words like these in Jeremiah, who cries out to God for the ridicule and abuse he endures. Our servant instead exudes conviction rooted in the Lord and the constant teaching God has provided. In the midst of a trial, the servant remains upright in faith and confident in God's presence.

Phil 2:5–11, the Christ Hymn, is presented by Paul as the first and ultimate model for a life of faith. Paul seems to set up his audience by speaking of one mind, which in the context of this letter does not imply a singular communal script as much as sharing in a single vision. After encouraging them to be of one mind, he begins to answer the natural question: how. "Be like Christ." Christ is the model of humility and kenosis and because of his obedience to God—even to death on a cross—God exalted him above all of creation. Later Paul will add Timothy, Epaphroditus and himself (of course) to the roster of Christians worth emulating. This understanding of Christ's exaltation through humility, and not atonement, is often overlooked, but may give room to widen a church's theological framework for interpreting Christ's acts and words in the gospels.

Every year congregations are given the splendid and daunting gift of being immersed in Christ's Passion. Matthew's interpretation begins at chapter 26:14 with Judas getting paid to betray Christ. Once the money changes hands, the audience waits with anticipation as the wheels are set in motion. Matthew follows Mark at the Lord's Supper and Jesus' subsequent proclamation of the disciples' betrayal. Matthew elaborates on Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane and gives Jesus a longer teaching during his betrayal, in which he reminds all in his presence of his divine power. A noticeable sidebar Matthew includes is the suicide of Judas. We learn the origin of the phrase "Potter's Field," the land purchased with the money Judas abandoned. A unique interjection to the broader story of Christ, it keeps the focus on the chief priests and elders. They would not offer Judas forgiveness when he sought it and later they stir up the crowd of anonymous voices against Jesus, further manipulating the process. However, lest we follow the straight route to pointing blame, we are reminded in Matthew's narrative that Christ's false trial, betrayal, denial of rights, abuse, and death on the cross are all elements of the scriptures being fulfilled. Whether read in full or simply in part, Christ's Passion is God at work, using sinful hands to

reveal the depth of sin and the depth of God's love for creation.

Pastoral Reflection
Whether it's called Palm Sunday or Passion Sunday in a given congregation, worship planners are challenged with how to approach the robust narrative of Christ's Passion. The gospel can certainly preach itself as various readers, or one well-rested orator, takes the parish into the details of Christ's trial and death on the cross. The abbreviated version (only 44 verses!) closes with a sacred and beloved phrase of Christian faith, the lone soldier—in Matthew with some cohorts—remarking out loud, "Truly this man was God's Son." The extended version ends with the nearly audible whoosh of air that comes with the sealing of the stone placed by the guard of soldiers. For either ending, the silence that follows such closing statements bears its own gospel message.

If preaching is to follow and a single port of entry is sought, this narrative is a treasure of opportunities. What do we accept in exchange for our faith in Christ? Where do we run when we desert Christ? How many times have we denied Christ? Can Judas be forgiven? How have we joined our voices with the crowds and turned on our Lord? What are the moments when the presence of the Son of God is unmistakable?

The homiletic possibilities are nearly endless, though any further reflection on the Passion comes with risk. Unlike some lectionary readings that require a little historical development or theological insight to make sense, for this Sunday our challenge is to stay out of the way. It is noteworthy that once the trial sequence begins, Jesus says very little; it is his detractors and accusers who fill the silence with inflated words. If the good news is to be spoken, it may be that even despite all human intervention, God's promise has been, and will be fulfilled. Humanity will be inevitably redeemed through Christ's death on the cross. JSE

Maundy Thursday
April 21, 2011

Exodus 12:1–4, (5–10), 11–14
Psalm 116:1–2, 12–19
1 Corinthians 11:23–26
John 13:1–17, 31b–35

First Reading
Exod 12:1–4 and following invites us into the chaotic and frantic homes of the Israelites as they are getting ready to run for their lives. The plagues that God used to sway Pharaoh have failed, or succeeded in making the LORD's name known to the powerful. This reading is the instruction manual of the Passover that God shares with Moses and Aaron, who will then distribute the message to the Israelites. As direction is given, we are offered a glimpse into the hectic air of those final hours in Egypt: One lamb for the whole family or for multiple families, if there was too much meat for one group to finish. It must be cooked quickly with virtually no prep as others are packing their bags. Once the lamb is ready to be eaten, the family does not even have time to sit; they need to eat standing up, able to run on God's cue. This, one of the most sacred meals shared in human history, was first carried out like many meals of active families today—hastily, amid confusion, and with no time to spare.

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is the source of our liturgical remembrance spoken over the Communion table. In the context of the letter, these four verses feel more like a Pauline aside, probably

because of their sacredness for modern worship. Paul was attempting to diffuse deep divides forming among the Corinthians and between him and the congregation. Food foibles are a clear line of disagreement as they are addressed multiple times, including here in chapter 11. Paul attempts to lift the chalice and paten above these petty arguments over class, status, and who is eating what when. The Holy Supper is set apart as a sacrament, a gift from Christ passed down to proclaim his gift of forgiveness and new life.

John 13:1–7 and following offers the reader another glimpse of John's interpretation of the Holy Supper. Unlike his brothers, Mark, Matthew, and Luke, John does not dwell on the breaking of the bread in the Upper Room. When he writes of the gift of Holy Communion, his focus is on the masses, as is revealed in chapter 6. By chapter 13 Jesus and the disciples are away from the crowds and Jesus, instead of reenacting the heights of a mountaintop experience, kneels low to wash their feet. One of his final acts for his closest followers is to make them ready for the labors that await them. Jesus broadens the scope of meals from simply eating with each other to a vision of serving and walking with each other.

Pastoral Reflection

Even before the national economy fell into a recession, multitudes of people were relearning the joys of camping. Granted, most campers were not choosing to sleep in tents but in the comfort of covered wagons called RVs, which carry them across the country in search of new sights and experiences. This style of travel has become so prevalent that the remnant that still use tents and backpacks need to be wary of what kind of campsite they are reserving, as most are now outfitted for hook-ups and multiple axles.

For those who continue to camp in the time-honored fashion of backpacking, and even for those who use mobile homes, one of the inherent challenges is how to manage the baggage. Especially when life is refined to a single nylon sack, the user must consider what to bring and what to leave behind, how it will be stored, how it will be packed, how it will be carried over hill and dale. Like a reliable credit card, people cannot leave home without their baggage.

Contrast this need to manage baggage with the Israelites in those final hours between captivity and freedom as recounted in Exodus. They have virtually no baggage, at least none that is itemized. Instead, God instructs the people to eat standing up, pants belted, sandals tied and staff in hand. They are about to enter a new life given through God's grace and they will begin that new life with no baggage.

How would it be to leave it all behind? The pictures on the wall and the chains of slavery hanging behind the door. The musical instruments and the echoes of masters yelling out their orders. Everything they hold dear and everything that has held them in place. The Israelites ate their meal almost breathlessly and walked out the door with only what they needed to run. Everything else was left behind.

There is something freeing to the thought of standing before God and walking through life with no baggage, bearing only what God gives us. Such a gift is found through the cross, but it cannot come without the cross. The old life that drives us into sin and death must be destroyed. The baggage of selfish ambitions, self-destructive behaviors and fractured relationships is taken up by Christ, who sets us aside from punishment and bears the curse created by us and for us. Everything that speaks to the past is nailed to the cross and killed.

And on the third day, the tomb will be empty and God's people will be free. Humans enjoy packing bags, accounting for their valuables and carrying their burdens around. It takes the liberating power of Christ to cut the straps, letting the weight fall away and allowing the person to finally recognize the freedom of new life given through our Lord. JSE

Good Friday
April 22, 2011

Isaiah 52:13—53:12
Psalm 22
Hebrews 10:16–25
John 18:1—19:42

First Reading

In Isa 52:13—53:12, the "suffering" servant returns to the worship space. In contrast to the servant passage from Passion Sunday (50:4–9a), the congregation is hearing a description of the servant from the outsider's perspective. From this vantage point, the moniker "suffering" is applied. It is noteworthy that in the first servant description in 49:1–6, the one bringing about God's restoration is identified as the nation of Israel (v.3). The book of Isaiah transitions through history from proclamation and judgment toward a vision of restoration through God's covenant. In the middle period, the nation is suffering the consequences of its sin. As James Cone notes in *God of the Oppressed*, "Israel's suffering must be understood in the light of the purpose and sovereignty of God wherein old Israel became a new being."[2] This theme of ongoing re-creation carries across worship on Good Friday.

Psalm 22 has been made famous by Christ, who is witnessed as crying out the first verse on the cross. As we continue beyond the first verse, the psalm makes a conversion from abandonment and suffering to words of hope and anticipation. In the final stanzas, the psalmist envisions a renewal experience in which the hungry will eat, God's name will be revered and God's promise will be upheld for generations. A question to ponder through this psalm: did Jesus cry out in his own agony or on behalf of God's people, anticipating the promised redemption?

Those of us of a Lutheran persuasion will recognize the opening lines of Heb 10:16–25; it is from Jeremiah 31, God's promise of a new covenant no longer on paper and stone but written directly onto our hearts. The author of Hebrews is building an argument for Christ as the fulfillment of that promise and the new source and norm of our worship of God. Compared to historic observances that created separation between followers and God, in the reading for Good Friday, Christ is described as the gateway to God. Thus, it is Christ who makes readily available the Creator who was once shrouded behind curtains and walls.

On Passion Sunday, Matthew's interpretation of Christ's trial and death is given. On Good Friday, it is John's turn to portray Jesus in his final hours. And once more, there is far more gospel than can be digested in these notes. However, one detail that makes John unique is Jesus' self-assurance of his task. Jesus does not ask for the cup to pass from him, he speaks more freely than in the Synoptics, and he does not cry to God but instead proclaims his own death before giving up his spirit.

2. James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 158.

Pastoral Reflection
Though every congregation claims to want guests and hopes that new folks will stumble through their doors, worship can be filled with pitfalls for the uninitiated. Hymnals can feel like coded mysteries. Physical movement can seem strange; the spoken words can make no sense. Worship can feel like challenging work when all a person is seeking is access to God.

Good Friday is a powerful occasion to consider Christ's role for both the faithful and those seeking God. John's Gospel offers good news in a myriad of ways, so it is worth focusing on a specific segment, such as John 18:1–11. This portion of the Passion is made more powerful when it is connected with chapter 10, which the regular parishioners will remember as the "I am the good shepherd" teachings. It is also includes, "I am the gate," which Jesus is enacting with the disciples and the soldiers in chapter 18.

On the one hand, thinking of Jesus as a gate is not quite as inspirational as envisioning him as being bread, a shepherd or a fruitful vine. Gates swing and creak and especially along grazing fields, they may be electrified. That is hardly a proper illustration of God's love through the cross. On the other hand, a gate in a grazing field serves two functions: it keeps the predators out and it gives the sheep access to the rich, life-giving land.

In John 18:1–11, John tells the worshipers that Jesus, after giving his high priestly prayer, leads his disciples across the Kidron Valley to a garden, which he and his followers entered. A garden is often a sanctuary designed for rest and renewal and this garden was likely defined by boundaries, which means entry was probably limited to one or two passages. Kind of like a lush, green, grazing field. When Judas brought his entourage of mercenary soldiers, Jesus "came forward" (v.4) to meet the threat at the entrance to the garden. The disciples stayed back, safely protected by Jesus, their gate.

Christ is surely the source of new life given from God. Jesus died on the cross and conquered death so no barrier or chasm could separate God's people from the love God offers the world. Hebrews gives parishioners a strong image of access.

John furthers the idea of access while revealing another side of God's love through Christ, which is protection from the hordes of devils that conspire to take life. Broken relationships, self-destructive behaviors, consuming diseases, and insurmountable debt all work against confidence in God's enduring presence. And all have no claim on the lives of God's children. On the cross, access to God is freely given. On the cross, the covenant that nothing will steal one single sheep from Christ's fold is fulfilled. The cross kills everything that is killing the people of this world, so that all that is left is the joy of re-creation. JSE

The Resurrection of the Lord
April 24, 2011

Acts 10:34–43 or Jeremiah 31:1–6
Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
Colossians 3:1–4 or Acts 10:34–43
John 20:1–18 or Matthew 28:1–10

First Reading
On this most blessed of days, it is almost unfortunate that a portion of Acts 10 is read, since Acts 10 can stand alone. The story of Peter encountering Cornelius is a remarkable turning point for the Christian faith and for the book of Acts. Verses 34–43 are Peter's joyous sermon to Cornelius, a Roman soldier who has gathered friends and family in his living

room to hear Peter's good news. The fact that Cornelius is a soldier not from Peter's corner of the world compels Peter to launch into his message with the note that God shows no partiality. He even sneaks in a quick verbal jab when he says in v.36 that God sent a message "preaching peace by Jesus Christ," a bold statement to make in front of a professional warrior. Acts 10 can change the complexion of Easter morning by inviting those in worship to consider that this promise of the empty tomb is for them as it is for brothers and sisters not yet in their midst.

Colossians reads and feels like a good Easter text. It is short, it falls in line with the message that faith begins and ends with Christ and it offers encouragement to keep the focus on Christ. It could easily be passed up on the way to the gospel. This reading does knit nicely with Acts and Matthew under the theme of worldly versus divine thinking. Throughout Colossians, the author does not admonish the congregation to pretend that it is above the realm of human existence. Instead, the message is to not become distracted by the trivialities of this world. This practice is lived out in Acts, when Peter is commanded by God to seek people outside his normal comfort zone. Living as people of faith, God's people are invited by Christ to live fully in the new creation through Christ, since the old life has been put to death.

Matthew 28:1–10 takes the source material of Mark 16 and makes several meaningful adjustments. Mary Magdalene and "the other" Mary are not going to the tomb to anoint Jesus. The surprise of the stone rolled away becomes a live action experience for the women, and the guards nearby. The guards are shaken by this event to such a point that they are rendered lifeless, which effectively removes them from the scene. The most dramatic difference between Mark and Matthew is the response of the women. Though they were fearful, they did not run in terror but in joy as they bore the message that Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again. The women, who expected to remain passive spectators, are transformed into the first evangelists of Christ's resurrection.

Pastoral Reflection

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Even if we do not say it out loud, this is the good news that all of us are expecting to hear on this day of days. And this is about all that people are hoping to hear. All who gather for the trumpets, the long, elegant processions and the chancels filled with lilies are hoping to hear the promise that this story of Christ dying and rising is more than a story, and that it is for all of us.

God's people come away from their couches and chores and overbooked weekends seeking a message that does not exist anywhere else in the world. Church leaders can secretly lament the fact that many who come with energy will disappear again until the next major holiday or family-related event, or we can cherish this one opportunity to provide the word that sustains the weary.

A 2000-year-old story in a 5000-year-old book can still break through the clutter and chaos that clouds God's people on a daily basis. Like the women who approach the tomb merely to stand near it, worshipers stick their heads into a space they remember from their youth or that resembles distant memories. Yet everyone who comes to this worship does not fully know what to expect.

Once the shock and awe of the stone being rolled away is over, the women, and the congregation, are invited to go

deeper. The angel says, "I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified." Whether we are regular members or occasional visitors, the act of searching and longing for good news is a part of life. Thus, people hunt for happiness at malls and shopping centers. People wander down paths of infidelity and addiction hoping to find relief from pain and disappointment.

Yet we soon discover that the living Christ is not in a dark, dead tomb. Christ has died to the darkness that consumes human existence, but death cannot claim the incarnation of God's love. Christ came to God's people to reveal the nearness of God. To demonstrate through miraculous acts and powerful words that the kingdom of heaven is not in bottles and self made traps, and that the dwelling of God is not difficult to reach. There are no entrance fees or exams to show proficiency and worthiness, God is simply here.

And when the acts and words were not enough, and they cannot be enough to re-create the world, Christ led his followers to the cross, dying for their past and rising so that new life can be lived. This good news is rewritten each day in faith as Christ comes to us in the depths of darkness and draws us back out of the tomb. JSE

Second Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2011

Acts 2:14a, 22–32
Psalm 16
1 Peter 1:3–9
John 20:19–31

First Reading

For the next three Sundays, our first readings will reveal the response of the once-passive crowds to the Pentecost event. This means, these snippets of Acts are being taken out of context. However, it is a fair extraction since Pentecost could not happen without Christ's resurrection.

Acts 2:14a, 22–32 is Peter's first public attempt at preaching. Reading his audience, Peter goes with what he knows—and they know—and he interprets Pentecost (or on this day, the resurrection) through the lens of scripture. Psalm 16 is referenced; a psalm that speaks of anticipation for what God will do for God's faithful. The psalm, ascribed to David, denotes his confidence that God has been with him, guiding his thoughts and his heart. It is the Lord who has granted him protection and will continue for all days to walk with him.

Through these words of David, Peter offers words about Christ, who is the fulfillment of God's work in the world. Peter makes the homiletic move to argue that David was speaking of Christ, and not himself, as he penned the psalm. We are invited into the scripture we know to hear it anew, from the perspective of faith in Christ. Peter is not arguing that the sacred texts of faith are being rewritten to suit a new cult but that Christ's resurrection (and the coming of the Holy Spirit to be named later) is the continuation of the promise made between God and humanity. As William Willimon writes, "The Old Testament is not 'Christianized' in this process, rather it is allowed to speak its own word about the coming salvation."[3]

1 Pet 1:3–9 follows this understanding as the author celebrates the "new birth into a living hope through … Christ"

3. William H. Willimon, *Acts*, *Interpretation:A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1988), 36.

(v.3). A reference is made to faith enduring a refiner's fire, such as trials and adversity that are alluded to but not identified. This opens the text for us to place ourselves somewhere between David's Psalm 16, which examples trust in God's presence and Peter's interpretation of the psalm, which declares that God has followed through on the covenant.

John 20:19–31 demonstrates that Christ is the continuation of God's ongoing involvement with human history through Christ's relentless pursuit of God's people. Even after his death and resurrection, when he is free to dwell far off at the right hand of God in some mythical heaven, Christ instead returns to be with his disciples. And when one of his friends is not there for his visit, Christ comes again to ensure that Thomas is a part of the passing of the peace.

Pastoral Reflection

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Such proclaims the holy remnant that has returned to worship after the exuberant experience of Easter morn. What will they find? A supply preacher? Slightly wilting lilies? A PowerPoint presentation cobbled together from past services?

The aura of Easter, and the fact that many of God's distant faithful will likely appear suddenly from the mysterious unknown, creates a lot of pressure to offer an extravagant experience that day. Church staff and preachers put great care and energy into organizing a worship service fit for celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord. Easter is a day that the Lord made, it is right to give thanks with loud sounding trumpets and glad tambourines. It is what worshipers and worship leaders hope to come and hear.

All the focus and determination that goes into Easter Sunday can then leave the second Sunday of Easter with only the fumes that remain. Also, in rural communities, May is a time to get back to the fields. The church calendar runs late into spring this year, encroaching on precious discing and planting time. This means, just as pastors may not be in worship, more than likely many rural parishioners are not, either.

And yet, worship this Sunday continues. And the story of Christ walking in the world of humans and all of our expectations continues. The resurrection continues. The parishioners may know from the prior Sunday that Mary Magdalene, after recognizing Jesus in the garden, runs back to share her good news with the disciples. The disciples know that Christ is risen indeed and still they continue to live in fear. Christ, defying the boundaries of locked doors and shuttered windows, comes to his faithful followers as they are. He passes through their gated entry and becomes for them the new passage through which they will be safe and protected from the thieves and scoundrels searching for them.

Christ defies their notion that he has abandoned them. Christ overcomes their expectation that Mary Magdalene's proclamation was simply a dream. Christ breaks through their presumption that the resurrection was a onetime event of history that they missed. And when Christ discovers that Thomas, maybe out on a bread run, is not a part of the celebration with his disciples, Christ returns again.

The resurrection continues. The power of sin is destroyed and new life is given even as the congregation is catching its breath. The tomb is still empty as God's faithful take to the fields and plant seeds for the harvest. Good news is being proclaimed through supply preachers and associate pastors who climb into the pulpit. Death is still vanquished even as the lilies

may succumb. For the sake of the world, Christ was not one and done. He comes back and remains with God's people as the journey of faith continues. JSE

Third Sunday of Easter
May 8, 2011

Acts 2:14a, 36–41
Psalm 116:1–4, 12–19
1 Peter 1:17–23
Luke 24:13–35

First Reading

Acts 2:14a, 36–41 is the second of three sneak peeks at the first significant response to the Holy Spirit. Through his sermon prior to this moment, Peter's description of Christ reveals our Lord primarily in the suffering servant role, less as the source of atonement for humanity's sins. At verse 37 Peter's audience is ready to respond to this good news of a humiliated and exalted Lord. The crowds offer a question a Luke-Acts reader might recognize from Luke chapter 3, "What should we do?" Luke's theology involves not simply contemplation but also a resultant action. First in the presence of John the Baptizer, who is promising the coming of God's redemption through baptism; again in response to Peter, who describes Christ as the continuation of God's unending covenant. Receiving and witnessing the good news of Christ compels a response; the people are anxious to give thanks for what they have heard.

1 Pet 1:17–23 offers remarkable language of being made holy through Christ. Though the author does not drift into the words of adoption, there is a hint of this thinking that implies a separation that has since been brought to a close. At the end of verse 16, slightly out of reach of today's pericope, the writer quotes God, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." This insight is developed as the comparison is repeatedly made between what is perishable and what is imperishable. It is because of Christ that God's people are able to stand upright in the presence of the Lord, confident that, though all else will fade away, God's word will endure.

Luke 24:13–35 takes the reader on a journey from good news through the realities of disbelief back to the table of Christ. This is similar to the passage made in Psalm 23, which will be visited during Easter 4A. Along the road to Emmaus, two disciples act as evangelists, even as their voices were no doubt tinged with skepticism. The good news of Christ is revealed through tainted linens scarred by past failures and disappointments. The disciples know the stories, yet they are struggling to believe. It is not enough for them to hear the good news themselves. On the same day that the empty tomb is discovered they are hiking out of town. However, Christ's presence has still shaped them as they follow prior missionary models from Luke chapters 9 and 10 and invite Christ into their home. Once the holy meal is prepared in their sight, their skepticism is transformed into joy.

Pastoral Reflection

Nothing beats a satisfying, rejuvenating meal. A plate filled with roast beef that falls apart on the fork, a pile of mashed potatoes drowning in butter, and a sprinkle of vegetables for the doctor's sake. Or for the vegetarians in the house, a large, steaming bowl of thick lentil soup with sweet potatoes, carrots, and pureed apples seasoned lightly with cumin and chili powder. Whether of plants or animals, a good meal elevates the experience from mere consumption to a confluence of gratification and joy.

That being said, most meals do not reach such heights. Hence, we keep track of our favorite recipes and long to revisit quality restaurants. Most of the time, a dining experience at home is limited to what can be prepared, plated and consumed within 30–45 minutes. Many families are not even able to eat together, instead passing each other in the hall or along the driveway. The joy of sharing a banquet is elusive and at times, imaginative.

In Luke, the disciples have disbanded their ranks after Jesus' death on the cross. Two have decided to walk to Emmaus from Jerusalem, approximately seven miles or two and a half hours away—plenty of time to digest the experience of Christ in their lives. As they are walking and talking, Jesus, cloaked in their disbelief, appears and joins them. They take the time to offer their witnessed events and once their message is complete, Jesus, still a mystery, interprets scripture for them. When they get to Emmaus, the two invite him in and as soon as he blesses and breaks the bread for their meal, the disciples recognize Christ.

It can sometimes seem like too much to equate the wafer and drop of wine shared on Sunday to the meals Christ shares in scripture, or to the fantastic feasts we enjoy at fine restaurants. However, Luke 24 affords an opportunity to dwell on this meal the Lutheran church describes as a sacramental gift from Christ. Only through this meal are the first denying disciples able to witness the risen Christ in their midst. In that moment they are transfixed on God's glory and the supper is elevated to thanksgiving and joy.

Two weeks after Easter, the weight of reality has settled with chaotic calendars and doubt that prevents us from recognizing Christ in our midst. Through this haze Christ comes to his followers where they are, he hears their stories and he invites them to eat with him. As Robert Rimbo writes in *Worship Matters*, "Here, in a morsel of bread and a sip of wine is a feast to satisfy our deepest hunger and thirst."[4] Christ responds with what we are seeking, that we may know that he is near. JSE

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 15, 2011

Acts 2:42–47
Psalm 23
1 Peter 2:19–25
John 10:1–10

First Reading

This Sunday is the third in which Acts 2 is read, continuing the response of the disciples and the newly minted Christians to the good news of Christ (contextually in Acts, Pentecost). The reading for this day, verses 42–47, is borderline obnoxious in its utopic vision of the early church. Relief comes quickly in the book as we soon learn that this commune style of faith life does not survive many chapters. Peter will be at odds with the Jewish council. Peter and Paul will do theological battle over entrance rites. Several apostles will lose their lives for their faith. The model does not hold. However, it is still a model that carries importance with congregations, even if only in nostalgic, rewritten memories. Yet, the commune collapses and based on the continuation of Acts, Luke seems to understand that fantasies cannot last.

4. Robert A.Rimbo, *Why Worship Matters* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 76.

1 Pet 2:19–25 brings the suffering servant language back as a means to describe Christ. (An aside: the concept of the "suffering" servant runs rampant across these two months. Might be an interesting, long-term theme for those of us who are into theme preaching.) And the author offers an answer to why Christ had to die: redemption. This reading is similar in tone to Phil 2:5–11, the Christ Hymn, in that the author of this reading sets up Christ as a perfect example of living in faith. There is also a hint of Jesus' own Sermon on the Plain, Luke 6:32–36, when he asks the crowd, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?" The author of this letter is carrying forward one of the fundamental questions of discipleship: what does it mean to follow Christ? Like fellow scribes of the Christian Writings, this writer postulates that, because Christ has gone first and destroyed what kills human life, his followers can walk with conviction that they will not be lost.

John 10:1–10 takes the worshipers back to one of Christ's lesser-known yet remarkable sayings, "I am the gate for the sheep" (v.7). Seeing the chapter and verse prompt in the bulletin, some may expect to hear about Jesus the shepherd. On the other hand, the notion that Jesus can, and does, function as a gate may be gaining some traction by this week in the Easter season. This reading has been referenced covertly by the lectionary on Good Friday (John 18:1–11) and the Second Sunday of Easter (John 20:19–31). This Sunday may be the one to dig into the theological model of Jesus as the passage through which people encounter God freely, as well as the barrier that protects humanity from the destruction that comes with sin.

Pastoral Reflection

"It's a beautiful day for a ballgame…let's play two!" Those who grew up in the Chicagoland area have probably heard this line from Hall of Famer Ernie Banks, either to their dismay or joy. It was his catch phrase while he played his career as a Cub. His love for the game ran so deep that even with losing records and dismal teammates, Banks could not help himself. He had to return to the baseball diamond.

Yes, it's true, some of us reading this reflection actually don't like baseball, as strange as it can be to consider. So I apologize, but I'll keep going anyway. Because by mid-May, the season has now entered full swing (yes, that sad pun was intentional).

The return of baseball brings with it "a new summer and a new season stretching forever in all directions."[5] It is a rather romantic sentiment, especially for those who do not appreciate the sport. Yet, for those of us who have spent the darkness of winter anticipating a higher sun, green grass and the sound of ash bats, revisiting the season of baseball promises a fresh perspective.

What does this have to do with the Fourth Sunday of Easter? Perhaps nothing at all. Or it offers a way to consider how God's people approach liturgical seasons. The rhythms of the worship calendar shape the experience of scripture, prayer, songs, and even the sacraments. The words sound different, the bread bears a distinctive taste and the music moves the senses in a new direction. Parishioners may not articulate the change like a baseball fanatic waiting for May, yet we know from deep within that Easter proclaims Christ in a way all together different from Lent.

On this Sunday, the preacher and the parish encounter this transition bluntly

5. Wilfrid Sheen, foreword to *9 Innings*, by Daniel Okrent (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), xi.

as Psalm 23 is read. This psalm appears first on the Fourth Sunday in Lent, a liturgical time of questions marked in deep purples and stark spaces. It comes to the congregation still three Sundays away from the mystery of the empty tomb. Psalm 23 works with the emotions of darkness and longing for the reprieve promised in the resurrection.

This Sunday the psalm returns to us, this time framed by white and gold trimmings, abundant flowers and lots of light. The psalmist sounds more assured of his (or her) place in God's presence. The passage through the darkest valley has already occurred; now is the feast and celebration of new life around Christ's table. Though the promise of good news has always been in the words, it may be received with greater clarity by the surroundings of the season. For a Sunday, the congregation is invited to remember when hope still seemed to be a distant concept and has now become a blessed assurance. JSE

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 22, 2011

Acts 7:55–60
Psalm 31:1–5, 15–16
1 Peter 2:2–10
John 14:1–14

First Reading

Acts 7:55–60 does not offer a positive picture for any disciple considering Stephen's Ministry. This reading pulls the hearers toward two significant witnesses to Christ, Stephen and Saul. Though portrayed as enemies, they share the common bond of being theological innovators. They each faced significant opposition from traditional religious systems. In Acts 6:14, Stephen is accused of changing "the customs that Moses has handed on to us." This is the primary charge that will lead to his death by stoning. Similarly, the Holy Spirit commissions Paul in chapter 13 and Paul then heads to Gentile lands to reveal God's presence. His methodology of freely accepting Gentiles without all the rites for Jewish association gets back to the Jerusalem Council and he is called to defend himself. Their frustration with him sounds eerily familiar; they want Paul to "keep the law of Moses" (15:5).

If we are looking for an overarching theme this Sunday, geology might be a good one. The language of stones continues in 1 Pet 2:2–10. The letter writer is bolstering his audience for the persecutions that can come with convicted faith. Using scripture to describe Christ, the image of our Lord as *petras* or *lithos*—stone—is offered three times, in three unique forms. Christ as the crown jewel of Zion, as the cornerstone, and as the stone that topples all who try to cut their own paths to righteousness. This reading encourages disciples who are walking with insecurity to know that Christ is unavoidable. Christ on the highest hill—he is the base of every structure, he is an unavoidable obstacle to sin; he might as well be named so that all can know his identity. The writer then adds some flowery adjectives that demonstrate a shift in power and authority from the established, ruling classes to God's people, that they may "proclaim the mighty acts" of Christ (2:9).

This Sunday is not light on controversial theology. John 14:6 is widely known, thanks in no small part to Christians who have interpreted Jesus' statement as a proof of faith. In the context of discerning a person's commitment to Christ, even the most well-intended followers could begin to sound like the Jerusalem Council. Jesus

can be read as a gatekeeper protecting God, or another way of reading this verse is that Jesus is offering access to the mystery of faith in God. This verse, as prominent as it is, can also distract from Jesus telling the pragmatic Philip and his friends that those who follow Christ will do "greater works than these" (14:12). That is not a statement of a static kingdom but of an ever-evolving and innovating relationship with God.

Pastoral Reflection

What makes Martin Luther so cool? Oh, let us count the ways. We could start with his foundational theological tenet that we are all "justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:16). Immense freedom was rediscovered when Luther shifted the focus of salvation away from us and back to God, where it belongs. Or maybe it's his determination to reform religious practices in order to make Christ accessible to normal people. And how that almost linear focus drove him to translate the Bible into a common language. The Bible now can be found in nearly every corner of human life, even hotel rooms. As we encounter one of the fathers of modern theology, over and over we discover a new wideness to God's mercy and new depth to God's love.

With that in mind, it is interesting that one of Luther's most beloved acts is when he refused to dialogue. "Here I stand," his oft-overused proclamation at the Diet of Worms, has been exploited, strangely, as a defense against new concepts about God, new ideas for ministry and new methods of proclaiming scripture. Ignoring some evidence that Luther never actually said these words, their prominence has moved beyond their history. A statement of conviction can also be used as a refusal to listen to others.

We all have our lines in the sand. We have our limits. There is a point or destination or way of thinking that is simply too far afield for our comfort. Our Acts reading, starring Stephen and Saul, reflects what happens when we cross the lines of others, or someone steps over our own self-made limits. The expansive horizon of faith in Christ quickly narrows to measureable units, like the number of stones we can fit in one hand. Stephen muddied the waters of his tradition and was summarily punished. Our instinct is to side with him, since it is not right for anyone to have to die for his faith in Christ. We have our enemy, and his name is Saul.

Except, Saul, like Stephen, was also defending his faith in God. We may not rise up and rear back, but we are prone to strong actions when our convictions are pushed. Liberation theologians rail against perceived passivity; confessional Lutherans revolt against interpretations shaped by what seem to be cultural norms. Battles ensue over liturgical rites, pieties and even denominational heritages.

Stephen and Saul, saint and sinner, we find ourselves on either side of the firing line at all times in faith. Yet Christ grants salvation to both of our heroes, as he offers unending grace to all of us stubborn radicals of the faith. JSE

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 29, 2011

Acts 17:22–31
Psalm 66:8–20
1 Peter 3:13–22
John 14:15–21

First Reading

Mars Hill would make a great name for a church (for those concerned, yes, I know

about the one in Seattle and the other one in Grand Rapids). Acts 17:22–31 is the well-known story of Paul standing surrounded by philosophers and other deep thinkers of the time in a center (Areopagus) built for dialogue about life. Though this reading contains a powerful message about identifying God in the midst of life already in progress, it is worth mentioning that this entire scene came about by accident. Paul arrived in Athens while escaping from an angry mob. His protectors whisked him to safety in Athens and while he waited there for his entourage, he noticed the idols being worshipped (17:16). Paul being Paul, he couldn't pass up an opportunity to proclaim Christ. He garnered the attention of the local academics, was invited to Areopagus to speak and some in the crowd joined his ministry team. Paul's love for Christ compelled him to share his gospel story at an unscheduled stop and God was witnessed in a new way for the Athenians.

Psalm 66:8–20 gives us another taste for being driven in faith to draw others into witnessing God. The psalmist begins this portion of the song with praise for what God has done for the whole community. The writer's joy becomes personal at verse 13 when he is not able to contain his exuberance and makes broad promises in God's name. The psalm then becomes invitational as the writer turns to his neighbors, friends, and family and proclaims how God has responded to his own prayers and thus, will surely hear theirs.

1 Pet 3:13–22 offers some rationale, or fortitude, for standing firm in proclaiming faith. The writer uses baptismal theology as the reason why Christ's followers need not tremble and hesitate to speak God's name. Baptism, which comes out of the same waters that re-created the world, recalibrates us to think as Christ. Because Christ has been resurrected, we have nothing left to fear.

As we are two weeks away from Pentecost, this teaching about the Paraclete functions almost as a primer of what is still to come. Laying out the varied definitions of the Paraclete might be fun; it would provide the congregation an opportunity to examine their own understandings. Jesus describes the Paraclete as the "Spirit of truth" (v.17), which is to say, Jesus is giving this new advocate the same title as he gives himself. Returning to the controversial verse 6 of this chapter, Jesus declares himself "the way and the truth and the life." Now another expression of God's presence is being revealed, who will do the work of Christ while shaping his disciples to reflect God's love. As Gail O'Day writes, "Jesus was also a Paraclete—what the Paraclete does is not new, but is a continuation of the work of Jesus."[6]

Pastoral Reflection

The end of May heralds transition and a renewed assurance of Christ's presence. Fields are planted. Equipment will be cleaned and stored. Grain farmers now begin the summer-long process of anticipation. Schools are closing down for the year. College students have graduated or moved home. Families prepare for their first trip to the cabin after they complete their circuit of graduation and confirmation parties.

In the life of the congregation, this is an unsettling time of adjustment. The Easter proclamation is still resonating through the walls and halls of the building, and yet, the voices are beginning to diminish. Folks are beginning their

6. Gail O'Day," The Gospel of John," *New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 747.

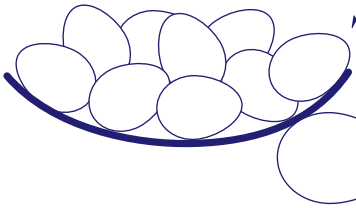
seasonal exodus away from worship and toward plans of water skiing, fishing, and simply getting away from the stresses of their education-oriented calendars. Soon Sunday celebrations will take on a feel of the gathering of the holy remnant, which carries unspoken feelings of disappointment, abandonment, and that old, old friend of faith, doubt.

What does it mean for the rest of us that we have been left behind to hold down the fort for our friends and loved ones? A lot of emotions begin to creep into the space that has been vacated by vacationing parishioners. Very few of those emotions are uplifting or gospel-centered.

Maybe this is the shape that Jesus' disciples found themselves in toward the end of John's Gospel. Jesus has been promising to leave them, to go where they cannot follow, but they are not to worry because he is in them and he is in the Father and the Father is in him, whatever that means. Around them are religious and political persecutors who will go after Jesus, and hunt them down next. Though Jesus has been preaching to the masses and declaring that access to God will be made free for all, by chapter 14 the masses are gone. It is only Jesus and his closest friends, his holy remnant.

Surely what they want is what all of us faithful want, assurance that Christ is with us. That this work that we do will continue and that these slowly quieting worship services are still worthy of Christ. We can speak with confidence of the resurrection in April. By the end of May, our conviction is less assertive.

We need this Gospel reading from John to hear the promise that Christ's ministry will endure. Christ's resurrection destroys every sting of sin, even our distrust that God can do wonders through a few. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming for you" (14:18). This promise strikes loud as each week shifting priorities empty another pew. With the Spirit of Truth walking among us, we can pray for our friends to find the rest they seek, we can sing the praises that still fill our hearts and anticipate with the farmers the joy of the promised harvest to come. JSE



The Tithing and Stewardship Foundation

Programs offered through the Tithing and Stewardship Foundation at LSTC promote the practice of proportionate giving, encouraging greater spiritual growth in the sharing of all our talents and gifts. The Tithing and Stewardship Foundation generously underwrites the workshops.

Saturday, April 2, 2011 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.	**Preaching and Stewardship** A one-day workshop to be held in conjunction with the Northern Illinois Synod. This event will include lecture and workshops on preaching on the topic of stewardship.
Saturday, April 30, 2011 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Spring Stewardship event hosted by LSTC and the Metropolitan Chicago Synod on the LSTC campus.

For more information and to register, go to **http://tithing.lstc.edu/** or contact Laura Wilhelm at lwilhelm@lstc.edu 773-256-0741.

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