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Preaching Helps

Mission Today

What does it mean for the church to be in mission today?

The present issue of *Currents* is a "miscellaneous" one in which the major articles have not been commissioned or selected according to some planned theme. All the same, the five articles published here work together in intriguing ways to help us get at the question: What does it mean for twenty-first-century North American Christians—many of us Lutherans—to be the church in mission? What kind of "missional landscape" do we find out there? Given this landscape, how shall the church be the church? For those of us called to preach, how shall we go about it?

Nathan Frambach gets the conversation started by asking what being "in mission" might look like for North American Lutheran Christians in societies in which "the church has been de-centered." He challenges us to understand the church in ways that are agile, mobile, participatory—more like the kiosk at the farmer's market (where people stop, talk, and make friends) than the big-box store (where people are simply expected to walk in).

Today it may be a commonplace to say that the (supposedly) once Christian West has become a mission field, but that has not always been the case. **Patrick Johnson** reminds us of a great prophet of the Christian mission to modern Western culture, the missionary and ecumenical theologian Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998). Newbigin wrote no monograph specifically on the task of *preaching* in the encounter between the gospel and what he saw as pagan Western culture; Johnson has helpfully gathered and ordered many of Newbigin's reflections on the homiletical task, drawing from sources that span four decades.

For Newbigin, "the content of preaching is Jesus Christ." But how does that preaching intersect with the hopes, fears, and dreams of those who hearken to it? What precisely is it that Christ accomplishes for us? Such questions lead us directly into soteriological reflection, and in these pages **George Murphy** directs our attention to what are often called "theories of the atonement." Don't be intimidated by the latinate word "fiducial" in the title of his essay! In fact, Murphy's phrase "fiducial influence" is a remarkable (Lutheran!) twist on the "moral influence" label given to Peter Abelard's understanding of atonement—an understanding that many of us have found attractive as a critique of and alternative to Anselm's "satisfaction" theory. Murphy gives us some helpful new language; remember that you saw it first in *Currents*!

The church is called to faithful discipleship in settings in which we are keenly aware of difference and of disparities in power. **Mary Streufert** asks: Is a genuine "hospitality of difference" possible? How are power disparities to be addressed? Streufert's reflections on these questions take us deep into stories from the Gospel of Mark, into a rich vein of current scholarship, and—very hospitably!—into a moving account of an occasion on which *she* was on the receiving end of lavish, assumption-smashing, power-upsetting hospitality.

In a reflection written twenty years after graduating from seminary, **David Housholder** challenges himself and his readers to articulate their "life message," that is, to preach, teach, and write from a "'deep place'…of great authenticity and integrity" where God is present. Several themes of this issue of *Currents* are sounded again in Housholder's reflection: the need to survey the missiological landscape and find fresh paths into and through it; the encounter with difference and disparities of power; the task of speaking intelligibly about the atonement; the call to preach with integrity.

May God bless *your* reflections on what it means to be the church in today's world!

Kathleen D. Billman

Kurt K. Hendel

Mark N. Swanson

Editors

Being Church Today: Living God's Mission Where We Are[1]

Nathan Frambach
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Frontier living, old and new

Wilhelm Loehe, founder of the institution at which we gather this afternoon, was apt to say, "Mission is nothing but the one church of God in motion,"[2] a phrase which in capsule reflected a missional ecclesiology that served Loehe and his missionally minded cohorts well in their particular frontier context (mid-1800s in these United States). Now, in this new, emerging frontier context in which the churches of North America find themselves, a missional ecclesiology must emerge *in practice* that is more deeply Trinitarian and eschatological; more organic and fluid *as it lives*. The question that will drive such an emergence is, "What does it mean to be the church *as we live*?" Not as we think or remember or long for, but as we live as the people of God. Mission in this new frontier context is the way a people sent by a sending God live every day, "on mission," as they risk living for the reign of God and bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ "24/7" as many are apt to say. What God has done in Jesus Christ for the sake of the creation and all of its people cannot be undone; it is *pro nobis*, for us. It is this central proclamation of the Christian faith to which the Holy Spirit continually points us, and, in turn, to which we are called continually to point others. What matters first and perhaps most is *who* we are—a people created, chosen, cleansed, claimed, and called by God in Christ—and we are who we are, for better or for worse, all of the time, not just on Sunday mornings or Wednesday evenings. On the new wilderness roads emerging all around us, being "on mission" looks, I believe, strikingly similar to what happened on that much older wilderness road in the Acts of the Apostles (8:26-40). Someone is sent (and goes) to an unexpected place along the way, is encountered in a deeply mutual and relational way by an other, and in their midst the Spirit works mutual transformation.

I want to suggest that we have *at least* two fundamental foci in our DNA as Lutheran Christians in these United States—a people sent to and living in particular places that are historically conditioned. There is a strong missionary impulse to bear witness to the Christian gospel "Lutheranly," remaining faithful to the primary accents of our Lutheran

1. This article is the address given by the Rev. Dr. Nathan C.P. Frambach on the occasion of his installation and tenure as associate professor of Youth, Culture and Mission at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa on 1 November (the feast of All Saints) 2007.

2. Wilhelm Loehe, *Three Books concerning the Church, offered to friends of the Lutheran Church, for consideration and discussion*, (trans. Edward T. Horn, Reading, Penn.: Pilger Publishing House, 1908), 59.

heritage: the doctrine of justification by grace through faith and the centrality of a theology of the cross; a deep commitment to the efficacy of the word of God as both law and promise; an understanding of the human as *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time justified and sinful); a profound sensibility about the priesthood of all believers and a clear understanding of *vocatio* (calling) as the primary means of the ministry of the baptized. This missional impulse with its theological scaffolding is coupled with a built-in sensibility about learning to navigate the realities of frontier living. It's one of the mantras we recite (and believe) here at Wartburg Seminary: attending to context. Many of our Lutheran forebears knew well how to migrate their faith into a new place. They became bilingual, both literally and figuratively, learning a new language as well as the customs and mores of new people. They learned not only how to survive in but also how to adapt to a new environment, all the while holding onto those threads indispensable to their beliefs and way of life. Perhaps many of our forebears were culturally savvy before adapting to a new place was considered savvy. Regardless, we must affirm, celebrate, and build on these dual commitments—the strong missional impulse and the knack for navigating new frontiers. However, we must also "fess up" to another reality: the landscape has changed.

An emerging missiological landscape

The phrase *paradigm shift*, although overused, seems an accurate description for the acute changes that the Christian churches attempted to navigate in the twentieth century. Underlying these changes was a massive shifting of the tectonic plates, or, culturally speaking, what Graham Ward calls a "cultural sea change."[3] This should come as no surprise; the church had a place, had *its* place in Christendom, and then lost this place. In short, during Christendom Christianity and the Christian church as an institution had a culturally supported, central place in the public life of American society. There existed an accommodating, intimate relationship between the "church" and the predominant culture of the larger society. This relationship led to an environment in which these two entities, "church" and "culture," were functionally one and the same. We are no longer able to talk (if, in fact, one ever could) about culture without using the plural, "cultures." We live within what some have called a "pluriverse" of cultures determined by geography, race, ethnicity, class, worldview, and the like. All of us inhabit and are shaped by a variety of cultures at the same time. Given the impact of some large, powerful realities—secularization, cultural and religious pluralism, globalization, the massive advances in technology that created the digitally-enhanced world we now experience in this Infomedia age—the church

All of us inhabit and are shaped by a variety of cultures at the same time.

3. Graham Ward, "Introduction: 'Where We Stand'," in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), xv.

has been de-centered. Under increasing pressure from these aforementioned powerful realities, the cultural underpinnings that once supported it having been swept away (a shifting of the tectonic plates!), the church practiced some ecclesiastical free agency and swapped its central place in public life for a prominent place in the private domain of life.

Another phenomenon helped define the emerging missiological landscape. As early as 1942, William Temple, then Archbishop of Canterbury, pointed to the emergence of worldwide Christianity and named it the "great new fact of our time."[4] The "fact" to which he was referring was but an incipient reality at the time: Christianity had been transformed. No longer confined to the Northern Atlantic context, it had become a global mélange of churches, existing in virtually every major cultural reality on earth. For many years now, David Barrett has generated a statistical review for the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. How's this for an eye-opener: In 1900, Christians in Europe/Northern America comprised 77 percent of the world Christian population. By sometime in 1998 Christians in Europe/Northern America comprised 38 percent of the world Christian population. By the year 2025, it is projected that Christians in Europe/Northern America will comprise 27 percent of the world Christian population.[5]

More recently, Philip Jenkins has narrated the transformation that is taking place in world Christianity.[6] Notice that churches in non-Atlantic regions (Africa, India, South America, etc.) are growing, exponentially in some cases, while many (most?) established Christian traditions are losing numbers, which has become especially pronounced in recent decades. At the same time many (most?) of these established Christian traditions are coming to terms with the awareness that Christendom—the dominance of the Christian religion and institutional churches in the West—is finally over. Douglas John Hall documents this with painstaking detail in his trilogy *Thinking/Professing/Confessing the Faith*.[7]

These changes are difficult to grasp, and maybe even harder to digest, for many of us—particularly members and leaders of the so-called "mainline churches" in North America. Tribes like the Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Episcopalians specifically enjoyed the benefits of establishment and protection under the cover of Christendom. For these churches, the paradigm shift we have been discussing is extremely challenging. Navigating this emerging missiological landscape will involve discerning and experimenting with approaches to ministry that will radically challenge many present understandings of what it means to be the church today. I want to name four such challenges (opportunities?) here:

4. Stephen Neill and Owen Chadwick, *A History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth, UK and New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 14-15.

5. David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1998," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 22,1 (January 1998): 26-27.

6. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

7. Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989); *Professing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); *Confessing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

- Learning how to do theology in unaccustomed ways. This will expose different sources for theological reflection, such as David Dark's recent work, *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons, and other Pop Culture Icons*, or similarly, *Eyes Wide Open* by William Romanowski, both of which focus on the search for God in popular culture.[8] Graham Ward points to the opening that has been created for creative theological sources and to those who are leading the way:

  > The principles of established order have become questionable and what remains is a "hole, opened by a society that calls itself into question…." I call this "hole" the implosion of secularism and it is the many consequences of that implosion that postmodernism explores and postmodernity expresses. The implosion of the secular has also facilitated a new return to the theological and a new emphasis upon reenchantment: a return not signaled by theologians but by filmmakers, novelists, poets, philosophers, political theorists, and cultural analysts.[9]

- Discovering how to relate to a context genuinely and deeply, as we see in the 17th chapter of Acts (Paul at the Areopagus). Today we relate to our church de-centered context—that of previously Christian and then secularized western cultures—as marginalized outsiders, which means that we begin with a leadership posture characterized by humility, patience, and servanthood.
- Learning and practicing new forms of communication, beginning with deep listening and mutual dialogue (often in unconventional places and spaces) as the first move toward genuine understanding. (Here I think of the work of hermeneutical phenomenologist Hans-Georg Gadamer.) This exposes the need for the communication of the Christian message to be intelligible, at the heart of which very well might be the recovery of gospel as communal story or narrative into which the hearer is invited to enter and to dwell.
- Discerning and asking hard, honest questions about the purpose of the church from the perspective of particular traditions, and then thinking and acting differently in terms of how to go about fulfilling that purpose, once discerned. Professor Cheryl Peterson suggests that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) does not yet have an agreed-upon ecclesiology.[10] This lack of an agreed-upon ecclesiology has led to a number of difficulties for the ELCA, most significantly, how to address the challenge of mission today.

  > So where might Lutherans turn in order to reclaim a theological understanding of the nature and mission of the church for the challenges of our context today, especially that of mission? There seem to be two main approaches and an emerging third…. 1) reclaim the Reformers' view of the church as given in the Lutheran Confessional writings, especially Articles 7 & 8 of the Augsburg Confession (1530) as sufficient for a contemporary Lutheran ecclesiology; 2) recover the ecclesiology of the "Great Tradition,"

8. David Dark, *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons, and other Pop Culture Icons* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2002); William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2001).

9. Ward, "Introduction," in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, xv.

10. See Cheryl Peterson, "Whither Lutheran Ecclesiology?" *Trinity Seminary Review* 27 (2006): 107-20.

> classical Christianity interpreted and practiced in accord with the traditions of the early church; or 3) develop a "missional ecclesiology" from a Trinitarian understanding of *missio Dei*….[11]

Professor Peterson opts for #3, and I think that she is spot on. The task before us is to expose and respond to the missional challenges and opportunities that we face *today*.

The fact of the matter is, if we are to be true to our historical legacy as Lutheran Christians in these United States—a people possessing a strong missional impulse coupled with a knack for navigating new frontiers—then we must wrestle with this missional paradigm shift. Why? Because it defines the North American religious context in which we are called to live God's mission today. The challenge before us is, at its core, a missiological challenge. There has emerged around us a substantial, global conversation about the mission of the church, at the heart of which is a shift *from* a primary focus on the church and its expansion *to* a focus on God as a missionary God.

Re-framing church

Such a shift in focus to God as a missionary God has had tremendous implications for the life and ministry of Christian communities and their leadership. If God is a missionary God, then the church is called to be a missional church and Christian leaders are called to exercise missional leadership. This way of thinking about and imagining Christian life and practice has come to be called the theology of the *missio Dei*, or the sending of God. In its infancy this "theology" was significantly influenced by Karl Barth in the West. More recently, the work of David Bosch has been most influential; his 1991 book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* is already a classic.[12] We should hear from Bosch at least once:

> Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the missio Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another "movement": Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.[13]

In short, no Trinity, no mission; no Trinity, no church. As Justo González so nicely puts it (quoting Roman Catholic bishop Christopher Mwoleka), for too long "Christians have made the basic mistake of approaching the Trinity as a puzzle to be solved rather than as an example to be imitated."[14] The movement to mission is rooted in the very life of the Triune God. God knows relationship within God's self, that is, "immanently." Yet this deeply relational God is one who lives by sharing. "If the Trinity is the doctrine of a God whose very life is a life of sharing, its clear consequence is that those who claim belief in such a God must live a similar life."[15] God, in creating, seeks relationship beyond God's self, that is, "economically." Catherine LaCugna points out that both will and desire seem to be involved in how God relates:

> The reason for creation lies entirely in

11. Ibid., 109.

12. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

13. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

14. Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 113.

15. Ibid., 114.

> the unfathomable mystery of God, who is self-originating *and* self-communicating love. While the world is the gracious result of divine freedom, God's freedom *means necessarily being who and what God is.* From this standpoint the world is not created ex nihilo but *ex amore, ex condilectio*, that is out of divine love.[16]

Out of God flows love into the creation and all of its people. In particular, the people of God are called in love to share this love. Can you see where this gets us? The purpose of mission and evangelical living is not merely for the sake of the church. Rather, it is to express God's faithfulness to God's saving intention for the entire creation.

Friends, the landscape has changed, due in no small part to those powerful realities about which we spoke earlier: secularization, globalization, cultural and religious pluralism, and this digital age in which we now reside. In so many ways it's a big world getting smaller and coming closer all of the time. We now have at least one generation in these United States (most likely two), as well as in many other parts of the world, that has been bathed in bytes since birth. A new frontier context has emerged, and we are once again immigrants, in a way, in a world that we do not always understand. And we live in the midst of so many people who are, literally, immigrants—just as our ancestors once were.

In this new frontier context there are new wilderness roads to which and along which we are sent to bear witness to the reign of God, which broke into the world in and through the person of Jesus Christ. It is this reality, the inbreaking of the reign of God, which the gospel announces; and we are called and sent to bear this good news, the same message that Jesus carried with him: "The Kingdom of God has come near" (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 10:1–12). Sinners are forgiven, and enemies too for that matter; the last are first; the least are greatest. There are people to be loved, and words of healing and hope to be spoken. What does the reign of God look like? It looks like the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5—7), and perhaps specifically the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1–11), as well as the vivid picture captured in the Revelation to John (e.g., Rev. 21:1–7).

A new frontier context has emerged, and we are once again immigrants, in a way, in a world that we do not always understand.

The landscape is not the only thing that has changed. Remember the profound and widely shared shift that has taken place in how one understands mission, a shift *from* a primary focus on the church and its expansion *to* a focus on the evangelizing mission of the Triune God. In short, the modern missionary movement, which is responsible for our being here today as Lutherans in these United States, focused primarily on the former—the church and its expansion. In this emerging missiological landscape we are compelled to focus on God as a missionary God and

16. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 355.

the church as that community sent by God the sending One to embody a more fluid witness in new frontier contexts—on mission wherever, whenever.

The church does not *do* mission—it *is* mission, by its very nature and calling it lives as God's sent people. Worship centered in word and sacrament, life as a distinctive community, the concrete demonstration of God's love in acts of service—all bear witness to the good news of God in Jesus Christ. The church is sign and foretaste of this good news, at the heart of which is the inbreaking of the reign of God. The church is called to witness to, participate in, and even celebrate God's mission, all the while knowing that the "mission" does not belong to the church, but to God.

> We need to learn how to be a place, yet leave our church buildings and live God's mission.

Leadership re-framed

God intends Christianity to be more than a system of belief or a commodity that can be programmed, packaged, and marketed as the ever-elusive new and improved quick fix. Christian beliefs and practices are intended to foster a way of life as followers of Jesus Christ that *in turn* send us into the world to imitate the forgiveness, mercy, and love of God. Drawn by the Spirit, our cause and deepest passion is to attend to the reign of God within community and in God's world. Community in Jesus Christ is not something we create or can coerce people into; it is a gift to which the Spirit calls people. In an authentic Christian community, there are no insiders and outsiders, but only souls from both far off and nearby, who are being drawn closer to God and one another by the love of Christ.

So how does this happen? What does it mean to be a public outpost for mission? What does it mean to be the church today? I believe that it is less about being tied to a building and more about participating in a way of life. It means an understanding of "the church" that is more nimble, more agile, perhaps even more mobile, yet deeply rooted in God's word of promise in Jesus Christ. If we are the gathered and gathering community as the people of God, then we need to learn better how to go out the out door—living God's mission wherever, whenever. We need to learn how to be a place, yet leave our church buildings and live God's mission. We are called to be good news in God's world. In fact, one of the distinctive marks of evangelical living today is the need to live the good news before attempting to speak it. We gather as God's people, we listen to God's story, we leave because we are sent to "become what we receive," the body of Christ—listening to others, loving our neighbors, living God's story.

The challenge for missional, Christian leaders communicating in the emerging culture is to dwell in God's story and listen to the stories of others before using the wonderful benefits of storytelling to tell God's grand story. Although the practice of *martyria* (bearing witness) is central to evangelical living, there is one important caveat: in our emerging cultural context today, one must earn the right to speak

the good news of Jesus Christ to another. Evangelical living begins with evangelical listening, that is, being present and attending to others in such a way as to build trust and lead people to deeper faith questions. This approach takes time and patience; there is no model or magic formula. This is a challenge for all of us who live in the age of the quick fix.

There are challenges before us, no doubt—challenges that call us out of our private enclaves and comfort zones and into seemingly unorthodox, even "profane" settings. We can better immerse ourselves in particular contexts—cafés, music lounges, pubs, Facebook—in order to set up "listening posts," to pay attention, observe, listen, learn, befriend, and join in dialogue with others. In so doing we will live into our identity as the people of God, cultivating Christ-centered relationships as we stand in between God's normative story and the stories of others around us.

Let me return to a question that I posed much earlier: What does it mean to be the church *as we live*? Where are the new wilderness roads that are emerging around us? Where are the new wilderness roads to which you are being called, along which perhaps you are already walking? They are everywhere and all around us. Generating a response to these and so many other questions will not mean thinking more, but thinking and acting *differently*. In this new frontier context the people of God must be much more fluid, more nimble, and more agile than we have been heretofore. We must reach back, farther back than our immigrant or even reformation past, to find cues and clues for navigating the new wilderness roads in this emerging frontier context. The book of Acts is a good place to start. I do not mean here the book of Acts as a road map to help us with our navigating, and certainly not as a prescription for being church today. Rather, it seems to me that we will discover or re-discover in the biblical narrative some cues and clues for missionary living in the new frontier context that is emerging in a thousand different ways all around us. As a case study in miniature, I point us once again to the 8th chapter of Acts, vv. 26–40: the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. It is, I believe, a paradigmatic text when it comes to figuring out what it means to live God's mission today.

Navigating the new wilderness roads emerging everywhere all around us, being church today, means living God's mission *where we are*. Could it be that what happens *through* the "assembly of believers" is just as important as what happens *in* the "assembly of believers"? The world today needs church communities that are rooted deeply in God's word of promise through Christ and yet more nimble, agile, and mobile in how they practice the art of evangelical listening and living. Christian communities that are populated by Christ-followers have a kiosk-at-the-farmer's-market mentality. They set up shop to talk more than trade; to make friends, not money. Face(book) it: for the sake of the myriad of people who do not come to a church, who are not connected to a Christian community, being church today will be more local kiosk than big-box retailer.

A Call to Conversion: Lesslie Newbigin on Preaching

Patrick W. T. Johnson

Doctoral candidate in homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary

When Bishop Lesslie Newbigin returned to England from India after years of service as a missionary and leader of the Ecumenical movement, he turned his theological focus to the West. Beginning with a small pamphlet "The Other Side of 1984," which led to his 1984 Warfield Lectures given at Princeton Theological Seminary, which were then expanded and published as *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, Newbigin explored what would be involved in a "genuinely missionary encounter" between the gospel and Western culture.[1] Illumined by his experience in India, Newbigin was able to see that the West is no longer a Christian culture, but neither is it simply a secular culture. Rather, Newbigin saw that the modern West is best understood as a *pagan* culture. Christianity, he argued, has not been replaced by an absence of religious conviction, but has given way to a scientific rationalism, which implies tacit faith commitments that are often at odds with the gospel, and which thus functions as a pagan religion. For that reason, Newbigin described the Western situation as a missionary context, and raised an important missional challenge to Western Christians.

More than twelve years after the publication of Newbigin's incisive critique, George Hunsberger, in his article "Renewing Faith during the Postmodern Transition," reflected on how important Newbigin's work has been for ministers and for the practice of preaching. His comments highlight *Foolishness to the Greeks* as particularly important to Newbigin's contribution:

> This alone has made him an indispensable resource for pastoral leadership in general and the practice of preaching in particular….[This preaching] invites, welcomes, and enables people to believe things that are at odds with the going versions of reality. It participates in the inner dialogue between the gospel and assumptions of one's own culture and cultivates a community for whom continuing conversion is the habitual approach. It is for the art of that sort of preaching that Newbigin provides essential resources for the preacher.[2]

Hunsberger goes on to argue that Newbigin's most important contribution to preachers in the West is helping them see that they are engaged in a missionary encounter, and can no longer assume that those who come to church have been nourished in a society that shares the moral and

1. J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

2. George Hunsberger, "Renewing Faith during the Postmodern Transition," *Transmission* Special Edition (1998): 10-11.

spiritual norms of a Christian culture.

Building on Hunsberger's basic insight into the usefulness of Newbigin's work for preachers, the purpose of this essay is to turn Newbigin's original question specifically to the task of preaching. We will seek to sketch the outlines of what is involved *homiletically* in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture by systematizing Newbigin's thoughts on preaching. When taken as a whole, his comments are a treasure of insights into the ministry of preaching, and are richly suggestive for an understanding of preaching in dialogue with a missional theology.

We will systematize Newbigin's thoughts on preaching by drawing from works he wrote throughout his life, as well as the insights of those who have found his work important for the practice of preaching. Newbigin's thoughts about preaching, as well as quotations from him, will be drawn from the books and articles that are listed at the end of this essay. Rather than present his thoughts by book or article, we will group them according to six major themes. These six categories are: the character, setting, method, content, evaluation, and purpose of preaching.

1. The character of the preacher: A servant of the Word

The preacher is gifted and called by God to the work of preaching, but the calling is undertaken as a labor of service. Therefore, preachers are servants, and their work is a ministry. Their service is to the Word, and they are not in the pulpit to expound their own ideas, assumptions, and experiences. Rather, the preacher steps into the pulpit in order to open the Word. As Newbigin reflects on this conviction in relation to his own preaching, he says that he hopes that through his sermon some verse or parable or incident will remain, "glowing in the minds of [the] hearers through the coming week."[3]

Since the preacher is called by God to serve the Word, the ministry of preaching cannot be dismissed on the basis of objections to hierarchy. Some have characterized traditional preaching as an authoritarian exercise, with words descending from exalted clergy onto a passive laity. In response, they have developed homiletical methods that employ dialogue rather than monologue. Newbigin acknowledges that the historical division between clergy and laity has been harmful to the church, and has prompted this focus on dialogue, yet he argues that traditional preaching may not be dismissed on these grounds. To do so is to misunderstand the ministerial nature of preaching, and the preacher as a servant of the Word.

In order for preachers to develop their identity as servants of the Word, Newbigin offers two practical suggestions. First, near the beginning of worship, the Bible should be brought into the sanctuary in procession and placed on the pulpit. It is a reminder that the Word is of prime importance, and that the preacher rises as a servant. The reading of Scripture is thus the crucial task with which the preacher is charged. Newbigin writes, "I have often been comforted in the pulpit by the thought that, if the worst came to the worst, and I had nothing to say, I could read a passage from the book and

3. J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd: Meditations on Christian Ministry in Today's World* (Leighton Buzzard, UK: The Faith Press, 1977), 26.

by doing so I would not have failed totally in my duty as servant of the Word."[4]

Second, Newbigin urges the preacher to follow a lectionary, or a schedule of lessons. Early in ministry, following his own tradition, Newbigin did not use an assigned text but freely chose the text for his sermon. Later, though, he found the use of a lectionary very valuable. He writes that without a lectionary, over time, the congregation becomes the victim of the particular "concerns, anxieties, enthusiasm, [and] antipathies of the preacher."[5] With a lectionary, however, preachers must wrestle with texts that they would not normally choose, and which seem at first to hold no meaning for the congregation. In wrestling with an unfamiliar text, preachers are shaken free from their own concerns and ideas, and given something truly fresh to say. Newbigin encourages his readers in this practice, saying, "I am sure that if I have ever been a real servant of the Word for a congregation, it has been on these occasions when the text was one that I would not have chosen."[6]

2. The context of preaching: Words and deeds

The preacher's ministry is properly set within the life of a congregation, as part of the ongoing action of the reign of God. In the ministry of Jesus, in whom the presence and the proclamation of the kingdom of God were simultaneous, Jesus' presence, works, and words were one reality. The church, which continues Christ's mission in the world, must also see its word, works, and presence as one, unified witness. Words cannot be separated from deeds.

If preaching occurs without the visible presence of the kingdom of God and apart from deeds of love, then preaching will be empty words, without the power to evoke belief. The people to whom the preacher speaks will rightly ask about the preacher's own involvement in the struggle for justice and mercy. If preaching "does not have behind it a costly engagement with the powers of evil, all the powers that rob men and women of their humanity, and if it does not call men and women to share in the same costly engagement," then the sermon will ring hollow. People who do not see signs that the kingdom of God has come near in Jesus Christ will have no reason to believe the preacher's words.[7]

However, when the kingdom of God comes in loving presence and transforming deed, the preacher's words will be meaningful. When the preacher and the congregation are truly involved in bearing and battling the sin, sorrow and pain of their neighborhood and their world, then the preacher's words will not be empty. As with Peter's address on the day of Pentecost, the sermon will explain the presence of the new reality. The preacher's words will interpret the deeds of the congregation, and the deeds of the congregation will illustrate and validate the words.

Just as words without deeds are empty, so deeds without words are mute. All works of the church—teaching, healing, feeding, caring, peace-making—are signs that point beyond themselves to Jesus Christ. If the church portrays its good deeds as self-sufficient, then it invites people to trust in that which cannot satisfy, and betrays

4. J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, "Preaching Christ Today" (the Eighteenth Joseph Smith Memorial Lecture, Overdale College, Birmingham, UK, 1979), Newbigin.net Online Bibliography, http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/79pct.pdf (accessed January 6, 2010).

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way: Bible Studies* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), 12.

them with false expectations. When the church permanently disconnects its deeds from witness to Jesus Christ, it evokes belief in the wrong thing. Ultimately, the church is not a political or social program, but a living witness to the mission of God in Jesus Christ. Every deed must point to Jesus Christ who alone can mediate the ultimate judgment and mercy of God. "There is and can be no substitute for telling the good news. Evangelism, the activity of telling men in words of mouth or pen the story of Jesus, is a necessary and indispensable manifestation of the new reality in action."[8]

Viewed holistically, then, preaching is an integral part of a congregation's continuing obedience to the living Lord. It is an event that springs from and leads into a new reality, interpreting the presence of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, when preachers write their sermons, they must have the congregation "with" them, for the sermon comes from their lived experience. It arises from and leads into their involvement in the world. Throughout writing the sermon, the preacher must ask, "What do I expect them to do as a result of this sermon?"[9] The answer to that question may not be simple or clear, but if the preacher fails to ask it, the sermon will likely miss its mark.

3. The method of preaching: The Word in the world

Since preaching is words in service to the Word, it is fundamentally a linguistic act. Words are the currency in which the preacher trades. However, this currency is subject to inflation; the more words there are, the less they are worth. This is partly why preaching has been devalued in the modern world: it trades in words, and there has been an explosion of words in the communication age.

Nevertheless, the words of the preacher still have power, even if they appear to be weak. Newbigin tells an illuminating story of traveling the roads of South India and seeing the ruins of old shrines and houses. At first, the buildings fit together perfectly, but on some unknown day a bird passed by and innocently dropped a tiny seed in a small crevice between two stones. Over time the seed put down roots and grew into a great tree, which ultimately split the stones and destroyed the edifice.[10] The words of the preacher are like the seed, perhaps spoken to no apparent effect, yet concealing great power. The power hidden in their weakness is the Spirit of God, which quickens the words and gives them life.

Since the preacher's words are so potentially powerful, they must be carefully chosen, and the preacher must know what meaning they carry. In the Western world, the assumption has been that the audience knows the meaning of Christian words like "sin," "salvation," and "Jesus." However, in a missionary setting, one cannot make this assumption. Rather, one must assume that the audience does not share in the Christian tradition and cannot meaningfully appropriate Christian concepts.

The first task of missionary preaching, then, is for preachers to immerse themselves in the mental world of the hearers. They must know what freight their words will carry for the audience if they are to understand how the hearers will receive the message. The audience will make sense of the preacher's words through the lenses of their own ideas. For example, terms like

8. J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *A Faith for this One World?* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 90.

9. Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd*, 27.

10. Newbigin, "Preaching Christ Today."

"sin" or "salvation" have a different connotation for a Hindu or Buddhist than for a Christian. One cannot assume that the hearers will know the Christian meaning of their words.

If the audience is to hear what the preacher intends, preachers must understand the conceptual lenses of those to whom they speak. Moreover, they must go behind the cultural meaning of words and uncover the assumptions that are implicit in them. The cultural assumptions of the hearers are the points at which the gospel will challenge them, and be most relevant to their lives. Newbigin calls this type of relevance, borrowing a phrase from A.G. Hogg, "challenging relevance."[11] When preachers challenge cultural assumptions with the gospel, they call their hearers to a new allegiance.

While the first part of the preacher's task is therefore to understand the linguistic and mental world of the hearers, the second part of the task is to be immersed in the linguistic and mental world of the Bible. Preachers must come to understand biblical words and the assumptions that are implicit in them. This understanding of the Bible will give preachers the viewpoint from which they will re-approach and challenge the context in which they are preaching. Newbigin notes that this is not the normal modern cross-cultural apologetic. The typical apologetic method in Western Christianity has been to explain the gospel in terms of the culture. The result, however, has often been an explanation that fits the gospel into the mental framework of the culture, such that the challenge of the gospel—its strangeness—is quieted. In order to preserve the power of the gospel, Newbigin argues that we should explain the culture in terms of the gospel, rather than the gospel in terms of the culture. In other words, in a missionary encounter preachers should allow the friction and dissonance between the gospel and the culture to come to the forefront, so that the gospel challenges the hearers and calls them to a new allegiance.

Newbigin illustrates this reversal of the normal paradigm in *Foolishness to the Greeks*, and explicitly in the chapter "Profile of a Culture."[12] There he suggests that the first step of missionary engagement is to understand the fundamental suppositions of one's culture, in order that one may then clearly hear the witness of the gospel. He acknowledges that it is difficult to gain this critical stance, and he himself would not have been able to attempt his analysis of Western culture without living in the Indian culture. With this experience, though, he is able to uncover the implied assumptions of Western culture, and especially the faith commitments that are tacitly held in modern scientific rationality. Then, contrasting these assumptions with the gospel, Newbigin is able to see where the gospel is most challenging to Western culture. He concludes that the challenge is most sharp in the claim that God raised Jesus from the dead, a claim that cannot be understood in a "rational" worldview. At this point, and others like it, a missionary encounter between the gospel and the Western culture will call for a radical conversion.

Newbigin argues that the type of work he does in *Foolishness to the Greeks* is explicitly the task now set before Western preachers:

> The long syncretistic relation between Christianity and western culture has

11. J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, "Missions" (unpublished manuscript, ca. 1991), Newbigin.net Online Bibliography, http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/91m.pdf (accessed January 6, 2010).

12. Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 21-22.

> now developed into a situation where the specificity of the Gospel is almost lost, absorbed into relativism, individualism, and narcissism of western culture. It is now necessary for preachers in the western world to recognize that they are in a missionary situation where the Bible is no longer authoritative Scripture, and the name of Jesus, freely used in swearing, does not refer to any well known person.[13]

In other words, Western culture is no longer a Christian culture, and the implicit assumptions and faith commitments of Western culture are often at odds with the gospel. Western preachers, already thoroughly immersed in their culture, must now take a critical stance in relation to it. They must attempt to recover the full meaning of Christian words, and the assumptions that are implicit in the gospel, in order to challenge their culture in a missionary encounter. This will mean, for them and their community, recovering an authoritative place for the Bible, "in its canonical wholeness," as Scripture.[14]

In the preaching moment, preachers will ultimately clothe the gospel in the language of the contemporary person to whom they speak. However, the goal is that the gospel will challenge, rather than be absorbed into, the cultural-linguistic assumptions of the hearers. To put it another way, the preacher will faithfully speak the Word in the world. On the one hand, this task will include a careful study of the culture, including its language, art, and drama, and the assumptions that are inherent in it. On the other hand, the preacher will carefully study the Bible, its language, and the assumptions underlying its language. This is the careful methodological work of preaching that aims at a missionary encounter. Indeed, only the one who has taken up both sides of this task faithfully may then leave the communication of the gospel to the Holy Spirit.

4. The content of preaching: Jesus Christ

The content of the gospel that the preacher seeks to communicate should be considered factual news. As news, preaching is distinguished from convincing someone of an opinion or a possibility. Rather, it is the announcement of an historical event that has already happened, a fact with which we now have to deal. On the basis of this core conviction, Newbigin criticizes modern moves to construe preaching as dialogue. First, he argues that the very idea of "dialogue" is inherited from the Greek tradition, and is foreign to the world religions; therefore it is not a proper method for preaching to those who do not share the Greek philosophical tradition. Moreover, dialogue by its nature is not suited to the announcement of factual news. Insomuch as it is news, preaching is rightly monological.

Furthermore, preaching is a narrative that announces the arrival of someone or something. As the announcement of an arrival, it is not the same as a lecture on religious matters, or ethical advice for better living. It is even different from prophetic speech in the manner of an Old Testament prophet. Rather, the preacher "continue[s] that which began to be done when Jesus came into Galilee and preached, announced, proclaimed the Kingdom of God."[15] The preacher proclaims the news of the arrival of the kingdom of God. Yet the preacher does not simply point to the kingdom as Jesus did, for in Jesus Christ the kingdom of God now has a name and a face. It is no longer an idea we are free to

13. Newbigin, "Missions."

14. Ibid.

15. Newbigin, "Preaching Christ Today."

develop, or a program we are free to shape. The character of the kingdom of God is defined in the presence of the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, "we preach Christ, incarnate, crucified, regnant, as the power of God and the wisdom of God—as in fact, the presence of the reign of God in power and wisdom."[16] No matter what biblical text the preacher is confronted with, the task in the sermon is to, "bring the hearers face to face with Jesus Christ as he really is."[17]

This means that the preacher proclaims the risen Jesus. Newbigin notes that there is a very common way of preaching that presents Jesus as a holy man, a master, and a great soul who was crucified. Yet, Newbigin argues, this is not enough. If indeed Jesus is raised from the dead, Jesus is no longer merely a teacher or a prophet, but is Lord. If Jesus died and rose again, then we are at the beginning of a new creation, and everything is made new. Christ is the beginning of the new world, the pioneer, the leader, the one who goes before humanity. He is this because in him the ultimate height and depth of the human situation has been taken. "He has known the deepest darkness of pain and despair and defeat and death, to face them, master them, [and] conquer them… He is the One who alone has the keys of death and hell."[18]

So Christ is the beginning of the new creation, yet he is also its end, and in him all things will be consummated. He drives history to its final goal, and he himself is its end. It is given to him, the Lamb who was slain, to break the seals and unroll the scroll of history. This means, as Christ is the end and consummation of history, that in him alone may we find purpose and meaning for the human situation. Moreover, this also means that Christ is not bound by the old creation, including any form of religious, or philosophical, or political structure into which his followers try to place him. The risen Christ defines the new creation, beginning and end, and challenges every pietistic assumption and religious system that attempts to tame him.

Thus, the preacher who steps into the pulpit has no other task than this: to preach Christ; to announce the news of the arrival of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ; to proclaim that the crucified and risen Lord is the beginning of the new creation, its author and pioneer; and to declare that Christ is the fulfillment of history, and only in him is there ultimate purpose.

5. The evaluation of preaching: Savior and Lord

To test the faithfulness of the sermon to this content, the preacher should ask whether the sermon proclaims Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Newbigin argues that in modern preaching the wholeness of this phrase often has been lost. On one hand, some preach Christ only as Savior, as one who helps, delivers, and comforts. While this is true, by itself it ultimately leads to narcissism: "he died for me and I am saved." In its worst forms, this preaching appeals to the lowest common denominators of selfishness and fear. Preaching Christ as Savior and not as Lord fails to present the command to obey, the call to discipleship, to take up one's cross and struggle for peace and justice. On the other hand, some preach Christ as Lord and not as Savior. By this Newbigin refers to preachers who send their hearers out of the church fully aware of what is wrong with them and the world, burdened by

16. Ibid.

17. Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd*, 24.

18. J.E. Lesslie Newbigin, *Christ our Eternal Contemporary* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1968), 5.

their own guilt and the things they ought to be doing, yet with no release from the weight, no new power for action, and no joy in God and God's kingdom.[19]

A holistic message, therefore, preaches Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. "Nothing is more crucial for the faithfulness of our preaching than that we should learn how these two are rightly related to each other." To emphasize this, Newbigin tells a story that comes from the beginning of his ministry as a bishop. Young in his ministry and with many questions, he went to see a local bishop and great Lutheran missionary. He asked him, "If you have a candidate for ordination and are in serious doubt about whether or not he should be ordained, how do you resolve the doubt?" The bishop replied, "I go and listen to him preaching and find out whether or not he is rightly relating the Law and the Gospel." For Newbigin, this means whether one is proclaiming Christ as both Savior and Lord. In his own preaching, Newbigin applied this test to the outline of every sermon, before writing the manuscript.

Newbigin is convinced that preaching Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and thus rightly relating the wholeness of the gospel, will send a congregation out into the world

> re-enlisted in the company of those who follow Christ as witnesses and signs and agents of the rule of God in the life of the world. It means they are liberated from concern about their own salvation in order to be totally at Christ's service for his work of salvation for the world. It means they go out as bearers of an active and patient hope, bearing already in their own hearts the secret of God's kingdom which is for the whole world.[20]

19. Newbigin, "Preaching Christ Today."

20. Ibid.

6. The purpose of preaching: Conversion

The purpose of the sermon, when the preacher has faithfully announced the reign of God in Jesus Christ, is the conversion of the hearers. People will not see the kingdom of God if they are facing the wrong direction. If they are to see the reign of God in Jesus Christ, they must be turned around, or in the language of the New Testament, they must experience *metanoia*. To be turned around, *metanoia*, means to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. The reign of God comes to us from a different direction than what we expect; indeed, what we previously thought was 'God' turns out not to be God at all. Thus, conversion to Christ requires a "mental revolution."[21] When Jesus preached in Galilee, he declared, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15, NRSV). In the historical context, Newbigin notes that those to whom Jesus spoke were expecting a righteous king to come and rule the world. Instead, Jesus told them that the kingdom of God has already dawned, but they must turn around to see it. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus illustrates clearly what it means to turn and look the other direction. Unless his followers turn and look in that direction, the kingdom of God will pass them by.

The purpose of preaching, therefore, is a total turning, or conversion. Drawing on the New Testament, and particularly the Acts of the Apostles, Newbigin discerns three basic characteristics of conversion. The first and most fundamental element of conversion is a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, which means, "a final surrendering of the self to the person of Jesus Christ."[22] Second, con-

21. Newbigin, *Mission in Christ's Way*, 3.

22. Newbigin, *Christ Our Eternal Contemporary*, 92.

version means turning toward a pattern of conduct that is consistent with a life wholly committed to Christ, and turned toward the neighbor in love. Third, conversion means participation in a visible fellowship that is centered in Jesus Christ, marked by baptism, the Apostle's teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Conversion in this holistic sense is the purpose of preaching as a missionary encounter with culture, and preachers should continually call their hearers to such conversion. Indeed, following the pattern of the Old Testament, the call to conversion is first and always to those who are already bearing the name of Christ, and then the invitation is extended to those of other faiths.

While the purpose of preaching is the conversion of the hearers, Newbigin stresses that conversion is never only for the sake of those who are converted, but for the sake of all. When one is turned around, such that he or she sees the reign of God in Jesus Christ, that one is also commissioned. Conversion is missional in that the converted are sent to testify—in word and deed—that the reign of God has come in Jesus Christ, and it is universal in that they are sent to the whole world. Thus, the continual conversion of the church is to the world and for the world.

Finally, because conversion is the goal of preaching, preachers must labor under the hard realization that they may not of themselves attain the goal of their preaching. God is the one who converts, who turns people around. The preacher addresses the invitation to conversion to all, but God converts only a few. The ultimate action is always God's, and conversion is always by the grace of God.

The reception of Newbigin's thoughts on preaching

In summary, Lesslie Newbigin has addressed six aspects of preaching as a missionary encounter with culture: character, context, method, content, evaluation, and purpose. Not all of this work has been widely received in theological or homiletical literature, in part because it has not been systematically presented. Newbigin wove his thoughts on preaching throughout many of his works. However, as we noted in reference to George Hunsberger's article, some of his thoughts on preaching have been received, and his importance for preachers has been recognized.

Specifically, in addition to Hunsberger, Newbigin's ministry as a preacher and his general advice on preaching is discussed in Geoffrey Wainwright's biography of Newbigin, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life*. There, Wainwright devotes part of the chapter "The Liturgical Preacher" to a section called, "The Form of Sound Words." He discusses first the effect of Newbigin's preaching on those who heard him, based on the observations of his colleagues. The Bishop never read a manuscript, but used an outline to maintain consistent thought, and looked into the eyes of the audience during his delivery. This allowed him to capture the attention of the audience throughout the sermon. In addition, he had a gift, according to a colleague, for communicating in the language of the people, and avoiding complicated theological phraseology.[23]

After describing Newbigin as a preacher, Wainwright analyzes some of his sermons that were delivered on anniversary occasions. At these events, Newbigin tended to focus on the event itself, allowing the Scriptural text to serve as a type of motto that he wished the audience to take with them upon leaving the event.[24] For instance, in 1957 in Cleveland, Ohio,

23. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Lesslie Newbigin: A Theological Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 279.

24. Ibid, 280.

at the service that brought the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church together as the United Church of Christ, Newbigin took as his text John 12:32: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Newbigin used this verse, "to speak of the character, motives, and purposes of Christian unity and of this ecclesial union in particular."[25]

In addition to Wainwright's work, Newbigin's analysis of western culture has been commended to preachers by William Willimon, a noted homiletician, preacher, and United Methodist Bishop. As an editor of the *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, Willimon requested Newbigin to write an article for the encyclopedia entitled "Mission." Later, shortly after Newbigin's death, Willimon paid homage to him in the Easter 1999 publication of *Journal for Preachers*, writing that preachers are indebted to Newbigin for reading the Western situation as a missionary context.[26] Willimon stresses that Newbigin has helped preachers see that the West is not a culture without religious conviction, but a culture that is religiously committed to a different set of beliefs and assumptions. In this setting, preachers must understand their ministry as a missionary encounter with culture, in which they call their hearers to conversion, to turn away from false gods, and worship the living God.

With respect to Newbigin's understanding of preaching, Willimon focuses on three themes in this article. First, preaching is set in deeds; it is witness to something that has happened.[27] Second, Christian communication requires words, which means engaging both the linguistic world of the Bible and the hearers. Moreover, this engagement is one of conflict, as the preacher challenges the concepts and assumptions of the culture with those of the text.[28] Finally, Willimon writes, "I like Newbigin's stress upon the gospel as something which has happened to us, a 'series of events,' which are the story of Jesus." Even more specifically, Willimon appreciates Newbigin's stress that the gospel, the advent of the kingdom of God, is proclaimed as a fact that has altered the world.[29]

> Newbigin stresses that conversion is never only for the sake of those who are converted, but for the sake of all.

Conclusion

We began this essay with a version of the question that drove Newbigin for the latter part of his life: what is involved *homiletically* in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and Western culture? In other words, what does it mean for preachers to proclaim the gospel in Western culture

25. Ibid.

26. William H. Willimon, "Preaching as Missionary Encounter with North American Paganism (in homage to Lesslie Newbigin, 1909-1998)," *Journal for Preachers* 22/3 (1999): 7.

27. Ibid., 4.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 4-5.

with challenging relevance, calling their hearers to radical conversion? In summary, Newbigin offers us insight into six aspects of this type of preaching.

First, he helps us to understand the character of the preacher as one who is a servant of the Word, and whose preaching is in service to the Word. Second, the context of preaching is the congregation's lived obedience to the Lord; the preacher's words flow from and into the congregation's involvement in the reign of God in the world, interpreting these deeds as signs that point to the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. Third, the method of preparing a sermon is to uncover the meaning of the culture's words, and their implicit assumptions, and set them in contrast to the words and assumptions of the gospel. This process, which prepares the preacher to proclaim the gospel with challenging relevance, is at the heart of preaching as a missionary encounter with culture. Fourth, the content of preaching is Jesus Christ. With any given biblical text, the preacher ultimately proclaims the news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, the one in whom the kingdom of God has arrived. Fifth, the sermon is tested in its faithfulness to the gospel by how well it relates Christ as Savior and Lord. To preach Christ as Savior is to proclaim him as the one who sets people free from the weight of their guilt and sin, and to preach Christ as Lord is to call those whom Christ has set free to take up their cross and follow him in discipleship. Sixth, and finally, the purpose of preaching is the total conversion of the hearers, that they may be turned to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, a new pattern of conduct in obedience to Christ's Lordship, and a visible fellowship with the body of Christ. The ministry of preaching thus extends into mission, as the hearers are converted for the sake of the world, and are sent to testify to the world that they have seen the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ.

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Atonement as Fiducial Influence

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Writing about "theories of the atonement" seems to have become something of a cottage industry among theologians in recent years. There have certainly been debates throughout church history about how the work of Christ is supposed to reconcile us to God, but discussions have broadened and intensified in the past few decades. In 1931, Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor* established a pattern for many subsequent treatments. He compared what he called the "classic" view of Christ's work, in which that work is seen as God's victory over the powers of evil, with theories of the "Latin" type typified by Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* and "subjective" views popular in liberal Protestantism.[1] Like other theologians, Aulén expressed his own preference, arguing for the superiority of the classic view.

In this brief note, I do not intend to review the numerous theories of the atonement that have been proposed, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses. Nor will I deal with more radical criticisms, which have been made recently of the whole idea of atonement, the idea that the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ were a work of divine-human reconciliation. Instead, I will limit myself to a consideration of the late Gerhard Forde's treatment of the work of Christ in the *Christian Dogmatics* edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson in order to clarify its significance and its place in a comprehensive picture of creation and salvation.[2] I will not exegete Forde's argument in detail and it should go without saying that the view I present here, while heavily influenced by that argument, is my own.

A preliminary reminder about the word "atonement" should help to obviate some criticisms of the concept, if people will bear it in mind. The proper meaning of "atonement" is "at – one – ment." This is not just a popular etymology. The word was apparently coined by Tyndale to translate *katallagēs* in 2 Cor 5:18, where most modern versions use "reconciliation."[3] It is important to remember this because the word "atonement" has subsequently come to be

1. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (New York: Macmillan, 1961). A more recent discussion is Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids Mich: Eerdmans, 2005). An article by the late William C. Placher, "How Does Jesus Save?" *Christian Century*, 2 June 2009, 23, is also helpful.

2. Gerhard Forde, "The Work of Christ," Seventh Locus in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 2:1–99.

3. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "atone" and "atonement." For Tyndale's text (with the spelling "attonement") see Luther A. Weigle, ed., *The New Testament Octapla: Eight English Versions of the New Testament in the Tyndale-King James Tradition* (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 1016.

identified with particular theories of how the work of Christ brings reconciliation about. In particular, for many people the word has sacrificial implications (as, e.g., in "Day of Atonement" as a translation of *yom kippur*). Such connotations, however, are not intrinsic to the word itself.

As I noted, theologians through the centuries have produced a number of theories of the atonement and there have been extensive debates about them. Forde made an important point that relativizes the importance of those debates. "For theories do not reconcile," he emphasized. "If dogmatics covers the offense with its theories, it cannot serve a proclamation that actually *is* a ministry of reconciliation."[4] We are saved by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ proclaimed to us, not by theories, however good they may be, about how those things work to bring about reconciliation between God and humanity.

That point may seem obvious and even trivial. The map is not the territory and a detailed recipe for some dish is not food. But Forde's point thrusts deeper than that. Theories of the atonement have often assumed or set up theological systems that specify various things that supposedly have to be done in order for God and humanity to be reconciled—pay a debt to God or the devil, satisfy the divine honor, serve a sentence, trick Satan, defeat the powers of evil, or fulfill some cultic requirement. These may, within limits, be useful metaphors, but they tend to obscure the fact that what actually gets the job done is the death of Jesus of Nazareth on a criminal's cross and his resurrection. Atonement is not, first of all, a matter of conformity to any theological system. It is a matter of the cross-resurrection event actually doing something to people.[5]

But what is it that needs to be done? "Atonement" is necessary because God and humanity are not "at one." We have separated ourselves from God by our fundamental sin of refusal to trust in God. That trust is the basic thing for which the First Commandment calls, as Luther explains in the Large Catechism. What does it mean to say that we are to have no other gods than the one who brought Israel out of Egypt? "A 'god'," Luther says, "is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart."[6] In Rom 1:18–31, Paul sees the fact that humans failed to trust first in God but instead "worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" as the root of the human problem, the source of all other sins, and the reason why "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven."[7]

What is then needed in order for atonement to be accomplished is for people to stop relying on their idols and to begin to trust in the true God. False faith must be eliminated and genuine faith must be restored. And when that happens the wrath of God can come to an end, since there is then no longer any cause for it.

"If you feel distant from God, guess who moved" is an expression of popular theology. It states the basic truth that we have alienated ourselves from our Creator, not vice versa. Atonement means that we

4. Forde, "The Work of Christ," 9.

5. Thus the title of the final section of Forde's locus, "Atonement as Actual Event."

6. "The Large Catechism" in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 386.

7. Biblical quotations are from the NRSV.

are brought back to where we belong. This does not mean that atonement has no effect on God. The divine wrath is indeed brought to an end. But it is ended because our faith in God is restored, not because something additional was done to satisfy God. In particular, God's wrath does not need to be assuaged somehow *before* God is willing to be merciful to us. By bringing people to faith, God expresses the divine mercy and simultaneously does away with divine wrath.

The critical question then is how faith—true faith whose essential feature is *fiducia*, trust—in the true God can come about. A detailed doctrine of original sin does not need to be expounded at this point, but it is important to realize that scripture states quite clearly the universal character of humanity's sinfulness—fundamentally, its lack of true faith. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). When Calvin said that human nature is "a perpetual factory of idols"[8] he was echoing what God told the prophet Ezekiel (14:3): "Mortal, these men have taken their idols into their hearts."

Atonement happens when all our idols are dethroned and true faith in the true God is created. And that is what the cross and resurrection of Jesus accomplish. This event brings about, first of all, God's condemnation. Our trust in false gods, our religious, political and moral systems, our own selves, have killed the source of our life. For while scripture says that the cross was "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23), it is not God who cried "Crucify him." It is we, through our representatives among the religious leaders in Jerusalem and the Roman government, who demanded and carried out the crucifixion of the one whose resurrection proclaimed him as the Son of God. When we are brought to realize this, the idols upon which we depended and which motivated our behavior are shown to have worked death rather than life, and in a real sense we die.

Atonement happens when all our idols are dethroned and true faith in the true God is created.

And the cross-resurrection event is saving grace. When we are brought to see that the true Creator was willing to die for us, indeed *did* die for us, then we will be convinced that God is trustworthy "above all things." This is true faith and reconciliation with God. And when that happens, God's wrath comes to an end.

Condemnation and reconciliation happen when we are encountered by the cross-resurrection event. For us this means being addressed by the word of the cross. That word must encounter us in Spirit-empowered proclamation and the "visible words" of baptism and the Lord's Supper if it is to work real atonement. This again makes it clear that theories about how atonement works are of secondary importance. Various images and metaphors of atonement can be helpful but they do not take the place of proclamation of the fact itself. The pastor who said, "I have only one sermon, 'Come, sinners, and

8. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:108.

look on Christ,'"[9] was no doubt speaking hyperbolically but his statement points in the right direction.

This does not mean, however, that theories of the atonement are without value. The development of adequate theories is part of the theological task of "faith in search of understanding." The central *claim* of the Christian tradition is that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ reconcile us with God. If we are then asked, "How does that work?" we are driven to the task of theory construction in order to give an adequate answer. A theory will not work atonement, but it can help that work to be understood in connection with the whole of Christian belief about creation and salvation and our relationship with the world, and thus can aid in sustaining intelligent faith. The fundamental purpose of any theology, including its theory of the atonement, is to support the proclamation of law and gospel.

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What then is an adequate theoretical description of the work of atonement that I have sketched? We can begin with what Knutson described as the "magnet" picture of atonement,[10] with reference to Jesus' words in John 12:32: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." Views of this type, which go back at least to Abelard, are often called "moral influence" theories. Their basic idea usually is that the love of God shown by Christ's willingness to die for sinners evokes a corresponding love from us: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). And this mutual love then means that we have been reconciled to God.

Such theories are often characterized as "subjective" but, depending on the way they are presented, that may be a misleading description. A theory of this type can argue that the cross of Christ actually does something objective, exerting a real influence on people and thus bringing them to a loving condition. The problem with moral influence theories is not that they have to be entirely subjective. Nor is the problem that they speak of a change in the human person rather than a change in God's attitude. As we have already argued, God's wrath is done away with when we are reconciled. The difficulty is rather that we are not saved by morality! It is not love that justifies us but faith (Rom 3:28, Eph 2:8).

A little reflection on the way in which atonement was described earlier will make clear the change that is needed.

9. Ludwig Hofacker, quoted by William Malcolm Macgregor in John W. Doberstein, ed., *Minister's Prayer Book: An Order of Prayers and Readings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 403.

10. Kent S. Knutson, *His Only Son Our Lord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 72–75.

What Gerhard Forde was presenting can, I think, be called a *fiducial influence* theory of atonement. What the cross-resurrection event does is first to destroy idolatrous faith and then to create genuine faith in the true God, thereby drawing sinners back to God. Love for God will indeed also result, but as far as atonement is concerned that is secondary.

Attaching the label "fiducial influence" to the view that has been described here is a relatively small matter, but it may help to get this view considered along with other theories that bear familiar labels like "Christus Victor" or "penal substitution." It is, after all, hard to discuss a theory that has no name.[11] And the name "fiducial influence" emphasizes two critical features of the Lutheran tradition. First of all, we are justified by faith. And second, saving faith is not something that we call up by ourselves but is a result of a divine influence upon us.

It is necessary to ask, though, whether this theory that focuses on the reconciliation of individual sinners is sufficiently comprehensive. The New Testament does not limit itself to an individualistic picture, but speaks of Christ reconciling Jews and Gentiles together with God (Eph 2:16) and of "all things" being reconciled to God through the cross (Col 1:20).[12] What happens when people are brought to faith through the cross of Christ is, as Paul says in 2 Cor 5:17, "a new creation." Human sin meant that history had taken a wrong turn, heading away from God. The cross-resurrection event with the renewal that it brings about means that there is a reorientation of history. The course of the world's development is turned back toward God's goal of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1), in which all things are reconciled with God.[13]

11. Forde, "The Work of Christ," was apparently content with calling it "atonement as actual event." (Cf. p.98.) But it seems to me important to be explicit about what the actual event does.

12. Forde, "The Work of Christ," 93.

13. George L. Murphy, "Chiasmic Cosmology and Atonement," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60 (2008): 214.

An Affinity for Difference: A Theology of Power

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Introduction

Difference. Difference bothers us. It troubles us if we have a "difference of opinion" with others. We might be uncomfortable if we are in settings where practices and beliefs are different from ours. Public leaders place a high value on the ways they are different from others, trying to make constituents uncomfortable with the differences between them and their political rivals. Difference has a bad rap. We don't like it. We try to avoid it. However, according to Genesis 1, difference is the heart of creation.[1] It is, in fact, what constitutes creation, for without difference, according to Genesis, there was "a formless void."

Although difference is the gift and the heart of creation itself, we humans use power both to create further difference and to abuse difference. Such creations and abuses are manifest as systems of oppression that are based upon the control, objectification, exclusion, and condemnation of others through and because of difference.[2] For instance, we use power to create differences among ourselves, such as through the construction of race and the economy of class. Similarly, we create power disparities based upon difference, whether that difference is constructed or real. For example, we create economic power based on *constructed* differences of race, and we create differences in social power based on *biological* differences, such as the differences in muscle mass across the sexes. The church, made of humans as it is, exists within the tensions and problems humanity has created around difference. What is our way through the abuses of power that we have inherited and created around difference? In this paper I propose two means of resistance to and transformations of abuses of power. The first is nonviolent resistance, for which I depend upon various examples of transformative power within the Gospel of Mark. The second is a practice of hospitality of the other, for the sake of the neighbor, from the state of being simultaneously justified and guilty. I will close by suggesting practical implications for the Lutheran church.

Power in social systems

To begin to unravel the problem of the abuse of power, we must have a preliminary understanding of power in social systems. Social systems are powerful, concludes sociologist Michael Mann, through the

1. See Ranjini Rebera, "Power in a Discipleship of Equals," in *In Search of a Round Table*, ed. Musimbi Kanyoro (Geneva: World Council of Churches for the Lutheran World Federation, 1997), 82-90.

2. See Allan G. Johnson, *Power, Privilege, and Difference*, 2nd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2006).

unity of four types of power: military, economic, political, and ideological. This convergence of power, for example, explains the reach and strength of the Roman Empire.[3] However, Mann is missing a critical point in his analysis of power, according to John Dominic Crossan, who argues that whereas Mann assumes social power is solely violent, power is instead distinguished in two modes, violent and nonviolent. Crossan chiefly distinguishes between the two modes of social power by naming them "violent repression," on the one hand, and "nonviolent resistance," chiefly characterized by "persuasion and attraction," on the other.[4]

Marked by the theology of the cross, most Lutherans would undoubtedly claim nonviolent resistance as their preferred mode of social power. What are Christians called to resist? We are called to resist ideologies, very often embodied in social systems, that create systems of power based upon differences, either constructed, real, or both, that deny the full humanity of the other.[5] For example, we are specifically called to resist ideologies of gender norms and of race and class. All of this is nothing new to Protestant mainline Christians who have been paying attention to biblical studies and theology in the last 45 years or so. We know this news—in theory—and maybe we know it theologically. Is there anything new to say about sex, race, and class as ideologically based, socially embodied systems of power and difference in the church?

> Although difference is the gift and the heart of creation itself, we humans use power both to create further difference and to abuse difference.

The Gospel and power

The use of power in the church is inaccurately understood and addressed if we understand who holds it, who uses it, and who doesn't as a binary of "have" and "have not." None of us exists with complete power or with a total lack of power. Rather, as simultaneously privileged and oppressed, we each have power—individually and collectively—to use power. If we are truly to take the incarnation of Jesus the Christ seriously, we will theologically take heed of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, in which we hear him proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand throughout stark narratives in which power is transformed through nonviolent resistance.

The New Testament contains a variety

3. See John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 12-13.

4. Ibid., 15.

5. See Albert Pero Jr., "The Issue of Power/Authority in the Global Church of the 21st Century," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24 no. 3 (1997): 245-51. Pero argues for "a biblical anthropology which affirms the equality of all persons under God regardless of race" as the central nerve of power and authority in the African-American theological tradition, which essentially clashes with power and authority in an ecclesiological model that begins with "dogmatic structures" (249-251).

of responses to the status quo of power, which have been thoroughly explicated. For instance, Walter Wink's now famous *Engaging the Powers* de-centers the predominant interpretation of "turning the other cheek" and "going the extra mile," forcing us to evaluate Jesus' means of nonviolent resistance for what it is: subversive and audacious.[6] Recognizing Jesus' resistance to elite religious and Roman imperial power has also given us cause to re-evaluate the meaning of the cross from the perspective of Jesus' nonviolent resistance.[7]

In the Gospel of Mark, there are at least three instances of nonviolent resistance and social transformation in which the status quo of power changes: Jesus uses silence before Pilate to resist imperial power; the bleeding woman speaks to become visible; and the Syro-Phoenecian woman challenges Jesus to include her, a religious and ethnic outsider, in his ministry of healing. In these narratives we see three important examples of people who appear not to have power nevertheless resisting oppressive power based upon difference through nonviolent means. Although these practices are critical for contemporary resistance both within and outside of the church, there is yet something more that we need. The gospel and Luther's explication of faith in "The Freedom of a Christian"[8] press us to the present question: What does it look like to practice hospitality of the other as nonviolent resistance under current gender and racial norms?

What we further need to understand and to practice is what Mary McClintock Fulkerson names "hospitality of the other" through "a theology of affinity."[9] At the heart of Fulkerson's argument, she is getting at the "problem" of difference and what to do about it. How do we live out our concern and care for the neighbor without yielding to the desire to control the neighbor? Fulkerson's question surfaces Luther's dictum: we are *simul justus et peccator*. We at once reach out to care for the neighbor and try to control and define the neighbor. We are justified and sinful. And some of us are variously privileged and oppressed.[10] Fulkerson's argument leads me to ask the following central question: How do we practice hospitality of the other from

6. See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). See also, e.g., James H. Cone, "Christian Theology and Scripture as the Expression of God's Liberating Activity for the Poor," in *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 4-16; John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), especially chapter 3; Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 161-67.

7. See, e.g., Marit Trelstad, ed., *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006); J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); and Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

8. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in *Three Treatises*, 2nd ed., ed. Helmut T. Lehmann, W.A. Lambert, and Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 265-316.

9. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 384-85.

10. Although they are not synonymous formulae, to understand social systems of power it is critical to grasp these unrelated but intertwined states of simultaneous existence. We are all simultaneously justified and guilty. Many of us are simultaneously privileged and oppressed.

the perspective of being simultaneously justified and guilty?[11] Could hospitality of the other be a means of resistance to systems of oppression from the simultaneous experiences of being privileged and oppressed? Furthermore, what are the implications for the Lutheran church?

Silent power and powerful silence

Jesus gives us an unexpected model of resistance to abusive power. Philosopher Elaine Scarry outlines a convincing argument that torture, which usually seeks a verbal admission or confession, is a form of power-making for those with power over others. The forced confession is one way for the interrogators of a regime to objectify the pain of the victim and thereby for it to be translated as power.[12] Silence in the face of torture is a way to refuse the power of the torturer (the un-making of power), and it is a form of power remade. The power of the victim is remade insofar as the victim has not given his or her world over to the torturer by giving voice to the interrogator's question. The victim refuses the power of the abuser through silence. In Mark 15:5, we are told Jesus turns to silence before Pilate, the local epitome of Roman colonial power: "But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed." In other words, Pilate is stunned at Jesus' silence, for who refuses Roman imperial power?

Scarry argues that interrogation is central to torture because power is taken from the one who is tortured through an interwoven and ever-building relationship between verbal exchanges and physical pain. In other words, the physical difference between pain and no pain is translated into a verbal difference in the interrogation of torture. Scarry states, "[T]he absence of pain is a presence of world; the presence of pain is the absence of world. Across this set of inversions pain becomes power."[13] The torturer's attempt to expand his or her world relies on showing that the victim has no world. The forced confession is one critical way to establish the nonexistence of the victim's world, for the verbal response of the tortured shows the loss of his or her world.[14]

Jesus' silence, given Scarry's explanation, could indicate that Jesus gave no accommodation to the torturers; he gave them no power. Jesus still had his world. The two physical worlds of the torturer and the tortured are grossly separated. The demand for language (the torturer's questions) objectifies the growing world of the regime, which in our story of Jesus is brutal Roman colonization. A victim's verbal answers objectify his or her pain-induced shrinking world. The juxtaposition of the world-making and un-making translates into power.[15]

What is critical here is that Jesus' silence defies this power-making. He gives no voice; there is nothing to be translated into power. We might even conclude that

11. Answering this question is one way to answer Catherine Keller's rightfully lodged criticism that we fall into mirroring the apocalyptic solution to evils when we claim our non-apocalyptic position (i.e., that God is not violent) but we "otherize" the other to such extremes that we anticipate destruction on the evil that is "not us." See Catherine Keller, *God and Power: Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 53-65.

12. See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 28-37.

13. Ibid., 37.

14. Ibid., 28.

15. Ibid.

the silence of Jesus under torture indicates a power greater than the power of the world of the torturer, for, as Scarry points out, "The interrogation is…crucial to a regime."[16] By remaining silent Jesus did not allow the interrogators to obliterate his world or to expand their own world of power. He reconfigured the dynamics of power.

Visible invisibility

Often Jesus is interpreted as the one who alters the terms of power in the gospel texts, and indeed he does, as is readily noted by many biblical scholars. Jesus re-organizes the power dynamics of the meal table; Jesus challenges the terms of faithfulness to God as interpreted by powerful religious elites; and Jesus heals those who are rendered powerless and invisible by physical and existential brokenness. But it is very interesting to note that there are times when Jesus must be provoked into a new dynamic of power. The story of the bleeding woman, which is sandwiched into the account of the raising of Jairus' daughter, shows us a woman challenging the prevailing patriarchal power structure through her voice (Mark 5:21-43).

We know the story: Jairus approaches Jesus face-to-face and implores him to go to his home, where his twelve-year-old daughter is very ill. As Jesus and the crowd surrounding him begin to make their way to Jairus' house, a woman invisible to Jesus reaches out to touch his cloak, knowing in faith that such a move will heal the bleeding that has afflicted her for twelve years. One common understanding is that touching Jesus—a bleeding female touching a non-familial male—violates religious and cultural norms.[17] She is not to touch him, yet she does. Her courage to break the boundaries makes her whole.[18] As Rita Nakashima Brock notes, "Mark hints at the relational nature of healing through the concept of faith, which the afflicted always bring to the healing event. The function of the healer is not to gain power, but to facilitate the recreation of it."[19] Yes, Jesus as healer holds power to make her whole, yet as a woman—a bleeding woman—her action of touching Jesus breaks the power dynamic that was intended to keep her apart from others. Jairus, by contrast, approaches Jesus fully visible and directly begs for assistance from him. The hierarchical power of the

Her action of touching Jesus breaks the power dynamic. Her public admission of her action breaks her out of invisibility.

16. Ibid., 36.

17. See Wendy Cotter, "Mark's Hero of the Twelfth-Year Miracles," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 54-78. Cf. Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Gender and Power in the Gospel of Mark," in *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity*, ed. John C. Cavadini (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 83-109.

18. See Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 84.

19. Ibid., 82.

social relationship between Jesus and the bleeding woman, however, shows us the expected and accepted status of women in relationship to Jesus. Her action of touching Jesus breaks the power dynamic. Her public admission of her action breaks her out of invisibility.

When read through the hermeneutic of familiarity, Christians who believe in the power of the divine in the incarnation might be vulnerable to missing the significance of the woman's voice in this story when we read Jesus' question: "'Who touched my clothes?'" Surely Jesus, as Son of God, knows who did this, right? *We* know he knows! But let us look at it just a bit differently. Taking the incarnation seriously means we must take seriously not only Jesus' divinity but also Jesus' humanity. What if he does not know? As a healer, he felt power go out of him, but what if he is unsure who it is that was healed? The woman becomes afraid: According to Mark 5:33b, she "came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth." What if we look at it differently? The woman's own public admission shreds her invisibility, behind which she had been able to steal up to Jesus in the crowd unnoticed. Being a female and being a bleeding female had left her invisible. When she claims the power of the healing Jesus Christ for herself, she has the opportunity to be no longer invisible. She takes it.

Dogged challenge

The story of the Syrophoenician woman and Jesus is another account in which the dynamics of power and the problem of invisibility are made clear. This time, a woman's outright confrontation challenges the predominant power structure. Upon the Syrophoenician's request to exorcise her daughter of a demon, Jesus answers in Mark 7:27: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." A common reading of this text is that racial and religious division seems to appear even in Jesus the healer's response to an outsider to Israel.[20] Indeed, why *should* Jesus serve any but Israel? To this she has a ready answer, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28). The Syrophoenician woman must challenge Jesus to share the power of healing with her daughter. As someone racially and religiously superior to her, Jesus should not really have to help her, right? It is the woman here, not Jesus, who deconstructs the power of domination and exclusion. Both the bleeding woman and the Syrophoenician woman need to have the courage to claim from Jesus what they need. They had been invisible. They make themselves visible to Jesus and by doing so help to reorder the dynamics of power.[21]

What does this mean for us? These women were sure of their place in the commonweal of God, found in part through the healing power of Jesus. As Christians, we must likewise be confident of the place of all those oppressed behind the walls of invisibility and seeming powerlessness, both those beyond our religious borders and within the community of God in Jesus Christ. It also means that we must analyze our systems of power when those

20. Cf., Sharon H. Ringe, "A Gentile Woman's Story, Revisited," in Levine and Blickenstaff, *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, 79-100. Ringe argues from a surprising vantage point: that the woman possesses class privilege as an urban Gentile over rural Jews, for whom Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Mark may appear to exist. Even within this interpretation, the woman is actively challenging Jesus to share the power of God by allowing her to be a recipient of Jesus' ministry along with the rural Jews he is serving.

21. See Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 84.

we consider to be weaker than ourselves show us God's way of power in ways we never expected.[22]

(An) Affinity for difference

Fulkerson argues that a genuine hospitality of difference or hospitality of the other is best sought through a theology of affinity. Fulkerson points out that the conventional way of honoring difference (and being hospitable) within liberalism is to include "others" within unaltered systems, be they institutions or communities.[23] Simple inclusion does not work, she argues, because it is based upon liberalism's individualistic worldview. To unpack this problem and to begin to work toward a hospitality of difference, we must look at the connection between knowledge and power, she urges, for "[w]e must be able to see the ways our discourse *produces* the other as a result of where *we* are."[24] We must acknowledge how power operates in producing the other. The problem is that when we define the other, we are not acknowledging the instability of discourse or the ways power and knowledge are connected. When we define someone else, we domesticate them—we domesticate that which is outside of us by objectifying the other.[25]

The answer to the problem of objectifying someone else or of trying to make another person the same as we are is twofold. First, Fulkerson urges us to resist using a construction of the other in order to give ourselves a clearer self-definition. Empowering the other from the perspective of God's love for creation "requires us to be transformed by the other and to resist, where we recognize it, our domestication of the other."[26] Second, this is the point at which we see the nexus of care and control. The urge to care for the other is marked by the urge to control the other, and when we domesticate the other so that we can try to define who she is, we are inevitably attempting to control that which is strange to us: another human being.[27]

Servants in the Christian community already know that controlling an other is not part of Christian vocation. Yet the subtle ways in which we use our power in order to define and thus control others is problematic. Fulkerson offers two proposals as ways forward in letting go of oppressive or controlling power. First, Fulkerson urges us toward a theology of affinity—not one of identity or solidarity—in order to be hospitable to an other. We are not the same as another person; there is no universal self to which we should appeal and by which we can know others. Rather, "[a]ffinity acknowledges love's inability to know the other, to resist domination of the other."[28] We do this because of God's love, she urges us to see.[29]

Second, if we take seriously a call to a theology of affinity, Fulkerson proposes, we are led to certain institutional or communal implications: "to explore the conditions for relinquishing power, for institutional confession and

22. Ibid., 87.

23. See Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject*, 5. Fulkerson is using the term "liberalism" to refer to classic liberalism's cosmology that views communities as collections of individuals. The "universal self" Fulkerson criticizes from this worldview is a self that is essentially the same for all people.

24. Ibid., 381. Italics in original.

25. Ibid., 382-83.

26. Ibid., 383.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 384.

29. Ibid., 385.

transformation."[30] In general terms, Fulkerson points out that communities and institutions have particular forms of knowledge. That is, we disqualify certain kinds or sources of knowledge in favor of others; we like to have control and closure over what we know.[31]

Here is the point at which a commitment to affinity helps. By embracing affinity with others as a commitment of Christian hospitality, we affirm that reality is God's—not ours to control in our own likeness. We must look for what shapes others (and how it is different from what shapes us), and we must allow ourselves to take painful risks in our relationships with others, empowered by God's eschatological future. This is transformation—the hoped-for result of nonviolent resistance to ideologies that devalue particular others.

Fulkerson's argument about the necessity of being hospitable to different others matters because it is an important form of nonviolent resistance in the face of ideologies that do not value women—to give one important example. The hospitality of different others through a theology of affinity is one way of contradicting the borders of identity and power constructed by the idea that gender categories are natural—and naturally determined by anatomical sex.

How might her proposal look in practice? Here I refer back to the tension that Fulkerson draws upon: that women simultaneously endure gender oppression and are agents for change. Given this *simul* existence, what does a hospitality of difference look like from these twin perspectives? How does hospitality operate as a means of nonviolent resistance under current gender norms, from the perspectives of privileged and unprivileged?

To illustrate the power of hospitality, I will draw upon two specific situations, the first personal, and the second communal. My personal illustration is particularly painful, but it embodies Fulkerson's contention that we wrongly use power to define others. When we do this, we are at odds with a theology of hospitality, which should be a central component of a theology of power.

In the summer of 2007 I went to Nairobi, Kenya, to attend the YWCA's International Women's Conference on HIV and AIDS. I knew that the trip would change me. After all, I had willingly placed myself in positions of transformation before. By the end of the trip on Sunday, July 8, my colleagues and I had safely navigated more than ten days of life in Nairobi. We attended workshops and plenaries on HIV and AIDS; we met with young adults who struggle to find work; we talked with many HIV-positive women; we shared animal crackers with orphan girls rescued from the streets by Lutherans; we observed the making of three prostitution deals between Western white men and indigenous African women; we encountered police corruption at close range. We three women on the trip were, indeed, changed. That Sunday, the three of us weary travelers had exercised, eaten, showered, and packed. I settled down on my bed to read and perhaps to doze a little before catching our shuttle to the airport. My feeling of safe accomplishment was but fleeting, however.

The phone rang. Being the colleague who was responsible for the trip, I scrambled to the phone. "Hallo! Is this Mary?" the caller asked. "This is George. The people at the church are waiting for you!" You see, the prior Sunday and Monday George hosted us at the Jerusalem congregation of the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church (KELC), where we had

30. Ibid., 386.

31. Ibid., 387-89.

each quickly made emotional connections with different people. We had intended to return for their early English service the Sunday we were to depart. By Friday, however, we were exhausted. It had been an emotional week. We realized that we desperately needed proper sleep and some quiet time before our evening departure. Because a number of congregation members had already been sending us e-mails, I wrote an e-mail on Friday to several people at the church, letting them know that we would not be able to make it to Sunday's service.

Our means of communication failed. George was on the other end of the line, letting us know that church members had been waiting for us. We failed. We felt badly, but I thought we could just roll on from that point and not carry too much guilt about not showing up.

I was wrong. The phone rang again. This time it was Phillip, but he was not at the church. He was in the lobby and had something to give us! We descended to the posh lobby of our hotel, our hearts in our throats. Phillip of course expressed his regret that we had not gone to church, but he handed me a package from Neema. Neema had been among the beautiful, curvaceous women in the front row of the choir the previous Sunday. Each woman in the dust-encircled church was brightly and impeccably dressed in gorgeous, long skirts, form fitting tops, and queenly head scarves. Neema stood out because her skirt was particularly beautiful to me.

Neema is in her mid to late twenties and serves as the caretaker for the estate grounds of the KELC. She lives in a tiny apartment within the youth building with her shy seven-year-old son. Because I missed my sons, I was pleased to meet her son and knelt down to talk with him. We chatted, and then I moved on to meeting more people from the congregation. At the end of the day, she hovered over us three until our ride back to town arrived. While waiting, I told her how lovely I thought her skirt was. She was beautiful.

In the lobby of the hotel one week later, I pulled an edge of cloth out of the black plastic bag. I gasped. Her skirt was in the bag—for me. I was crushed. Crushed with my own humanity. I was alarmed: How could I possibly receive her skirt? It was the most beautiful thing she owned, I thought. I panicked. What could I give her in return? My colleagues urged me to run up to our room to retrieve the last specialty chocolates we had been carrying as gifts. Once in the room, I furtively wrote a note to Neema and included money for her to spend on her son and clothes of my own that I thought would fit her (she being round and I being straight). I ran the return gifts down to Philip, but I knew that what I sent was not my best, my most beautiful. Yet that is what she had sent me.

Now I was in agony. We had disappointed many people anticipating our arrival. And then, to make it worse for my privileged superiority, Neema had bestowed her best gift on me. The problem, you see, is that I had assumed that Neema could not give me a material gift of such great beauty and value—that only I had the power to give material things to her. For several hours I resisted even taking the skirt and blouse out of the bag. Once I did, to my relief I realized that she had not given up her own skirt and blouse. Instead, she had made me my very own!

What happened to me when I was almost safely out of Africa is a parable of power because it shows how I used the power of privilege to define the difference between Neema and me in my own terms. I assumed I was in charge of defining the power Neema did and did not have. My parable of power is a good example of the

way power is used to define and engage with others—even in the midst of attempts to live a liberating life, in which I try to place theological concern for the oppressed at the center of my work.

Although hospitality of the other through a theology of affinity is challenging for individuals, I would wager that the challenges are even greater for institutions and communities because every person in each of these collective entities needs to be engaged with the commitment simultaneously to embrace the other and serve the other without controlling the other, despite inclinations to the contrary. Likewise, patterns of policy and practice, to be hospitable, must be evaluated on the basis of and grounded upon a commitment to hospitality as a means of nonviolent resistance.

Such challenges could be no more acute than in South Africa after the fall of apartheid as an official system of rule. Fulkerson's premises are particularly relevant when applied to the work of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Black South Africans were notably in a position of oppression, lack of privilege, and marginalization during the regime of apartheid. In the aftermath of apartheid's defeat, Black South Africans were called by their new governmental and religious leaders to espouse a hospitality of the other in efforts to establish a new nation. Three of Fulkerson's assertions are especially noteworthy when seen through the lens of South Africa: 1) Power cannot be re-formed through liberalism's ideal of a universal self. 2) Everyone must be transformed. 3) Difference and power must be addressed through analyses of discourse and practices to change our discourse. In the end, risk is necessary for everyone.

First, Fulkerson argues that groups of people who have not had power and have lived with a lack of privilege cannot simply be added to the institution or community that is trying to be inclusive. As explained above, the "add and stir" solution of liberalism is not an adequate solution to the power differentials we form around difference. In the case of South Africa, Black South Africans could not simply be added to the social, economic, and religious structures that formed South Africa as a society and the Whites and Blacks who lived as its individual citizens. Something had to happen first.

That something was transformation. This is the second of Fulkerson's broad assertions. To change ideologies that see difference as a reason to create power disparities requires all parties to be transformed. Applying Fulkerson's ideas to South Africa meant that everyone needed to engage with the ideology of race and the violence that resulted in order to understand the effects on the power dynamics that ruled the country. According to Peter Storey, South African religious and community leader, one of the unique factors of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was "that victims of all sides of the struggle participate[d]."[32] Parties with and without power in the apartheid regime had to listen to each other as part of the process of transformation.

Similarly, Fulkerson also argues that part of the work of a hospitality of the other is to unpack the connection between knowledge and power and how discourse produces the other—how it domesticates the other by objectifying the other. Two other unique features of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that Storey outlines enact this feature of Fulkerson's argument. Storey explains that unique features of the Truth and Reconciliation

32. Peter Storey, "A Different Kind of Justice: Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa," *The Christian Century* 114 no. 25 (1997): 789.

Commission were to "give priority to victims rather than perpetrators" and to have all of the hearings held publicly so that perpetrators, victims, and their families would face each other.[33] Both of these features, prioritization of victims and truth-telling in public fora, are acts of engaging with the ways in which discourse has produced the other, resulting (in these specific instances) in gross brutality. As Fulkerson points out, it is obvious that for any transformation to occur, communities, institutions, and the people who comprise them must all take risks.

Implications for the Lutheran church

Thus far I have undertaken to outline four important means of nonviolent resistance to the social power of ideologies that do not value all of creation. In the Gospel of Mark there are at least three forms of resistance: using silent power by remaining powerfully silent; making oneself and others visible by making the invisible visible; and doggedly challenging ideologies of oppression. What I hope is very clear is that although these means of resistance continue to be necessary forms of nonviolent resistance both within and outside of the church, Luther's explication that faith sets the Christian free to serve the other urges us to expand our means of resistance to oppressive power to include a theological hospitality of the other. Hospitality of the other is critically important to transforming power. The story of Neema's gift and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work in South Africa are poignant illustrations of our tendency to use privileged power to define the other and of the possibilities of transformation when the privileged and the oppressed meet.

A lingering question or problem remains, however: What about identity? How will identity not be compromised as a community when the individuals within it seek to transform harmful ideologies and practices of power? Sociologist John Brueggemann asserts that this is the key question facing communities and institutions that attempt to resolve the dire social problems facing people today. Particularly in the United States Brueggemann describes the volatile issue as the combined problems of meaning and power: "Community is at risk. Power is abused."[34] The dilemma facing groups is to how to maintain "the *meaning* of its identity without asserting *power* over other groups."[35]

The answer, Brueggemann asserts, is bound up in the necessity of religious communities to work to build community and to end the abuse of power. He notes that theorists of religion, such as Durkheim and Marx, have been more and less confident about religion's capacity to provide solid meaning and to confront and transform power. Weber, however, was a bit more realistic about the capacities of religious communities. According to Brueggemann:

> [Weber's] great insight about the role of religion was basically, 'It depends.'… [The ability of religious communities to provide meaning and to confront power,] Weber argued, depends on the values and organization of religion and the social, political, and economic context in which they evolve.[36]

Subsequently, the question then becomes what makes religious communities and

33. Ibid., 789-790.

34. John Brueggemann, "Negotiating the Meaning of Power and the Power of Meaning," *Theology Today* 63 (2007): 488.

35. Ibid., Emphasis in original.

36. Ibid., 489.

institutions "most successful in facilitating engagement with the problem of meaning *and* the problem of power?"[37] Brueggemann has three answers, all of which carry implications for Christian denominations in the United States.

First, religious communities will ask a great deal of members: that they put doctrine into practice. "[Religious organizations and leaders] should demand commitment to the doctrine and ideals of the faith that is manifest in concrete and regular ways."[38] The implication is that there will be concrete accountability to ensure action consistent with faith. To do this requires strong communities; therefore, there is a primary need to nurture strong community.[39]

Second, religious communities and institutions will form partnerships with non-religious bodies and will contribute to public discourse. The implication is that the church will be a public church. Being a public church means that this church recognizes its interdependence with other institutions to create social change. Brueggemann strongly asserts, "Religion has no transformative power in society writ large when its adherents act independently of other institutions."[40] Religious communities are not solo agents in altering social ideologies of power. Moreover, Brueggemann calls on religious communities to contribute "sophisticated religious, theological, and spiritual sensibilities" to public discourse, just as other major institutions contribute to national and international public discourse.

Third, religious communities need to engage with the other in order to address the powerfully combined problems of meaning and power. In other words, Brueggemann encourages "a culture of discourse."[41] Here is the important engagement between Fulkerson's assertions about transforming power and the practical steps a religious community has available to itself that Brueggemann outlines. One difficulty for religious communities, notes Brueggemann, is that religious people tend to be "less tolerant and pluralistic in their attitudes" and "more committed to tradition and social conformity."[42] However, these tendencies are not without antidotes.

Religious communities already have some skills for cultivating a culture of discourse through their historical practices of "[l]iteracy, oration, debate, and planning and attending meetings."[43] The gifts of these practices can be used in creating fora to be with the other, the space to be hospitable to the other. In fact, Brueggemann indicates that healthy communities are the ones that make it a priority to recognize the other and to continue their commitment to strong community building.[44] The implication for the church is that it commit itself to the hard work of taking risks in the process of transformation, which is, after all, the hoped-for result of nonviolent resistance—both what the church calls for and to which the church in the world is called.

37. Ibid., Emphasis in original.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 491.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.

Preaching Your Life Message

David Housholder
Robinwood Church, Huntington Beach, California

It's been twenty years since I graduated from seminary, and I'd like to walk you through a transformative experience from just a few months ago.

A group of pastor colleagues from Southern California gathered at my house in the middle of an afternoon. I had used TiVo to record about twenty public speakers; most of them preachers, but some of them PBS motivational teachers.

We were hoping to study their communication techniques and learn a thing or two.

We anticipated that we would watch for a few hours, eat pizza, chitchat and go home.

Twelve hours later, well past midnight, we were in a whole different frame of mind. Some of us doubted our calling. We had been through a handful of heated exchanges.

There was a distinct common ground for all the speakers we saw:

- They seemed more under-prepared than over-prepared.
- They attracted and held huge audiences.
- They were all over the map politically and theologically. Jeremiah Wright to Joel Osteen. High brow and low brow. New Age to fundamentalist.
- Their words were not coming from a premeditated script or crafted speech.
- Their messages came from a very deep place within each of them.
- They each had a life message.

I woke up depressed the next day.

None of us, as the TV was clicked off, could articulate what our life message was before we split up for the night.

This was not a good feeling.

There is something truly authentic about preaching from that deep place inside you which God has touched. Achieving fluency in expressing this has become a new goal of mine.

Paul's life message (a transforming encounter with God with resulting grace) was not the same as the one that Jesus preached (the *Basileia*). Of course, any Good News from God overlaps with equivalent messages, but both Jesus' and Paul's "take" on it were formed in different environments with different experiences.

Basically, all those with their own book in the Bible got there by writing/speaking from that "deep place," a place which, by definition, is a locale of great authenticity and integrity. God is somehow very present in that place.

This is why many "Lutherans" trying to approach Luther's "place" fall flat. The message becomes derivative. It amounts to preaching someone else's experience of God. We become footnote-ers rather than truth-tellers; derivative theologians rather than original theologians.

One of my pastoral associates, Joe Johnson, whispered to me during a sermon: "Listen to his false voice. He's not

1. The author is a 1988 M.Div. graduate of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in Chicago, Illinois.

connected to his heart, which is why he's so boring." The result is a lack of traction, missing "bite."

So I took an inventory (a good thing to learn from twelve-step folks), and went about searching for my life message.

What message would I be willing to take a bullet for? What message stirs me? What were my pivotal spiritual experiences that formed this message?

Nietzsche once said: "Write with (your own) blood. Only then will you experience what 'soul' is." (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, 1891, my translation)

Not to be taken literally, but he has a point.

I look around at the prevailing churches of every stripe in Southern California. The preachers (most of whom everyone knows) are passionate about one or two things. Their whole message revolves around these passions, as do all of their books. They don't see themselves as having to preach the "whole counsel of God." They see themselves as one voice in the choir; an essential note that must be sounded.

But don't we have to adhere to "the gospel"? There is a sense among many pastors that there is a pure gospel that must be approached in everything we preach. Many of us key in our sermons and PowerPoint® presentations hoping to get close to this abstract truth, the "right answer" in the back of the math book.

But this platonic gospel has no blood in it; no dirt under its fingernails. And it doesn't stir anyone who is listening. It doesn't even stir the person preaching! The less incarnational this gospel is, the less potency it packs.

So my search led me back to college, when my faith was first coming alive. My grandfather, who took me out for breakfast every week for four years, shared his heart and his dirty-fingernail truths with me. His father committed suicide. He left home (a Minnesota homestead) in his early teens and worked the harvests from Kansas to Winnipeg until he landed an MBA at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks.

Then came the Great Depression. He was drawn to the empowerment writing of that time (the golden age of such literature). He poured this practical technology into me during breakfasts at Denny's.

> There is something truly authentic about preaching from that deep place inside you which God has touched.

I remembered the Bible my father brought home from the Holy Land when I was ten: a tricked-out study Bible with pages upon pages of maps and timeline charts. I lived in a village in the mountains of Idaho and this Bible was literally the most intellectually powerful thing in town. For two years, it was my video game. I learned (with the help of the charts and maps) every nook and cranny of the narrative.

Then, there was my first church out of seminary in Chimacum, Washington. My first encounter with (lots of) underclass Pentecostals living up the gullies and gulches of rural Olympic Peninsula. Lots of guns, dogs, satellite dishes, trailers, rust, and chicken wire dot the landscape. They believed in the power of God; and

that stuff was *real*. They brought me into their circles and taught me to access the things of the Spirit.

In Chicago, I had learned first hand about the ravages of racism as a community organizer during my LSTC time. Betty Booker of the Grand Boulevard Community 76 Organization showed me the belly of the beast of America's original sin. I spent months writing grants for housing protection, going to court against slumlords and gathering photographic and interview evidence to use against them in the crumbling 1890s-era housing of Chicago's vast South Side. To this day, my eyes tear up immediately with even the hint of racism around me. Reading Lincoln's second inaugural address causes my tears to flow freely.

Metaphorically speaking, I am learning to read and describe my own spiritual tattoos.

Building on this experience, I have been blessed with my primary prayer partner, for ten years now, who is an African American Baptist preacher/bus driver in West Virginia. Walter continues to walk me through the African American experience lived in a very personal way.

So in the months leading up to writing this, I have been intentionally and consciously learning to express my deepest held truths with language from my actual transformative experiences. Metaphorically speaking, I am learning to read and describe my own spiritual tattoos.

I am less eager to read the "latest cool book on church life" and less inclined to go to the most popular conference of the season. I watch national-class Christian communicators, not to borrow their messages, but rather to learn to be as authentic as they are.

- Each of us has a spiritual "core" and corresponding teaching that is the source of our leadership potency. This is how I am learning to define it for me:
- Paying attention to things that move my heart. What makes me choke up during a movie? What makes me angry on the news? What do I like to study, just for fun? Where do I find beauty?
- What "demands" on the pastor (how to dress, what to focus on) can actually lead us away from our spiritual core? How do we push back and self-define? So much of Lutheran pastoring has been reduced to dressing in costume and reading prescribed lines, whether or not these words are where our hearts are at that moment. I preached barefoot two weeks ago because I felt like it.
- Watching for moments when people "lean in" when I am preaching/teaching. There are those times you can hear a pin drop. Chances are that is when we are preaching from our hearts. People aren't in church for information. They can Google that. They want to observe a living fire in a real person.
- Weaning myself from derivative experiences of God. Not depending on someone else's life message.
- Not being afraid to preach dozens of Sundays in a row in a concerted effort to find and define my message and set the tone for the congregation.
- Reading the Bible as a conversation with the life messages of those who truly "landed it." Also, indulging my tendency

to experience God directly while reading the Bible (Heb 4:12).

- Letting go of my need to preach and teach the whole counsel of God. I don't want to be the whole choir. Just a helpful baritone. We need to be happy singing within our own note range.
- Getting rid of 80 percent of my books. Lincoln got by with just a handful which he returned to over and over.
- Reading fewer commentaries; except for Lenski, which I have always been addicted to. Trusting my own "commentary."
- Being willing to tell my truth even when it sounds way wrong. For instance, I don't give a hoot about discipleship. I don't think that discipline is the heart of the Christian life; I believe, in contrast, that it is in yielding to the power of God.

We have been trained since fourth grade to seek some holy grail of "objective answers in the back of the book." We got good grades whenever we approached this ideal. When applied to our preaching, the result is devastating boredom for our listeners (especially for young people who can see right through us) and the very real risk of losing touch with our own souls.

The truth is, I can't preach a gospel that is not gospel for me. Only a teaching on the atonement that atones me will ring true from my lips.

I am slowly learning to define and express what I have deeply believed in (at a subconscious level) all along.

Preaching has been called the last vestige of "live guerilla cabaret" left over in an over-produced media culture. Our "real selves" have to show up to make it work.

I can't invite people into Bonhoeffer's experience of grace. But I can invite people into my fascination with my dad's study Bible, my full blown Pentecostal experiences in Washington State, my passion for racial justice, and my breakfasts with Grandpa and our shared optimistic belief in a better world.

Partly in order to free myself from complex and competing demands on the content of my message and ministry, I left a wealthy congregation (full of great people) in Huntington Beach, recently, to plant a church for broken, ethnically mixed (emerging California) people two miles away; we meet in an old grade-school auditorium.

Half of our adult members are single; most with kids. Almost half are in recovery for one thing or another. I believe in them because I believe that God believes in them. The blood of my grandpa, Lincoln, Betty Booker, my dad's study Bible, and Olympic Peninsula Pentecostals flows through me as I preach and teach there.

I haven't found my life message yet, but I'm finding it.

You have one too. It's never too late to find your true voice.

All God's people got a place in the choir…

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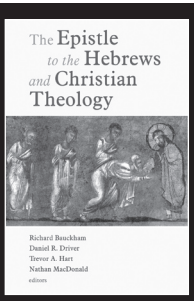

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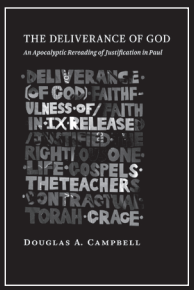

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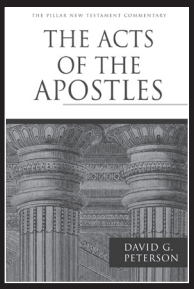

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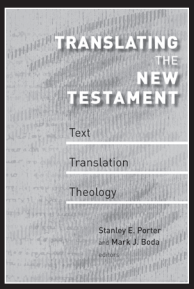

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Book Reviews

Contesting Texts: Jews and Christians in Conversation about the Bible. Edited by Melody D. Knowles, Esther Menn, John Pawlikowski, O.S.M, and Timothy J. Sandoval. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. v and 229 pages. Paper. $29.00.

This work consists of a series of essays given at a conference in Chicago, February 28-March 1, 2005. The conference was sponsored by four Hyde Park seminaries: Catholic Theological Union, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, McCormick Theological Seminary, and Chicago Theological Seminary. Most of the contributors teach at one of these institutions. The intent of the conference, and consequently the book itself, is to engage Jewish and Christian scholars in a dialogue regarding biblical texts that have been sticking points between Christian and Jews.

The introductory essay by the editors, all faculty members in Hyde Park seminaries, centered on Dabru Emet, a Jewish document about Christians and Christianity. Dabru Emet was first published in the New York Times in September 2000 and has found support among Jewish rabbis and scholars. The document itself can be found on pages 181-85. A short summary has been furnished by the editors in their introduction (p. 8). It says that Jews and Christians worship the same God; they seek the authority of the same book, the Torah; all differences will be settled in the endtime; meanwhile Christians should respect the claim of Israel to the promised land; and the holocaust (Shoah) was not a Christian phenomenon. One of the four Dabru Emet authors, David Novak, University of Toronto, explains the complicated process that resulted in such a useful statement (pp. 29-45).

Other scholars reflect on several ways Jews and Christians can understand texts that have proved controversial. Ralph Klein of LSTC tackles the broadly accepted "promise-fulfillment" theology in which Christianity has been considered the fulfillment of what God promised to the Jews (pp. 47-63). Instead of this supersessionist reading of the Bible, he maintains that both Israel and Christianity experience fulfillment of Old Testament promises in their traditions. Another LSTC faculty member, Barbara Rossing, continues her discussion of Revelation by maintaining that the Lamb refers to a nonviolent conquering (pp. 67-77). In contrast to Christian Zionists, unconverted Jews will not be destroyed in the endtime (p. 68).

Barbara Bowe, of CTU, seeks to define "other" in dialogues such as those found in this book. She shows how conflicts and vilification have been used to create the "other" (pp. 93-101). Sarah Tanzer, of McCormick, deals with the difficult role of the Jews in the Gospel of John (pp. 103-18). After depicting several solutions offered by scholars, she finally concludes that Jews and Christians will need to be patient with each other as they read this Gospel. In a somewhat similar essay another Jewish scholar, Laurence Edwards of CTU, searches for a way to explain the several uses of "Pharisee," positive and negative, in the writings of Luke (pp. 119-35). Other than Hyde Park writers, Walter Brueggemann of Columbia Theological Seminary has a fine article on how hope will create a common inheritance for Jews and Christians (pp. 139-63). Steven Weitzmann of Indiana University tackles the complex function of the "sacrifice of Isaac" (martyrdom) in Jewish and Christian tradition (pp. 79-89). The collection of essays was summarized by Rabbi David Sandmel of CTU (pp. 173-78).

The essays are instructive, but at the end I had to resonate with the observations of Susan Thistlethwaite, of CTS (pp. 165-72). As a leader in the Free Church tradition she needed to consider, though not necessarily accept, elements of Dabru Emet. In her tradition, as well as mine, the Torah cannot be considered authoritative (p. 170). For example, the regulations of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are presently a serious cause for intense conflict among Christians. Or, members of the Free Church cannot violate a Jewish-Christian-Islamic community (p. 169), so a Jewish claim to Israel, to the exclusion of Palestinians, cannot be easily accepted. From

a New Testament perspective I did miss a major contribution to the subject. There is no reference to the important "new perspective on Paul" that reads Paul in terms of his Jewish heritage rather than Reformation doctrine of salvation (James Dunn, E.P. Sanders, and N.T Wright). *Contesting Texts* is a cogent series of essays that will be useful in interfaith discussion in the classroom as well as in local faith communities.

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Mysticism for Beginners: John of the Cross Made Easy. By Sister Eileen Lyddon. Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2006. 165 pages. Paper. $13.95.

Mysticism pervades both current and historical Christian thought, but is a topic that many do not understand or are afraid to investigate. Given this ethos, St. John of the Cross would not seem like the place for a beginner to start. Sister Eileen Lyddon, however, has navigated a path for the reader, bringing this deep, spiritual thinker to an accessible level. The author is an Anglican contemplative who adds insight from a unique point of view.

The book is divided into eight major sections, moving from the active and passive nights of sense, through the active and passive nights of spirit, all the way to "The Way of Union." Each chapter contains nuggets of wisdom from John of the Cross along with commentary by the author, moving the reader to a greater understanding of the depth of John's writings. This is especially apparent in the final section, beginning on page 140, where text from John's "The Spiritual Canticle" is presented.

In the prologue the author states, "None of us goes through life without our experiences of night, and our growth as Christians depends on how we use them (p.23)." Despite the "darkness" associated with John's writings, Sister Lyddon prompts us to look beyond this into ourselves. She helps us on our journey with references to familiar authors such as C.S. Lewis and allusions to stories like Beauty and the Beast and Alice in Wonderland.

The title is a bit misleading in that the emphasis is on John and not a general introduction to mysticism. The book does, however, do a good job of bringing the reader into contact with spirituality and their own spiritual processes. This text is an accessible resource for those interested in pursuing personal spiritual avenues, and may be read by beginners to the study of mysticism who would not otherwise read John of the Cross.

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Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief. By Rowan Williams. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. 159 pages. Cloth. $16.95.

This book is composed of six Lenten meditations given by Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in the spring of 2005 at Canterbury Cathedral. Following the ecumenical creeds, they are written for thoughtful laity for whom Williams makes no assumptions about religious literacy. They are geared to help postmodern Europeans and North Americans grow deeper in their faith. The book is also graced with images, many of which are reproductions of the artist David Jones, in order to enhance a meditative dimension while reading.

Williams wants to make a clear distinction between faith as trust versus a statement of conjecture. To affirm one's belief in God the Father is not akin to affirming or denying the existence of UFOs. Instead, unlike our distrust of so many institutions, including the institutional church, we are acknowledging that the living Jesus Christ is not working for his own ends, but for our well-being. The outreach of the church should result in a world reconciled to God, and as such, free from fear and guilt. As self-sufficient, God is available to be there for the human. God is happy to be God

and as such can be trusted absolutely. The fact that God owes us nothing, and is not dependent on us, means that God can give us everything quite freely. To affirm God's omnipotence is to recognize that God remains faithful despite our sin. This confidence is affirmed in various mentors in faith that God provides.

Creation should not be thought in terms of efficient causality, with a before and after, but instead as God's generous moment by moment giving of God's self to the world and the world to itself. Hence, the doctrine of creation is not specifically a theory of origins. Likewise, miracles can be seen not as magic but as our making room for God's redemptive activity in the world. God's work is to help humans achieve an "integrated life," in which all that one is is the working out of what God has made.

Jesus came for all outcasts, those unable to fulfill the legal expectations of society. Genuine encounter with Jesus makes God credible and trustworthy. Indeed, Jesus confirms that God at the core is Christlike. Christ's redemptive work is such that he has left nothing undone until we are brought to heaven. And, in that light, Easter can be seen as a "second big bang," recreating and renewing life. In the congregation, I need to acknowledge that the person next to me, perhaps unknown, is God's guest, just like myself.

Williams has established himself not only as a prolific and thoughtful theologian, but also as a gifted spiritual guide. The book is decisively Anglican in tone, mediating Catholic tradition with Protestant sensibilities. Williams is sensitive to the worldview of postmoderns, and gently guides them into a deeper walk in their faith. This book would be a welcome study for a congregation's Lenten journey.

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Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective. By Francis Watson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. xvi and 400 pages. Paper. $32.00.

In this revision of his 1986 book, Francis Watson proposes an alternative to the "New Perspective" on Paul, begun by E. P. Sanders and given its name by J. D. G. Dunn, which criticized the way the "Lutheran" or "old" perspective abstracted Paul's theology out of its social situation.

In part I, Watson reconstructs the mission to the Gentiles as the result of alienation from the synagogue that transformed Christianity from a reform movement within Judaism into a sect. The mission to the Gentiles, he argues, began in Antioch where a mixed Jewish and Greek community worshipped in the synagogue (Acts 11:19-21). The message of Jesus as Messiah that did not require Gentiles to participate in the Jewish way of life elsewhere led to alienation. Two key texts reflecting this are 1 Thess 2:14-16 and 2 Cor 3:12-18. Paul's theology legitimates this separation from the synagogue. Thus, "freedom from the Law" is sectarian separation. "Faith" refers to a common identity in Christ that is incommensurate with "works of the law," which refers to a Jewish way of life.

Part II reads Romans through this lens, arguing that Paul writes to unite Jewish- and Gentile-Christians in the identity of faith, cementing separation from the synagogue. Paul's view on the Law is not inconsistent, as some claim, but persuades Jewish Christians to abandon the Law as the source of their identity and Gentile Christians to be considerate of Jewish Christian sensibilities. Romans 14–15 is the key to seeing these divergent goals.

Watson's argument is clear and engaging, but not without flaw. He over-argues the influence of the synagogue, ironically blurring the particularity of each Pauline letter. Even when his scholarship is rooted in social reality, he demonstrates that Paul's letters lend themselves to abstraction. He glosses over the eschatological thrust of Paul. Although Paul may have specific communities in mind, the judgment and salvation he

envisions is also future and universal (e.g., Rom 1:18; 2:9-10).

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N. F. S. Grundtvig, A Life Recalled: An Anthology of Biographical Source-Texts. (Grundtvig in English Series: Volume One). Translated and edited by S. A. J. Bradley. Aarhus: University of Aarhus Press, 2008. 597 pages. Cloth. $79.00.

If N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) is known at all among members of the church, it would be through the hymns, "Bright and Glorious is the Sky," "Built on a Rock," and "God's Word is Our Great Heritage." In a day in which "praise songs" have the upper hand, these literary and musical jewels are likely to become less known as well. Grundtvig deserves however to be much better known. Few thinkers are as adept as Grundtvig at keeping wedded what should never be separated. For Grundtvig, thinking and experience, thought and history, truth and myth, receptivity and activity, in short, time and eternity, are always to be held together. If one abstracts one from the other, one fails at that very aspect of reality that one is aiming to get at.

This important, long volume inaugurates a series of Grundtvig's writings in English. If the volumes subsequent to this follow suit with the excellence found here, we will be treated to hearty fare. This book is an anthology of autobiographical and biographical texts that invite the reader into the day-to-day activities of Grundtvig, a man who led as exciting a life as an academic or minister is able to muster. In addition, the book provides an extensive, 150-page, bibliographical index that covers every person, place, or event that intertwined with Grundtvig's life. Not only Grundtvig scholars and church historians, but also students of Scandinavian studies and history can find much to digest here.

Grundtvig was a Renaissance man: poet, hymn-writer, literary antiquarian, mythologist, historian, theologian, churchman, educationalist, and politician. It is said that he is the chief architect of Denmark's modern identity and is still an active force in Danish social, political, and spiritual life.

More than anything, Grundtvig was an advocate of *folkelighed*—folk life—as a medium to inspire people to fulfill their potential within the world. This deeply Romantic notion not only served his social, educational, and political views, but also bore upon his views of the church, which for him was, more than anything, accountable to, but also borne up by, a "living word," the Spirit working through the means of grace and the sharing of the word to sustain supportive Christian community. Theologically, this entailed that Grundtvig separated the "living word," as fundamentally oral, from the Bible, which at best can convey this word. While Grundtvig's move was disconcerting for many orthodox Lutherans, who wished tenaciously to cling to the Bible as the literal word of God, this tactic freed Grundtvig to progress beyond the impasse between the orthodox and their rationalist critics. For Grundtvig, one can live within the worlds projected by the Bible without having to defend its historicity. Rightfully, Grundtvig has been acknowledged as the Lutheran theologian who honors not only the second article of the Creed (Christ and redemption) but primarily the first (creation) and third (the Spirit).

The autobiographical and biographical sections of the book examine Grundtvig's own views of his childhood and youth, his unrequited love affair while serving as a tutor at Egeløkke Manor, his early years of immersion into Anglo-Saxon poetry, his years as pastor at Vor Frelser's congregation in Copenhagen, his study leave over three summers in England, his visit to Norway, and his rich service to both nation and church while a chaplain at Vartov congregation. Here we sense his love for each of the three women (Elisabeth, Marie, and Asta) to which he was successively wedded, the intensity and agony of his dispute with the theological rationalist Henrik Nicolai Clausen, his sparring with younger colleague and scholar Søren Kierkegaard, his wrestling with manic-depressive disorder, his disputes with bishops Jacob Peter

Mynster and Hans Lassen Martensen, and his own sense of being a social prophet, as well as the acclamation he received, during both his mature and twilight years.

This book is primarily for the dedicated student of Grundtvig or Scandinavian studies. However, pastors and laity are bound to find the courage that Grundtvig developed to effectuate positive change in his world exemplary and stimulating.

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Humanity Before God: Contemporary Faces of Jewish, Christian and Islamic Ethics. Edited by William Schweiker, Michael A. Johnson and Kevin Jung. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. 320 pages. Paper. $22.00.

Hans Küng's 1991 seminal work *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* opened up the field of inter-faith conversation on social ethics. *Humanity Before God* is a contribution to that conversation. The work is a compilation of Jewish-Christian-Muslim reflection centered on the question of the distinctiveness and role of "Humanity" in creation. This collection of papers is the result of a 2003 lecture series at the University of Chicago. The intention of the conference, and this subsequent publication, was to provide a wide variety of perspectives by Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinkers on the topic of "shared moral and religious concern" for the role of humanity *vis-à-vis* God and God's creation.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, "The Distinctiveness of Being Human," provides reflections on the role humans play in each of the three faiths, including the shared Jewish and Christian Genesis concept of being created in the image of God *(imago Dei)*, and the Qur'anic concept of human vicegerency (the human as *khaīfa*). This section provides diverse reflections on what exactly makes humanity distinctive; on what it means to be "created in God's image" or to be given a special role in creation, including the traditional arguments for human distinctiveness that involve the intellect or conscience, compassion, relationality, the ability to love, the will to do good, dignity and nobility, and "holiness." The second section, "Humanity in Creation," deals with the role, rights, and responsibilities of human activity in the larger sphere of relationships. Here, in this reviewer's estimation, is the most helpful section. The authors provide arguments for the theological or philosophical grounding of human activity in creation; of how humanity should order itself given its propensity to seek power, act responsibly toward itself, creation, and society, and create safe limits for the protection and extension of human rights.

Overall, the driving thrust of this work is the ongoing reflection among scholars within the traditions of the three Abrahamic faiths regarding contemporary social ethics. How can each tradition understand and shape the concept of the importance of humanity and its role in the creation? This certainly has important implications for how faith communities encounter each other, conduct inter-religious dialogue, and most importantly, how each religious community might understand its own role within the greater spheres of ecological, social, and political relationships. The book is not intended to provide common starting points or methodologies in order to seek a consensus for a global ethic among the religions. On the contrary, the authors demonstrate wide-ranging interests, from commitments to the authority of religious texts, the social sciences, philosophical enquiry, or secular humanism. The papers published from the conference are too diverse in scope and method to pull out any neat and simple base-line inter-religious commonalities. The one clear and helpful message of this work, however, is that each faith tradition can offer important and serious contributions to the area of social ethics, contributions that are honest, sincere, and noble.

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Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament. Edited by Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. xiii and 316 pages. Paper. $29.00.

We have here a wide-ranging collection of articles geared to "understanding the Old Testament texts as mediated through the New Testament, and the New Testament texts as they interpreted the Old Testament especially in relation to Jesus Christ." This volume is a sampler platter on the restaurant menu. One finds no consistent handling of the biblical writings methodologically.

Dennis L. Stamps ("The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament as a Rhetorical Device: A Methodological Proposal") raises the intriguing proposal that the content of Old Testament citations was not necessarily key to a writer's use of them, but rather that they were cited *as authoritative*. In other words, the persuasive power of the Old Testament passage came not in what it said but in its rhetorical function as implied ancient authentication of the New Testament writer's position and as a common bond between writer and reader.

R. Timothy McLay ("Biblical Texts and the Scriptures for the New Testament Church") offers a densely packed analysis of Deuteronomy 32:43 according to Old Greek, Masoretic, and Qumran (4QDeut^{q}) renderings. This discussion serves to illustrate from Hebrews 1:6 the textual difficulties involved in study of relationships between the Testaments—textual difficulties arising from the pluriformity of the Scriptures. Incidentally, though McLay asserts that his English translations are intentionally literal in order to make his argument clearer to individuals with limited facility in the biblical languages, he is curiously inconsistent in translating υἱός as "sons" (line 3, p. 45) and as "children" (line 6, p. 46).

Michael P. Knowles ("Scripture, History, Messiah: Scriptural Fulfillment and the Fullness of Time in Matthew's Gospel") contends that Matthew's overriding interest is that the Old Testament, as interpreted by the Messiah, points to the Messiah. Textual and typological allusions, explicit citations, and formulaic pointers to the Old Testament all serve this overriding interest. All along, contends Knowles, Matthew assumes that Scripture and the Messiah reciprocally validate each other's authority.

Craig A. Evans ("The Beginning of the Good News and the Fulfillment of Scripture in the Gospel of Mark") argues that Mark's Gospel was written as a deliberate challenge to the Roman cult of the emperor, and most immediately to counter the assertion that Vespasian's ascent to the throne was the "good news" that fulfilled Jewish scriptural prophecies.

Stanley E. Porter ("Scripture Justifies Mission: The Use of the Old Testament in Luke-Acts") concentrates on two instances of Old Testament usage by Luke to establish the overall purpose of Luke-Acts, as well as to illustrate how Luke's way of employing the Old Testament serves that purpose, namely, to establish the mission of Jesus and the church. He treats one instance from the Gospel and one from Acts: Luke 4:18–19 (as it uses Is 61:1–2) and Acts 2:14–36 (as it uses Joel 2:28–32, Ps 16:8–11, and Ps 110:1). Readers will recognize echoes of the widely recognized "proof from prophecy" motif.

Paul Miller ("'They Saw His Glory and Spoke of Him': The Gospel of John and the Old Testament") sweeps broadly through John's Gospel. He surveys formal characteristics of Johannine quotations from Scripture. But the bulk of the article explores John's hermeutics, i.e., the role of the Old Testament in "seeing" Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

James W. Aagerson ("Written Also for Our Sake: Paul's Use of Scripture in the Four Major Epistles, with a Study of 1 Corinthians 10") begins by summarizing five important areas of scholarly investigation of the use of Scripture by Paul and locating his contribution in two of the five, namely: "the investigation of Paul's scriptural quotations and arguments and their relation to larger Old Testament contexts" and "the character of intertextuality and inner biblical exegesis in Paul's letters." As the article's subtitle suggests, Aagerson's detailed ex-

egesis is directed toward 1 Corinthians 10, with attention to biblical allusion and echo as well as quotation. Specialists in Pauline studies will note thought-provoking assertions also in his general comments prior to the more detailed exegesis.

Sylvia C. Keesmaat ("In the Face of the Empire: Paul's use of Scripture in the Shorter Epistles") paints with a broad brush Paul's scriptural references and allusions in service of his provocative and subversive gospel, i.e., the liberating story of Jesus within the story of Israel which challenges oppressive theological and social structures of the empire. The author treats Ephesians and Colossians as authentically Pauline, and does not consider the Pastorals. I am in sympathy with Keesmaat's critique of the empire today, but unexplained claims such as that consumer materialism "requires sacrifices that demand the death of our children" are uncompelling at best. Also, today's fallen world is messy, which begs consideration of appropriate use of military force. Certainly our story is "a Messiah who brings peace through suffering love rather than through military action." But could not some military action actually be suffering love by those serving on the ground, literally? Think, for example, of liberating Nazi concentration camps and of the prospect of halting genocide in Darfur.

Kurt Anders Richardson ("Job as Exemplar in the Epistle of James") zeros in on but one of the Old Testament images and themes recalled by James: Job's endurance.

It is an ambitious undertaking to survey the remaining New Testament writings in twenty-five pages, but Andreas J. Köstenberger makes a valiant attempt in "The Use of Scripture in the Pastoral and General Epistles and the Book of Revelation." The wide net that this article casts allows for only sketchy reviews of the individual writings. Imagine trying to say something comprehensive about use of the Old Testament in Hebrews in fewer than three pages. The author's treatment of the Pastorals, which he elsewhere defends as authentically Pauline, is the most engaging, probably because the Pastorals present relatively little Old Testament material to wrestle with, and Köstenberger takes care not to overstate his case. He also draws the discussion back to the rhetoric of invoking the Old Testament.

Köstenberger's "Hearing the Old Testament in the New: A Response" delightfully summarizes and addresses issues in all of the preceding chapters. I found his response to be especially welcome, given how varied the essays are in this collection.

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Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops: Public Ministry for the Reformation and Today. By Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008. ix and 141 pages. Paper. $16.00.

By any standard of assessment, this is a remarkable book for Lutherans. One of the most touted shibboleths among Protestants is that of the "priesthood of all believers," a slogan which Wengert sees, with good reason, as a license for pitting laity against clergy and vice versa. The textual evidence indicates that this notion cannot be traced to Luther, Melanchthon, or the Reformation era but is wholly an invention of Pietism. That insight alone would make this a noteworthy book. However, Wengert goes on to defend a robust vocation for bishops within the concept of ministry and debunking other notions such as the "transference" view of ministry.

After surveying the Reformation and confessional literature, Wengert contends that there is no disjunction between the "priesthood of all believers" and the ordained but instead a unity within the body of Christ. All Christians have callings and that of the ordained is simply one of those callings within the entire body. Wengert also leads us to cherish the office of oversight (bishops) and vest them with proper authority.

The phrase *das allgemeine Priestertum aller Gläubigen* is not to be found in Luther's writings (1). It was Spener, over a century and a half after the Reformation who designated the laity as a "spiritual priesthood." It is this Pietistic distinction which reinforces a

division—even opposition—between clergy and laity which is wholly unwarranted in early Lutheranism.

While no testimony can be given from Luther to assert a distinction between laity and clergy, his emphasis is that it is the authority of the proclaimed word that renews the public office of ministry (4). For Luther, there is a single Christian estate, in which many different vocations reside. Likewise, the "evangelical catholic" conviction of an ontological change in those ordained cannot be derived from Luther's notion of *Stand* (6). Hence there is no difference between clergy and laity other than respective offices (7). *Stand*, then, has nothing to do with an ontological essence; but by the same token, *amt* (office) has nothing to do with something "functionary," as a more "democratic" approach to congregational life might use to justify pastoral authority. Luther was not especially advocating a more democratic approach to ecclesiastical authority but was countering the pope's ability to create a separate *Stand* for priests (8). Luther was in fact destroying the two-estate theory of laity and clergy operative in Rome (9). All Christians, then, are priests but all do not hold the pastoral office (12).

On the basis of article 5 of the *Augsburg Confession*, the doctrine of justification requires a public office so that the goods of forgiveness of sins might be distributed (39–40). And, from the perspective of the Confessions, episcopal oversight is admissible, provided that it conforms to the gospel (46), more specifically that the "eschatological edge" of the gospel is preserved (52). The confessions have no intent of reducing church orders to a kind of "federated congregationalism" (73). In the confessions, pastors and bishops are not distinguished (74) but a distinctive office of oversight is legitimated under the rubric of service, and not lordship. A historic succession is possible, provided that it is accountable to the gospel first (76).

The office of the ministry, in the confessional writings, can be outlined thus: in the family it is administered through the parents, in the congregation through the pastor, and in the church, through the bishop. Again, bishops hold themselves to the purity of the gospel in bringing comfort to troubled consciences in opposition to Episcopal claims or the whim of a democratized priesthood.

Behind Wengert's historical and systematic work is a concern to affirm and uphold public ministry under the conditions of individualism, definitive of both North American and European church life, which as often as not wreak havoc in both congregations and synods. This is a volume worth pondering and needs to have its full impact on congregational, synodical, and churchwide structures.

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Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels. By Pheme Perkins. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. xvi and 312 pages. Cloth. $28.00.

Perkins, New Testament professor at Boston College, has added another wide-ranging work to her many publications. This introduction is not intended for the scholars of the Synoptic Gospels but for interested students and lay people. She includes comments on textual criticism and literary criticism in the belief that this is necessary for a full understanding of the Gospels. The book is solidly based on the so-called Two-Document hypothesis, i.e., that Matthew and Luke have used Mark and the Q source in composing their Gospels.

Chapter One defines "Gospel" as first of all the message about Jesus, secondarily as the book in which this message is recorded. Without complete argumentation, she says that Gospels are intended as a type of biography or biographic narrative with an emphasis on Jesus' death and resurrection. The four-Gospel collection may be traced to Tatian who compiled the Diatessaron.

In Chapter Two, Perkins discusses the manner in which ancient books were written and handed down, including writers, shapes of books, textual criticism, and Marcion.

Chapter Three, "The Quest for Sourc-

es," discusses Q as a source for Matthew and Luke, in addition to Mark, and adduces the Gospel of Thomas also, in the belief that the sayings in this Gospel may preserve some clues about the shape of the Q tradition before its incorporation into the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. She asks the question of whether Q is a Gospel and answers it negatively, although she admits that it also depends on the definition of a Gospel. The discussion of form criticism is brief and rather traditional. She includes a table comparing the parables in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and the Gospel of Thomas.

The Passion Narrative is discussed briefly, also in comparison with the Gospel of Peter. In these three chapters, the arrangement and order are not always evident.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are devoted to reading Mark's, Matthew's, and Luke's Gospels. These are the most valuable chapters, dealing with the special emphases and features of the individual Gospels, in other words, literary criticism. Perkins points out that Mark is not just a collector of various materials but puts his own stamp on the whole book. Despite its "choppiness," the Gospel is well crafted. It distinguishes between public and private ministry, and it shows the disciples as an image of the readers' own struggles with opponents. The titles of Jesus underscore his significance for the readers or hearers of the Gospel. The community implied by the Gospel was distant from Jewish practices. The Gospel ends abruptly at 16:8, although various endings were supplied later. Jesus shares the agony of the human condition.

The similarity between Mark and Matthew was obvious to early Christians. Because of its Jewish Christian orientation and because of the name Matthew in 9:9, the Gospel of Matthew was considered as written earlier than Mark. But this is not supported in present scholarship. Rather, Matthew has expanded the narrative outline found in Mark, although in some places he changes the order slightly. He adds to the teachings and parables of Jesus. The discourses are noteworthy. Matthew uses proof from Scripture in his formula quotations as an argument for Christian belief. Pharisees are the primary opponents of Jesus. Matthew's Christology is more pronounced than Mark's. Perkins says strangely (on p. 190), "Matthew has no stories about Jesus himself prior to his public ministry" and then she speaks of the infancy narratives as christological with the emphasis on Joseph. Don't they deal with Jesus? Although written in Greek, the Gospel of Matthew has Jewish Christian traditions.

Luke opens his Gospel for more sophisticated readers but unfortunately does not identify himself. He intends to support the preaching that is going on in his community. Despite the prologue, the interests of Luke are theological, not historical. His Gospel focuses more on Jerusalem than the other Gospels. He is the most accomplished stylist among the evangelists. The characters in the infancy narratives are quite different from those in the rest of the Gospel, as examples of piety who also use canticles based on Jewish Christian materials. The journey narrative is a special feature in Luke's Gospel. He uses parables as example stories, exemplifying a virtue to the readers. More women appear in the Gospel of Luke than in the other Gospels. While Mary plays an important role in the infancy narratives of Luke, it is surprising that she is practically invisible during the public ministry of Jesus. Perkins does not give an evaluation of these observations, except to say that they do not show Luke-Acts as an advocate of gender equality. In describing Jesus' role, Perkins states that traditional titles of Jesus are used; in addition, Jesus is the savior. In Luke, Jesus appears as the heroic prophet/martyr who even asks for forgiveness for those who put him to death. The community contemplated in Luke's Gospel is probably Gentile Christian. The so called "Western Text" shows that the Gospel of Luke was revised, most likely in the second century.

Chapter Seven might be considered an appendix: it discusses Gospels from the Second and Third Centuries, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Truth and others. Even the Gospel of Judas is discussed briefly. A final section returns to the question of genre and concludes that the four canonical Gospels really stand by them-

selves and cannot be expanded by any of the later "Gospels."

What is surprising about the book is the fact that the Gospel of John is only mentioned in occasional references and not discussed and that instead these later Gospels of the second and third centuries are found worthy of analysis. Even realizing that it is an introduction to the Synoptic Gospels, it would seem that the Gospel of John is more worthy to be included than these later Gospels. The work does not present new research or surprising statements, but serves well as an introduction to the Synoptics for new theological students or lay people.

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The Horrors We Bless: Rethinking the Just War Legacy. By Daniel C. Maguire. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. viii and 103 pages. Paper. $7.00.

In order to appreciate the argument of this book it is necessary to pay careful attention to the title. This is the case because the first few pages of the book can easily mislead the casual reader into thinking the book is about something else. In those pages Daniel Maguire suggests he will pursue a "third way" between pacifism and just war as "usually presented." This third way is just war understood and practiced in a manner analogous to police action, with similar forms of oversight and restraint. Those familiar with recent conversations between pacifists and advocates of just war will immediately recognize this as familiar and potentially fruitful territory.

However, with page six, the book leaves behind all thought of a "third way" and becomes a relentless criticism of any attempt to actually practice just war. Maguire pulls no punches in repeatedly asserting that violence is counterproductive, unnecessary, primitive, uncivilized, and barbaric. It is clear that he does not believe that there can be such a thing as just war. In the end, there is no third way; it is either pacifism or barbarism. In this situation, just war theory can be used either to rationalize horror or abolish war. As proof of the first option, Maguire offers up a running commentary on U.S. political-military activity, equating U.S. practice with empire and terrorism and on more than one occasion making a comparison to Hitler.

Serious just warriors sometimes complain that pacifists do not understand just war and manipulate the tradition so that it simply condemns war, one war at a time. While such a complaint is patently unjust as a generalization (think, for example, of John Howard Yoder's careful exegesis of just war), this book embraces the charge. This is what Maguire thinks just war is good for. If you agree with this premise, then this book will affirm you in that belief. If, however, you desire to embody just war or even simply to understand the tradition, this book will be less helpful.

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Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts. Edited by Matt Jackson-McCabe. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. x and 389 pages. Cloth. $35.00.

The historical reassessment of the "parting of the ways" is an important part of the project of Jewish-Christian relations. Scholars now generally see that the separation of Christianity from its Jewish origins was slower and more complex than most Christians have assumed. In *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered* we have a fascinating report on debates and revised views about ancient groups that inhabited the margins between Judaism and Christianity. The introduction and first chapter by Jackson-McCabe survey the history of scholarship and clarify definitions. Although the designation "Jewish Christianity" is still common, some would prefer "Christian Judaism" for certain groups, placing more emphasis on a Jewish self-identity. Essays by other scholars deal with groups (the Jerusalem Church, Paul's Christ-believing Jewish opponents, and the Ebionites and Nazarenes)

and with texts (Q, Matthew, the Johannine writings, James, Revelation, the *Didache*, and the *Pseudo-Clementines).*
The authors all spend time defining the terms (a little tiring), but the advantage is that they try to let the texts speak for themselves rather than impose a single classification scheme. I found myself wanting the book to attempt some final synthesis, but the point really is that no historical synthesis is possible. What we have in the extant texts is a series of snapshots of different communities that in one way or another identified themselves with their Jewish heritage. What is not clear, however, is how these different communities can be linked. I have usually assumed, for example, that one could trace a line from the early Jerusalem believers, through Paul's opponents in Galatia, to later Jewish Christianity as exemplified in the Ebionites. But this volume makes it clear that such a line cannot be drawn with any precision or certainty. This book is recommended for anyone in the church or academy who wants current information on this crucial topic.

David Kuck
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Paul & His World: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context. By Helmut Koester. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. xiii and 301 pages. Cloth. $39.00.

From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context. By Helmut Koester. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. xiii and 311 pages. Cloth. $39.00.

The 45 chapters in these two volumes come from New Testament scholar Koester's long, distinguished career. One should begin by reading chapter 25 in the Paul volume, where Koester describes his growing, changing understanding of New Testament scholarship, then proceed to the entire volume on Paul, and end with Koester on the Gospel tradition(s).

The 24 essays in the Paul volume are grouped in three categories. I. Reading Paul: His Letters and Their Interpretation; II. Reading Paul's World: The Cultural and Religious Environment; III. Reading Early Christianity. Five come from Koester's ongoing interest in the Thessalonian letters. Koester values what archaeological sites contribute to New Testament interpretation; his essays here look at Thessalonica, the cult of Isis and Serapis in Pergamom, and at Melikertes in the Isthmus of Corinth. He thus locates Paul in his actual world. The third section is less unified, with articles ranging from the relationship of Jefferson and Emerson, Gnosticism, Rudolf Bultmann, and Ephesos in early Christian literature.

The 20 papers in the volume on Jesus and the Gospels will appear more radical—and possibly disturbing—to many readers. Seven essays discuss "Gospels Apocryphal and Canonical." Six discuss the Gospel of John, while the final seven relate to the historical Jesus and his theological significance. Koester writes as a historian of early Christian thought in these essays. He gives high historical value to the Gospel of Thomas and the hypothetical document Q as historical sources some 20 years earlier than the oldest synoptic Gospel. Still even these documents do not enable us to get back to the historical Jesus; he remains an obscure figure in terms of historical reconstruction.

Anyone reading these essays will find the understanding of the New Testament expanded, challenged, enriched, disturbed, reinforced, or deepened. They will ask a good bit of many readers; but the effort to comprehend what Koester writes will be richly repaid.

Edgar Krentz
Chicago, Ill.

Justin Martyr and His Worlds. Edited by Sara Parvis and Paul Foster. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. xv and 246 pages. Cloth. $35.00

Justin Martyr and His Worlds, a collection of

14 papers, plus timeline, map, and a list of Justin's writings, emerged from a conference held in Edinburgh in July 2006.

Justin was active during a key period of spiritual discernment, when churches were beginning to recognize certain Christian writings as authoritative; thus he "marks a watershed" between biblical and early Christian studies. This book focuses on that interface between these two disciplines.

Aiming to assess current Justin scholarship and open the field to a new generation of scholars, this book fulfills this goal admirably. The result, however, is that many of the papers are highly technical, dealing, for example, with different theories concerning the number of Justin's apologies ("Justin, Philosopher and Martyr" by Paul Parvis), or whether the rescript by emperor Hadrian that Justin appends to the longer of his apologies is authentic and where Justin originally placed it ("The *Rescript* of Hadrian" by Denis Minns). Thus, while the collection would be of great benefit to the Justin scholar, much of it is probably beyond the scope or interest of most pastors and seminary students.

There are exceptions, however, with exciting implications, such as the fascinating paper by Charles Hill, "Was John's Gospel among Justin's *Apostolic Memoirs*?" Justin refers to the gospels read at Christian assemblies as *Memoirs of the Apostles*. Scholars generally agree that the *Memoirs* included the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke, but have long debated whether Justin knew and used the Gospel of John. Through a careful examination of a passage in the *Dialogue of Trypho*, where Justin discusses the incarnation of the Word and references the *Memoirs*, Hill argues that Justin did indeed know the Gospel of John and included it in his *Memoirs of the Apostles*. This means that Justin heard the Gospel of John read and expounded upon in church, adding to our knowledge of mid-second century Roman Christianity.

Elizabeth A. Leeper
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Qumran Studies: New Approaches, New Questions. Edited by Michael Thomas Davis and Brent A. Strawn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. xxvii and 296 pages. Paper. $30.00.

The eleven papers in this book address persistent issues in Dead Sea Scrolls research. It will be most useful to specialists, but pastors and lay people should at least know the issues that the book raises because of their significance for early Judaism and Christianity. The issues include how Greek texts found at Qumran illustrate the origin of the Septuagint, how texts may appear short because they were excerpted as notes for personal use, how initiation rituals are not related to punishment rituals, how a Messianic text refers to a Messianic age and not an individual Messiah (or two), and how religion and violence are related. The last may be of broadest interest.

Loren L. Johns examines competing models of identity and resistance in 1, 2, and 4 Maccabees, Daniel, the Assumption of Moses, the Apocalypse of John, and the War Scroll from Qumran. He characterizes human resistance against imperial powers along three axes: non-violent to violent, non-eschatological to eschatological, and human non-contribution to contribution. The War Scroll at Qumran presents violent, eschatological resistance in which believers contribute to victory. The Apocalypse depicts non-violent, eschatological resistance and the saints contribute to the final victory.

Peter S. Perry
Chicago, Ill.

The New Perspective on Paul. Revised Edition. By James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. xi and 551 pages. Paper. $36.00.

This volume reprints the essays published by Mohr-Siebeck in Tübingen in 2005 with two additional chapters. The first, long chapter, "The New Perspective: whence, what and whither?", surveys reactions to Dunn's position and comes to the following conclusions:

1. One cannot go back to the portrayal of Judaism as arid, sterile, and narrowly legalistic. 2. Paul's presentation of justification by faith arose in his Gentile mission. It is basic that "no person can stand before God except by God's forgiving justifying grace." 3. "Justification by faith alone needs to be reasserted as strongly as ever it was by Paul or by Augustine or by Luther." 4. The dialectical relationship between Paul's stress on justification by faith and judgment according to works must be maintained. 5. The central stress on Jesus Christ remains the "primary difference between his gospel for all and the understanding of salvation in the scriptures and traditions of Israel."

The next 20 papers, arranged in chronological order, allow one to track Dunn's thought as he ponders significant Pauline texts. Everyone interested in Paul back in the first century and in the gospel one should proclaim today should read these essays. They will drive you into Paul's letters and enrich your understanding of Paul as you engage in dialogue with this significant Pauline scholar.

Edgar Krentz
Chicago, Ill.

New Chapters in the Life of Paul: The Relative Chronology of His Career. By Gregory Tatum. The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 41. Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2006. 145 pages. Paper. $9.00.

Tatum reconstructs the chronology from Paul's authentic letters: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians. He assumes the unity of Philippians and the hypothesis of two letters in 2 Corinthians. He begins by constructing the sequence of these letters from the letters themselves without using Acts. He briefly discusses both the possible overlap and the problems in correlating Acts with Paul. He also abjures the use of "doctrinal development" as a criterion, preferring a rhetorical analysis of Paul's language in relation to specific situations.

The resulting relative chronology is included. The most surprising result is the conclusion that Paul sends money to Jerusalem twice, the first time from Galatia before he goes to Corinth, the second money from Macedonia and Achaia sent from Corinth before writing Romans. Tatum's research method is good, his conclusions stimulating and clearly presented. This is a significant contribution to the study of Paul.

Edgar Krentz
Chicago, Ill.

The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles. By F. Scott Spencer. (Interpreting Biblical Texts.) Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008. 260 pages. Paper. $19.00.

This is an unusual semi-popular commentary in two respects. In its "Orientation" it treats Luke-Acts as a single, unified work, and it discusses at great length the origins, literary genre and character, and literary patterns in Luke-Acts.

The second section, "Implementation: Proceeding to Interpret the Lukan Narratives," interprets the Gospel in some detail, but Acts rather cursorily. Spencer outlines Luke and Acts in a four-part scheme: I. Preparing God's Mission; II. Establishing God's Mission; III. Expanding and Interpreting God's Mission; IV. Defending God's Mission. Read this in the year of Luke. It will aid your proclamation.

Edgar Krentz
Chicago, Ill.

Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue. Edited by J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu. Sheffield Phoenix Press. $42.50.

After an introduction by Exum and Nutu, there are essays on Jael, Deborah, and Barak (Solomon de Bray paints all three together though

they never appear together in the biblical text. So who is the real hero of this story?); David and Jonathan (four artists render their male-male relationship in models acceptable in their time and in doing so make their homosexual tie more evident by their attempts to suppress it); Elijah (icons of the prophet deal with issues like concealment and revelation, the cave as sacred space, and Elijah's experience of the presence of God); Ezekiel (Marc Chagall's interpretation of Ezekiel's call vision marginalizes the prophet and gives major attention to the four living creatures. Chagall also includes a woman in the scene, who is probably Chagall's first wife); the Song of Songs and the Virgin Mary (the artistic renderings invite Christian viewers to contemplate the Savior of the world and the woman who can intercede for the faithful in heaven, as they also remind viewers of virtues like humility, purity, and love); Judith (female artists portrayed her as a prototype of feminine empowerment, with whom they wished to identify, while male artists depicted here as either Virtue or Vice); Salome (is she an innocent victim of her mother's ambitions or a seductive temptress?); the nativity and crucifixion of Jesus (three paintings by Michele Tosini show the stylistic progression from High Renaissance style to Mannerism); annunciation and Nicodemus (the paintings of the African American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner show the artist's deep faith and his insistence that God is present in unexpected places); and William Blake and the New Testament (Blake could not only write about the Bible but also *see* it. Blake often juxtaposed text and image in ways that problematizes them).

Ralph W. Klein
Chicago, Ill.

The Comeback God: A Theological Primer for a Life of Faith. By Michael Cooper-White. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2009. 159 pages. Paper. $12.99.

This work announces its intent in the subtitle: *A theological primer for a life of faith.* Indeed, the contents chart the relationship between theology and faithful living in a clear, humorous, and contemporary fashion.

The author—a pastor, seminary president, and teacher—says this of his work: "My intent is to construct a biblically based introductory theology with liberating ethical and pastoral possibilities" (xii). That is precisely what he achieves! Although beginning in the unusual but interesting fashion of looking first at eschatology, Cooper-White covers a variety of core theological themes and pinpoints the theme which unites them all: "God always keeps coming back! God is the irresistible, unstoppable, unremitting force of love, redemption, and renewal in the universe—at all times and in all places. That is the overarching thematic strain that will be played over and over again…" (xiii). In short, what the author desires is for the reader to come away equipped with a deeper knowledge and engagement in "a Christian theology for turbulent times" (xiv).

The core theological topics of the book include Scripture, the nature of God, Christology and soteriology, pneumatology and ecclesiology, the sacraments, ministry, and ethics. There is also a useful addendum on theological method.

Each chapter concludes with a section called "For Future Pondering and Probing." The questions and ideas are not only thought-provoking but explore issues that continue to create conflict. For example, the chapter on creation includes a question that asks the reader to reflect on her or his responses to "the theory of evolution or some variation of 'creationism' or 'intelligent design' that posits or allows for a divine Creator" (25). A number of questions invite provocative replies—fighting words! Nevertheless, how appropriate to combine a discussion of creation and God with precisely the recognition about how these realities intersect with contemporary debate.

The work also gently introduces many terms that are basic to a study of theology: dialectic, hermeneutic, postmodernism, global, pluralism. Definitions are succinct and useful, such as the definition used to describe the reading of portions of Scripture in worship services: "These are called *pericopes*, from Greek words meaning "seen from a common perspective" (48).

It is evident the author's work emerges from years of experience in teaching across a wide spectrum of educational venues in the church: adult forums, Sunday school classes, judicatory presentations, lay schools, and seminary classrooms. This is important because the author has, at many levels, the knack of anticipating which questions a religious seeker or lay person might ask in relationship to the several topics of this book.

I would recommend this work for those seeking education in the area of basic theology, especially the laity. Anyone interested in personally probing the question of attending seminary should definitely read this work. Having known the author for the last twenty-five years, it is a delight to read this book as a witness to his many experiences as a pastor, a judicatory leader, teacher, and a seminary president. The work will yield a rich harvest of information, pastoral support, and insight for all who read it.

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The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament: An East-West Conversation. By John J. Thatamanil. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. xvii and 231 pages. Paper. $25.00.

Any meeting of great minds across cultures, religions, languages, time, understandings of God, and the understanding of the nature and destiny of human beings is bound to result not only in an animated and productive conversation, but also debate, dialogue, disputation, and disagreement. It is to the credit of the author of this book that he has probed deeply into the rich imaginative world of ideas and concepts of the great eighth-century Indian seer-sage, Sankara, and the formidable theological contributions of one of the finest twentieth-century theologians, Paul Tillich, inviting us to listen in and be inspired by this meeting of minds, especially as we grapple with the uncertainties and perplexities of contemporary life.

The book begins with quoting Rudyard Kipling's "The Ballad of East and West" which contains the phrase, "never the twain shall meet." But the book itself is a demonstration of the next lines of this poem which says:

> "there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
>
> When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!"

The book is an excellent example of creative trans-cultural theology, which begins with a sensitive articulation of how such a conversation can take place; how one can navigate through the many pitfalls which are always possible in such attempts; how hasty generalizations and oversimplifications can be avoided; how comparative categories can be set up in a way that does not distort the integrity of the various positions; and why a rediscovery of the richness of the thinking of Sankara and Tillich is important today. The book has carefully delineated chapters on Sankara and Tillich on the human predicament and how one can come to terms with this. These chapters are models of careful research, where the primary texts have been probed in depth and simplistic "one-word answers" are eschewed in favor of allowing the nuances of the arguments to emerge in all their complexity. Through this careful approach the richness of the philosophical underpinnings and creative contributions of these great thinkers is revealed.

It is clear that the teachings of these theologians are not "timeless" texts, but are rooted in historical reality and part of the flowing streams of tradition, within which varieties of religious experience certainly play a role. Nonetheless, for us in the twenty-first century, a rediscovery of this conversation is important precisely because as we "re-imagine" what divine immanence means, we rediscover the reality that God, the world, and human beings are not mutually exclusive categories. Instead, they are integrated and flow one into the other in ways that these thinkers have explored in their writings, even though they come from different religious traditions, different regions,

different eras, and different ways of articulating who we are in relation to God and creation. The author has succeeded in inviting us to participate in an enriching and vibrant conversation across the East-West divide.

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Faithfulness and the Purpose of Hebrews: A Social Identity Approach. By Matthew J. Marohl. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 82. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2008. xvii and 210 pages. Paper. $25.00.

To whom was Hebrews written, and for what purpose? Marohl uses social identity theory to argue that the author was addressing a group experiencing a crisis of identity. The study examines three interrelated issues: identity, faithfulness, and time. In terms of identity, Hebrews seeks to establish and maintain the endangered identity of this group of Christ-followers by focusing on faithfulness, seeking to shore up the group's identity as the faithful by a comparison with others who are seen as unfaithful. Yet the symbolic category of the unfaithful does not refer to any specific historical group. In others words, Hebrews does not operate by demonstrating Christian superiority over Judaism or any other group. The author sets out Christ as the prototypical example of faithfulness and seeks to integrate the addressees into an ongoing story of faithfulness. The element of time is important in Hebrews; Marohl explores this by investigating the concept of "rest." Using the social psychological category of a present temporal orientation to describe the perspective of Hebrews, Marohl argues that future rest is seen as a result of past and present faithfulness.

Marohl's work is a helpful advance in the study of Hebrews, for its social symbolic approach does not require the matching of groups and issues to specific historical referents. Two aspects, however, seem to be weak in his analysis. First, he denies that the author seeks to motivate the addressees by emphasis on a future goal; rather, their present faithfulness creates the desired future rest. Does this need to be seen as an either/or? Can it not be a both/and? Second, he speaks of faithfulness as the key issue, but he does not adequately explore the content of this faithfulness. This is a challenging book, which is useful to anyone who wants to do some serious study of Hebrews.

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Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels. By Kenneth E. Bailey. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2008. 443 pages. Paper. $14.00.

Bailey has lived in the Middle East for sixty years (1935–1995) and taught New Testament there for forty years (presently emeritus at Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem). In this particular study, Bailey examines a number of New Testament passages in light of his Middle Eastern experience. He organizes the texts to be analyzed in six separate sections: The Birth of Jesus (25–62); The Beatitudes (65–87); The Lord's Prayer (91–131); Dramatic Actions of Jesus (135–185); Jesus and Women (189–275); and Parables of Jesus (279–426). Bailey writes on most texts in a congruent fashion: introduction, rhetorical structure, commentary, and summary. Under rhetorical structure he submits a graph showing how the text moves from introduction to a closing parallel reversal with the key point in the center (ring composition, 176) or even a parable as the central focus (encased parable, 148, 239–241). Some texts exhibit a modified prophetic rhetorical template of seven stanzas, with the climax in stanza 4 (269).

In the commentary Bailey may discuss some traditional interpretations, but for the most part refers to his own Middle Eastern experiences with parallel situations, or he utilizes the studies of Arabic New Testament exegetes such as Ibn al-Tayyib, Matta al-Miskin, and Sa'id Ibrahim—scholars little

known in the western world. As a result, the New Testament text often takes on a meaning not immediately apparent to those of us with a European background. The birth of Jesus exemplifies one fascinating and unexpected interpretation. Bailey argues that no Middle Eastern town or village would have allowed a visiting family to spend the night in an isolated stable, especially if the woman was pregnant. Some family would have taken the Joseph-Mary family into their guest room. If it was overcrowded, they might have given them a place in that section of the house used for cattle. But certainly Jesus could not have been born in some manger simply because there was no place in the inn (37).

Bailey's study is unusually helpful. He offers understanding of the texts that derive from the same culture in which Jesus lived. He writes clearly. Though his arguments are not necessarily simple, his style makes them easy to comprehend. Consequently, the book can be used profitably in colleges and seminaries, as well as in classes in a congregational setting. Furthermore, there are many unique hints for a pastor who wishes to preach on one of these texts. In fact, Bailey himself demonstrates a homiletical streak by sometimes relating current stories to the New Testament text. It is a helpful procedure, though I must say his analogy doesn't always clarify the passage. On the more academic side, Bailey tends to keep the text as is. So while he insists on the historical basis of the New Testament material, he can preserve many passages, especially the parables, as metaphorical in nature (279–81). And while many of us would recognize that parables, especially, have an added explanation that is not original to Jesus, Bailey still wishes to preserve the New Testament text. He maintains that the explanation of the Gospel writers has more validity than our later interpretations (282–83; 377).

Graydon F. Snyder
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Briefly Noted

Genesis. By James McKeown (Eerdmans, $25). Another contribution to The Two Horizons of Old Testament Commentary series. Mckeown avoids questions of authorship and focuses on the final form of the text. In his view the larger unit of which Genesis is a part includes not only the Pentateuch, but also the Deuteronomistic History, thus Genesis to 2 Kings. He equivocates on the significance of Gen 3:15, but concludes that the seed of the woman is the line of chosen people whom God will bless (this is by no means self-evident) and that ultimately this line does lead to Christ. He also equivocates about the long lives of figures in Gen 1-11, not deciding whether they are to be taken literally or symbolically, but opting for a "cautious approach." He gives five options for understanding the sons of God in Gen 6:1-4, but concludes that without further information it is difficult to choose among them. The commentary itself is 175 pages long and it is followed by 183 pages of theological reflections (where the ambivalence continues).

Ralph W. Klein

Ezekiel 1-20. By Horace D. Hummel. (Concordia, $42.99). Hummel, who once advocated the historical critical method, but utterly renounced it when he rejoined the Concordia faculty after the Preus house-cleaning, has published here the first of a two volume commentary on Ezekiel. His "Lutheran" approach to this Old Testament prophet accents themes such as Christology, the dynamics of Law and Gospel, God's means of grace, his word and Sacraments, and he interprets Christ as the divine speaker throughout the book. He scorns most commentators since C. F. Keil, except for Moshe Greenberg (whose reported death has not yet taken place!) and Daniel Block. He thanks a student for compiling a bibliography, but admits that many of these works were too popular or too "far

out" to merit refutation. This apparently includes such well known and highly respected scholars as Nancy Bowen, Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, Ellen Davis, Julie Galambush, Paul Joyce, Jon Levenson, Margaret Odell, Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, Karen Schöplin—and the author of this review. The bibliography does find room for Martin Chemnitz and Francis Pieper! Hummel does display his well known expertise in biblical Hebrew throughout the commentary.

Ralph W. Klein

Ezekiel. A Commentary. By Paul M. Joyce (Continuum, $140). A 60-page introduction, a 41-page bibliography, and 24 pages of indexes surround the modest 180-page commentary itself. The shortness of the commentary may reflect that it was originally intended for the New Century Bible Commentary series. Joyce, who is a major leader in the investigation of Ezekiel (12 items by him in the bibliography), focuses on the book's theo-centrism (You shall know that I am Yahweh) and its theology of grace, while admitting the book's sexism and legalism. Ezekiel did not think that repentance would avert the fall of Jerusalem nor would it lead to its restoration. A future would come only through the will of Yahweh. Joyce locates Ezekiel historically in the sixth century and in Babylon. One might place Joyce midway between Zimmerli, who proposed a lengthy period of growth for the book, and Greenberg, who did not pay much attention to later redactions. There is not space in the commentary to discuss issues of translation and textual criticism. Instead Joyce concentrates on particular verses that are theologically important. Ezekiel is an example of crisis literature in an extreme situation. In Joyce's view, Ezekiel is no exponent of individualism. Rather, in chapter 18 Ezekiel holds his own generation responsible for Jerusalem's fall. Joyce is sensitive to the importance of Ezekiel in Judaism, Christianity, and contemporary culture. This is an extremely important contribution to the study of Ezekiel.

Ralph W. Klein

Israelite Religions. An Archaeological and Biblical Survey. By Richard S. Hess (Baker Academic, $34.99). After a broad-ranging survey of the biblical and extrabiblical evidence for the religion of ancient Israel and its background, Hess comes to three conclusions about Israel in the time of the Divided Monarchy: 1. Ancient Israel was home to a variety of religious beliefs and practices that developed from earlier West Semitic beliefs and practices attested in Bronze Age archives and cult centers. 2. The religion of ancient Israel emerges as a distinct set of practices and beliefs (the Exodus from Egypt and the Sinai covenant are given particular mention). 3. There was gradual evolution and change in Israel as the people became increasingly devoted to Yahweh alone. The situation in Judah is contrasted with the more syncretistic nature of religion in North Israel. Forty-four figures are discussed in the text, and there are 55 pages of bibliography! As Mark S. Smith notes in a promotional paragraph, "The field now has a general treatment of Israelite religion produced by a scholar with a strong faith in the Bible's veracity. Even if readers do not share Hess's strong trust in either the Bible's historical claims or his high dating for many biblical texts and traditions, this volume nonetheless presents a good listing of research."

Ralph W. Klein

Isaiah. Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators. By Robert Louis Wilken (Eerdmans, $45). Although the Christian interpretation of Isaiah began already in the New Testament, it was only as Christians lived with the book and pondered its words and images that a fuller significance for Christians was discovered. The famous "Holy, Holy, Holy" of Isa 6:3 found its way into the Eastern Trisagion and the Western Sanctus. The burning coal of Isa. 6:6 was interpreted as the bread of the Eucharist by Syriac-speaking Christians. Christian thinkers also delighted to find in Isaiah a stockpile of invectives to deploy in their polemics against the Jews. In compiling this commentary, Wilken draws on commentaries by Eusebius of Caesarea, Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria, and Theodoret of Cyrus in Syria,

but he also cites sermons and other theological writings from a host of other Christian leaders. These writers used the Greek, Latin, or Syriac versions of Isaiah, and Wilken begins each section of the commentary with a modern translation of the LXX. This is followed by his discussion of central themes of the chapter and then a lengthy passage from one of the above-named commentaries and excerpts from the other writings. In commenting on Isa 1:3, "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's manger," Augustine wrote: "Don't be ashamed of being the Lord's donkey…. Let the Lord sit on us and take us wherever he wants…With him seated on us we are not weighed down, but raised up." And on the swords into plowshares passage, Athanasius wrote: "When the barbarians hear the teaching of Christ, they immediately turn from war to farming, and instead of arming their hands with swords they stretch them out in prayer." A wonderful resource.

Ralph W. Klein

Biblical Exegesis. A Beginner's Handbook. By John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay (Westminster John Knox, $24.95). This popular college and seminary textbook now appears in a third edition. The authors have added a new and welcome chapter "Exegesis with a Special Focus: Cultural, Economic, Ethnic, Gender, and Sexual Perspectives." They have also added an appendix "Using Electronic Technologies in Exegesis." Other chapters have also been thoroughly revised.

Ralph W. Klein

A Reader's Hebrew Bible. Edited by A. Philip Brown II and Bryan W. Smith (Zondervan, $49.99). The editors print out the standard text from Codex Leningradensis and then provide vocabulary suggestions, in footnotes, for every Hebrew word appearing less than 100 times and for every Aramaic word appearing less then 25 times. Proper nouns appearing less than 100 times in Hebrew and 25 times in Aramaic are screened in gray in the biblical text itself so that the reader does not waste time trying to parse them! The editors used the standard Hebrew lexica (HALOT) and (BDB). Advanced computer skills and much loving and diligent work produced this wonderful aid for those who want to keep Hebrew alive in their ministries.

Ralph W. Klein

Isaiah 40-55: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary. By John Goldingay and David Payne (Continuum, 2 Volumes, $200). These new volumes in the International Critical Commentary take the reader through chapter 55; a third volume will cover the final 11 chapters. The original ICC did not make it past chapter 27 (published in 1912). H. G. M. Williamson is redoing 1-27, with his first published volume covering only 1-5. Payne wrote textual and philological notes and passed them on to Goldingay, who added literary, exegetical, and theological commentary. When this manuscript became too long, Goldingay abbreviated it and published much of the literary-theological material in *The Message of Isaiah 40-55* (T & T Clark, 2005). Goldingay and Payne believe that the writer and his audience were both in Babylon though the message would also address the needs of the people in Judah; they also consider whether the author may have been a woman, without coming to a final decision. Isaiah 40-55 was always a part of the book of Isaiah in their opinion and was never issued separately though written in the 540s B.C.E. The introduction concludes with a discussion of the following theological themes: God (warrior and shepherd), God's people, Zion, the prophet as servant, and the nations. In chapters 41-42 Israel is the servant, in 49-50 the prophet is, and in 52-53 both prophet and people are the servant. The commentary offers a fresh translation for every verse, but does not print out this text for a whole periscope. The philological and textual comments are excellent, and the authors have read very widely in the secondary literature. Unfortunately, the price will put these volumes out of reach for many.

Ralph W. Klein

Psalms. Volume 2: Psalms 42-89. By John Goldingay (Baker Academic, $44.99). The very productive Goldingay distances himself from recent attempts to see theological significance in the arrangement of the Psalms and from the redactional history of individual Psalms. The fact that this volume covers "Books II and III" of the Psalter is deemed by him "convenient, but a little arbitrary." While he includes some variant readings from the LXX and other ancient versions, he largely sticks with the Masoretic Text. Hebrew references are supplied in transliterated form. A substantial introduction to Psalms was included in Volume 1. After his own translation of each Psalm, Goldingay gives a short introduction to the Psalm as a whole, and then "interpretation" (verse by verse exegesis) and "theological implications." A 13-page glossary explains some of his translation choices, e.g., fail or failure instead of sin; faithful instead of righteous; ignore instead of forget; person instead of soul; rise instead of Selah; well-being instead of peace; and worship instead of bless when Yahweh is the object. All of these are carefully chosen, and this expected three-volume commentary will be among the very best.

Ralph W. Klein

Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel. By Wilda C. Gafney (Fortress, $22). Five women are specifically mentioned as prophets in the Old Testament: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, the unnamed woman with whom Isaiah fathers a child, and Noadiah, and all are given detailed study in this book. Gafney surveys what is meant by "prophet" in the Old Testament and compares this to the Ancient Near East, where there are far more female religious officials. Special attention is given to extra biblical materials from Mari, Nineveh, and Emar. Gafney also studies female prophets in the New Testament, early Christianity, and rabbinic Judaism. Gafney finds that there are more female prophets in the Old Testament than have previously been discussed, and she identifies as prophets women in the canon who are not explicitly designated as prophets (Rebekah, the women warriors in Exod 38:8, the mother of King Lemuel in Prov 31:1, and the mourning women in Jeremiah 9). She also argues that many masculine plural references to groups of prophets may have included women. Gafney serves on the faculty of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

Ralph W. Klein

Who's Who in the Jewish Bible. By David Mandel (Jewish Publication Society, $30). This book lists the individuals in the Hebrew Bible, from Aaron to Zurishaddai, provides a translation of the name (Zurishaddai means Rock of the Almighty), and then reports what we know of this figure only from internal biblical evidence. Zurishaddai was the commander of the army of Simeon during the wilderness wandering.

Ralph W. Klein

The Jewish Bible: A JPS Guide. By Jewish Publication Society (Jewish Publication Society, $22). I have often been asked, "How do Jews read the Bible?" "Do they use biblical criticism?" This book would provide answers for these questions and would make a fine addition to a church library. Traditional and modern methods of interpretation are defined, and lists of classical (medieval) and modern commentaries are provided. There are summaries of the biblical books (JEDP defined; Second and Third Isaiah) and a 29-page glossary. There are also maps and a timeline of biblical events. Non-technical, but well informed.

Ralph W. Klein

Preaching Helps

The Resurrection of Our Lord –Seventh Sunday of Easter

Preaching the "Idle Tale"

I genuinely admire the optimism of preachers who attempt to move their congregations from arriving at the empty tomb to proclaiming that Christ is risen, indeed, all in a single Easter sermon. It's so Matthean. Of course, Matthew had an earthquake, an angel, who descends from heaven, rolls away the stone, tells the women (twice) that Jesus has been raised, invites them to see the place where Jesus lay, and instructs them to go and tell the disciples that Jesus is risen and where they can find him—in Galilee, as Jesus promised. If this is not amazing enough, as the women leave the tomb, they run into Jesus.

This year, we get Luke. "But these words [that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again] seemed to them [the disciples] an idle tale, and they did not believe them" (24:11)." Luke tells us. And then Luke tells us that, after Peter got up and ran to the tomb, stooped and looked in, and saw the linen cloths by themselves, he went home (24:12).

And this "idle tale" comes after a week of "idle tales." On Passion Sunday, Luke told us that, to the end, innocent Jesus associated with sinners and extended them God's forgiveness. Many in need of forgiveness who have experienced the realities of Christian community would call this an "idle tale." On Maundy Thursday, John told us the "idle tale" of Jesus, with a towel and basin, doing more than becoming his servants' servant. Jesus loves his own to the end, even though his own misunderstand, protest, resist his love, and even betray him. For any who are seriously grappling with the ways they have misunderstood, protested, resisted, and betrayed Jesus, the idea of Jesus washing their feet, let alone unconditionally loving them to the end, at some level seems an "idle tale." On Good Friday, John tells is the "idle tale" of a Passover lamb that declares his work "complete" and then dies. As the institutional church fights so hard for survival on every level, we would hardly call this "idle tale" being faithful to God. We know too well that "faithfulness" means "growth."

So, perhaps we can understand why, on the Second Sunday of Easter, at least as the lectionary tells it, we hear that, a week after the risen Christ appears to them, the disciples are still behind locked doors. On the Third Sunday of Easter, the disciples are out from behind locked doors, but they are not proclaiming, "Christ is risen, indeed!" Seven disciples decide to go fishing, and the risen Christ needs to appear to them the third time. It seems to take the disciples, who had direct encounters with the risen Christ, time to embrace and internalize the Easter gospel.

Perhaps we can be patient with ourselves, our Easter preaching, and, most of all with God's people. The church, through its lectionary and liturgical calendar, is wise in giving us seven Sundays to preach that, "Christ is risen, indeed!" Whether

we frame resurrection as forgiveness, reconciliation, new beginning, or the end of death, we can find much, both inside and outside the church, to suggest that the Easter message is an "idle tale" or the church's wishful thinking. Daring to believe—as in trust—the Easter gospel is, perhaps, the hardest thing we ask our people to do. Perhaps that's why the church gives us an Easter season.

At least during Luke's year, before we run too quickly to telling people to go and tell, "let us" (my students know how I don't like that phrase in sermons, because it's a nice way of saying "we should") patiently proclaim the good news that Christ is risen, so people can move from the idleness of the tale to their own doubt and hesitation to trying to get life back to normal—and finding they cannot. In other words, let us use this Easter season to help disciples grapple with the Easter gospel, as the first disciples did, confident that Christ will send the promised Spirit.

The Rev. David M. Blank leads us through this Easter season. Pastor Blank has served as the senior pastor of First Lutheran Church, Warren, Pennsylvania, since 2006. Born in Kittanning, Penn., the son of a Lutheran pastor, Dave grew up in North Huntingdon, Penn. He is a graduate of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (1983) and Thiel College (2979). Pastor Blank served congregations in northwestern Pennsylvania and Upstate New York. Prior to his call to Warren, Penn., Pastor Blank was the Director of Spiritual Care/Chaplain at Lutheran Care Ministries, Clinton, New York. He is married to Judith Cole, a native of Buffalo, who is a registered nurse and accomplished artist. Dave has two sons and a daughter-in-law: Nathaniel, Jonathan and Kristin; and two stepsons, Sean and Ryan Baty. Pastor Blank enjoys home winemaking, guitar and model trains. Dave is an old and dear friend, with whom I shared interim ministry many years ago. I am delighted to welcome him to these pages.

You know, if we are going to give our hearers the Easter season to wrestle with the "idle tale" of Christ's resurrection, I suspect that we preachers need to do this ourselves. Like Cleopas and his companion, I hope that you find partners and a journey in which you can discuss these things and I pray that the risen Christ encounters you as you walk and talk together.

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

The Resurrection of Our Lord
April 4, 2010

Acts 10:34–43 or Isaiah 65:17–25
Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
1 Corinthians 15:19–26 or Acts 10:34–43
John 20:1–18 or Luke 24:1–12

"Alleluia. Christ our Pascal Lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the feast. Alleluia." (Gospel verse for Easter: 1 Corinthians 5:7–8)

Acts 10: 34–43—Peter is at the home of Cornelius, an officer of the Roman garrison stationed in Caesarea. Cornelius, though a Gentile, is a devout worshipper of God and generous contributor to the Jews. What is Peter thinking staying in the home of Cornelius, whom Peter's clansmen consider unclean? Eating food considered forbidden by law? The whole scenario for Peter is a journey into the unknown. There is no foundation or established tradition on which Peter can place his feet. However, filled with a newly found word imparted by God, Peter proclaims a message that opens the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. In Christ there is peace for all who fear God and live according to God's will. The mission is established upon the proclamation and early creedal statement, "Jesus is Lord of all."

Luke 24:1–12—Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women excitedly tell the disciples a bizarre story of their encounter with angels and an empty tomb. They are dismissed by the eleven as sharing "nonsense' or their report is considered as *hosei leros*, "as if it were humbug."[1] Peter listens to their story, and goes to the tomb only to return home in wonder. There is no great declaration of faith in these opening verses for this first Easter. Regardless of what Jesus said in being delivered up, killed and raised on the third day, the disciples are numb in their grief and fear of the authorities. They discard the women's report as crazy talk. Peter sees the empty tomb only and not the promise of a resurrected Lord. Luke simply says Peter is filled with wonder and returns home. This is where our story ends for Easter Sunday. There is no resurrection appearance. No encounter between Jesus and the women or his disciples. We are left with bewildered disciples, women with a frightening encounter with heavenly messengers and Peter's excursion to the tomb. Yet, Luke leaves the door open to a faith that will change these people's—and our--lives forever. As Eduard Schweizer writes, "Even Peter's personal inspection of the tomb leads only to wonderment, which of course includes openness to future experience. 'Not from a person nor through a person (Gal 1:1) is the assurance of the resurrection given to the Apostle.'"[2]

Interpreting the word for today
The characters involved in Luke's Gospel reading for today weren't exactly celebrating a feast. Gripped by fear, and overwhelmed with grief, the disciples dismissed the women's story as crazy talk—too impossible and too unsettling

1. Joseph Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985), 1547.

2. Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 364.

to take seriously. However, among the disciples Peter took the first steps toward seeing if what the women had said was true. He found an empty tomb just as the women reported. Luke says he was filled with wonder but then returned home. For the moment Peter remained deaf to the incredible news of a resurrected Jesus. Soon he was to experience a phenomenal encounter with the living Lord.

Taking the first steps are often the most difficult. Moses led a stubborn people into the wilderness. Certainly his first steps in encountering Pharoah were wrought with questions and doubt. How did David feel headed toward an encounter with Goliath? Peter in the passage from Acts faced certain condemnation in associating with Gentiles and proclaiming that Jesus is Lord of all.

Many years ago, during my seminary experience I was assigned to Harrisburg State Hospital for my clinical pastoral education (CEP) credit requirement. The idea of working at a mental hospital was unsettling to me. It was strange, unfamiliar territory and I grew anxious during the time leading up to my first day at the hospital. I had seen a recently released movie, "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" (should give you an idea how long I've been in the ministry!) and the picture left me with disturbing images. As those first days passed, my fears subsided and God opened many wonderful opportunities for pastoral care and personal growth. Those initial steps were the beginning of a faith journey that would lead me through several more units of CPE and eventually a call to chaplaincy and parish ministry.

As a Church, we are called by God to take steps into places that appear unsettling or situations that others claim as impossible. How many opportunities for sharing the Gospel have been lost because we hesitated to take those first steps? What steps can we take to provide care for the aging, the uninsured, and the hungry? How often do we peer into the empty tomb and see only a space?

As Easter people we know all things are possible through Christ. We celebrate the victory over death, sin and Satan. For Luke, one does not arrive at faith in the observation of an empty tomb. Faith arrives as a gift of God. "He (Jesus) sat down to eat with them, took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him…" (Luke 24:30–31) DMB

Second Sunday of Easter
April 11, 2010

Acts 5:27–32
Psalm 118:14–29 or Psalm 150
Revelation 1:4–8
John 20:19–31

Acts 5:27–32—The last time the religious authorities confronted Peter and the apostles, they were dumbfounded and let them go. The "believers" continued to grow and now the authorities were not about to make the same mistake again. These religious leaders who were charged with lifting up God's message, have compromised their integrity, allying themselves with the Roman government and striving to maintain the status quo by ridding themselves of this Jesus nuisance.

Following a series of healings (which even involved Peter's shadow!), the council demanded to know why the apostles continued to defy them. Peter responds by declaring, "We obey God and not any human authority" and "We (along with the Holy Spirit) are witnesses to these things." The apostles--who have little and

could well lose their lives in defiance of earthly authorities--remain faithful and proclaim God's Word.

Revelation 1:4–8—Revelation will be part of our Sunday lections throughout the remainder of the Easter season. This book is often misunderstood and some individuals have given imaginative if not wild interpretations of what John may have intended. One thing remains certain: we will never fully comprehend some sections of Revelation. Revelation does offer powerful words of condemnation on those who defy God and wreck havoc upon the early church. At the same time, the writer of Revelation enfolds the faithful with words of comfort and hope. Written to the seven churches in Asia Minor, John's introduction uses a traditional Pauline greeting, "Grace to you and peace…" that has become a standard greeting in Christian circles. The Trinitarian greeting begins first, from the Father, "who was and who is to come;" secondly from the Holy Spirit referred to as the "seven spirits who are before his throne." Bruce Metzger states this is a reference to "the plenitude and power of the Holy Spirit (Is 11:2)."[3] Thirdly, the greeting comes from Jesus the Christ, 'the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth." The introduction offers hope for a church struggling under the weight of Rome's persecution: 1) In the midst of their suffering, believers are reminded that Christ, the first born of the dead, also suffered but rose again. 2) Jesus' love is present now and we are freed (washed)[4] of our sins. 3) God was before all things and will survive all things.

John 20:19–31—There are two separate stories in this passage of John. First is Jesus' appearance to the disciples without Thomas (vv. 19–23). Here, Jesus' greeting of "Peace be with you" is met with celebration from the disciples. John's version of Pentecost is experienced as the disciples receive the Holy Spirit. They are given the instructions to "bind" and "loose" sins. In addition they are charged to go out and share the good news ("as the Father has sent me so I send you"). The story regarding belief is second. Raymond Brown noted[5] that in the whole of Chapter 20 John has given us four different stories of faith: 1) the beloved disciple sees Jesus' burial cloths and believes. 2) Mary encounters Jesus in the garden but does not recognize him till he calls her name. 3) The disciples see Jesus and believe. 4) Thomas doesn't believe until he sees **and** touches the risen Jesus. However, only Thomas makes the ultimate confession on behalf of the whole church, "My Lord and my God!" The Gospel writer then turns to those who have not seen yet believe. There is no confusion or misunderstanding. All the signs and now Thomas' great declaration point to Jesus as the promised Messiah, the risen Son of God.

Interpreting the word for today

Proclaiming the gospel in stressful times is

3. Bruce Metzger, *Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 23.

4. Ibid., 24. Metzger indicates that in some later Greek manuscripts the word *lusanti* (freed) is confused with the Greek word *lousanti* (washed). Metzger states both readings are theologically significant.

5. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XII – XXI*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1980), 1046.

a common thread in these readings. Peter, the apostles, and the churches of Asia Minor are all under duress from earthly powers beyond their control. Even the disciples on the first day of the week were hiding behind locked doors for fear of the authorities. We are naturally inclined to retreat when we are under duress. Today congregations under stress have a tendency to hunker down and circle the wagons. When budgets shrink we look for ways to tighten our belts.

At an annual meeting, the congregation debated on whether to decrease or increase its benevolence, or to hold the status quo. The treasurer stood up and stated, "The way I see it we can hold a defensive posture and keep the status quo or we can take the offensive and risk moving ahead by growing in faith through our giving and sharing." Imagine where the Church would be today if Peter and the apostles acquiesced to the authorities' demands or the Christian communities bowed to the pressures of Rome! Paul uses the typical armament of a Roman centurion to describe the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10–18). This armor protects only from the front; it is meant for offensive warfare. Too often, when the church is under duress the proclamation of the good news is set aside or hidden under a box. Jesus said, "As the Father sent me so I send you." The apostles no longer remained behind locked doors or heeded the warnings of the authorities. The early church in Asia Minor endured the persecutions and pressures of Caesar and continued to proclaim Jesus Christ as the risen Lord and Son of God. The church is armed with the Holy Spirit and the love of God. These are powerful weapons that continue to be the foundation of God's faithful people who are ever moving forward. DMB

Third Sunday of Easter
April 18, 2010

Acts 9:1–6 (7–20)
Psalm 30
Revelation 5:11–14
John 21:1–19

Acts 9:1–20—This passage relays the familiar story of Paul's conversion. Saul, who had the power to obliterate the lives of those who belonged to the Way, suddenly finds himself dependent upon the very people he sought to destroy. Jesus confronts Saul and tells him where to go. Saul regains his sight through the Lord's servant Ananias, is baptized and lives among the disciples in Damascus. Out of hatred and murderous threats is birthed an unlikely saint who ultimately proclaims the love and grace of the risen Lord Jesus. Luke, the writer of Acts, sandwiches Paul's experience between two additional conversion stories—the Ethiopian official and Cornelius, the Roman captain. Though very different, all three stories contain three details that are similar. First, God approaches each individual (not the other way around). Second, the Christianized Jews would not (did not?) consider these likely candidates for the Way (especially, Saul!), and third, Luke has moved the story away from the Christian community in Jerusalem (toward Gaza, Damascus and in Caesarea) giving emphasis upon the universality of God's good news.

Revelation 5:11–14—John's vision is of a multitude surrounding the throne of God and worshiping the Lamb (Jesus). The assembly includes every creature of both heaven and earth. The seven words that define the worship of the Lamb--power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory and

blessing--are a depiction of the fullness of praise. John's scene is not necessarily meant to be a formula for liturgy but is an assurance for the Church Militant regarding the trial and tribulation it will endure. For John, these are words of hope and a promise of victory for all of God's faithful people in the midst of their daily struggle.

John 21:1–19—Following the conclusion of chapter 20, one has the feeling the Gospel has ended. Yet, chapter 21 brings us to one more appearance story after the resurrection. After a non-productive evening of fishing, the disciples (who for some reason don't recognize Jesus) are asked if they have any fish. Jesus addresses the disciples by calling them *paidion*, translated as "My boys" or "Lads" and encourages the disciples to return to the water and cast their net on the right side of the boat. John notes that, when the disciples do so, their nets are full of fish, 153 to be exact. Raymond Brown says it is impossible to speculate why John wrote 153, but Jerome[6] suggests Greek zoologists recorded 153 varieties of fish indicating John's intent was to symbolize the Christian mission to include all people. Regardless, the disciples finally realize it is Jesus who is standing on the shore.

After their breakfast Jesus commands Peter thrice in response to Peter's affirmation of love for Jesus: "Feed my lambs," "Tend my sheep," "Feed my sheep." Jesus lays out the mission of the disciples to the world.

Interpreting the word for today

My first congregations were former Augustana parishes. Both had the high altar that held Thorvaldsen's Christus statue and around the altar was a semi-circular altar rail. Each week, members of the fold would gather and kneel at the rail, which curved from the chancel wall. As I approached each of the parishioners and placed in their hands the body of Christ, I was reminded that, on the other side of the wall, the communion rail extended to an area unseen by human eye, where the circle was made complete. Here, those whom I knew--Leland, Anna, Helen, John, Adeline--and a myriad of saints whom I did not know, now part of the Church Triumphant, gathered and joined with us in worship and praise of the living God. It is a thought from which I draw strength and comfort.

The readings for today keep the mission of proclaiming the good news front and center in the midst of our Easter celebration. As Christians we have such wonderful and life changing news to share. "Jesus is risen. He is risen indeed!" It is good news! Yet somehow we hesitate or worry about what to say when opportunities abound for us as God's faithful people. I can imagine Ananias's response to the Lord when he is told to go visit Saul. "You want me to do what????" Yet Ananias does as the Lord says. As pastors, we are caught in situations that sometimes make us unpopular even among our own parishioners. Disagreements with church policies, social statements, changes in liturgy, or perhaps a misunderstanding can mean an angry parishioner who may disavow any relationship to the pastor. Yet, when the individual lands in the hospital or there is a death in the family, the pastor is called to bring God's message of grace and hope to all people. I am not one who enjoys "walking into the lion's den," but I have found, in most cases with an angry parishioner, the Holy Spirit provides for both pastor and parishioner a balm that eventually begins the process of healing. As with Paul, God does amazing things

6. Ibid, 1074.

and calls those whom we may have written off years ago.

As an amateur winemaker I take pleasure sharing the fruits of my labor with family and friends. I admit that I enjoy watching the surprised and delighted expressions of those who are trying my latest vintage. As Christians, we have an amazing gift to be savored and celebrated by the whole world. Jesus tells Peter, "Feed my sheep." To a world immersed in self-doubt, loneliness and judgment the church through word and sacrament is called to offer all people the sweet nectar of God's abundant forgiveness and love. DMB

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2010

Acts 9:36–43
Psalm 23
Revelation 7:9–17
John 10:22–30

Acts 9:36–43—Tabitha is a good and faithful disciple. She is the only female in Acts who is given the title of *disciple*. In Tabitha we see that, in the New Testament, the neat order of the world of the past is turned upside down. We have witnessed ordinary fishermen and tax collectors become theologians. Women are no longer placed in secondary roles. Rather, Tabitha is called a disciple and assumes responsibility in providing for those who have no means of support. The recipients of her charity are grief-stricken when she becomes ill and dies. Messengers are sent for Peter who is known to be somewhere in the vicinity. Peter arrives and the weeping widows show Peter their meager belongings given them by their departed Tabitha. Peter sends them outside, prays and instructs Tabitha to rise. The risen Tabitha is restored to her calling of charity and the widows are once again embraced and comforted as recipients of Tabitha's care. The power of the resurrection turns the expected order of the world on end. Through the resurrection no sheep of Christ's fold will be left unattended.

Revelation 7:9–17—Prior to these verses John lists the terrible ordeal that is to come through the six seals that are opened. Before the seventh is opened there is a pause and John's vision turns once again to the great multitude of people from every nation standing before the throne of God. They are robed in white and holding palm branches – a sign of victory. One of the elders asks, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" John explains that the multitude are the ones who have survived the ordeal and have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. No robe is made white when washed in blood. However, these are the ones whose blessedness and ability to stand before the throne of God have been made possible through the sacrifice of the Lamb (Christ). The words, which follow, bring comfort—no hunger or thirst, nor sun or scorching heat will afflict the faithful. The Lamb becomes the Shepherd and he will lead his people to the cool refreshing waters of life (reference to Ps 23:2?). The Shepherd shall provide solace and shelter to his sheep.

John 10:22–30—Jesus' words anger the Jews, who ask him if he is the Messiah. He tells them that they do not recognize him through the signs nor listen to what he says. Jesus also states that they do not belong to his flock. His remark that he and the Father are one only adds to their distaste about his words. The verses fol-

lowing this pericope report the people are ready to stone Jesus. Still, those who are his sheep recognize Jesus' voice, and he knows his sheep and they will follow their shepherd. No one will steal his sheep for they will remain firmly in his protection and care and will, ultimately, receive eternal life.

Interpreting the word for today

Since June I have been dealing with health problems that have landed me in three different hospitals over the course of four weeks. Just recently I made my sixth six-hour round-trip to Pittsburgh as an outpatient. It has been an ordeal, which sometimes leaves me wondering if some of the doctors are really addressing my needs as a whole person or are only concerned with the task at hand, whether that be an endoscopy, a surgical procedure or a heart cath. It's not a confidence-builder when your questions are not answered or you're told that the tumor has been removed, and then, during the next two succeeding visits, you are informed that more of the tumor has been excised. Six months and counting and I feel fatigued and fighting off depression.

During one of my extended stays in the hospital, Pastor Janet received word I was there. I had never met her before but her compassion and pastoral presence was a real comfort not only to me but also to my wife and sister-in-law who were present in the room. As she anointed me and then shared the sacrament, I heard the voice of the Shepherd through her presence and the words of Scripture and prayer. Yes, the Shepherd DOES know me and is leading me to still waters in the midst of my own personal storm. Indeed, there have been times following and times will come when I will need to be reminded, in the midst of my frustration and disappointment, that the Shepherd is present and returns me to the fold. He reassures me through the concern of colleagues, family and friends, through the prayers of a whole host of congregations, and a simple gesture of a get-well card (and there have been many) from one of the parishioners.

The readings for the Fourth Sunday of Easter are an invitation for the broken, the lost, the lonely, for all God's people. It is the Shepherd who calls us to drown in the waters of baptism and be raised up with him to life everlasting. It is the Shepherd who feeds us each Sunday at his table. Here, in word and sacrament, we find restoration and peace in the pasture protected by a Shepherd who has beckoned us: "**Come to me**, **all you** who are weary and **burdened**, and I will give **you** rest (Matt 11:28). DMB

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 2, 2010

Acts 11:1–18
Psalm 148
Revelation 21:1–6
John 13:31–35

Acts 11:1–18—Peter returns to Jerusalem and is questioned by members of the church. He is in hot water for his association with a Roman army captain, Cornelius, and his household. Peter's offense: he entered the home of the uncircumcised and ate with them. Peter recounts his story beginning with his strange vision of seeing creatures of every kind and hearing a voice saying, "kill, and eat." He continues saying how the Holy Spirit called him to the Gentile household, and concludes by asking, "Who was I that I could hinder God?" Peter's story is met with silence.

William Willimon says, "The church's silence and then response shows that it realizes a bold (and perhaps frightening) chapter has opened in the saga of the People of God."[7] Willimon goes on to point out that the real hero of the story is not Peter or Cornelius but God who is bold to make promises—and keeps them. God opens our eyes and turns us toward him (repentance). Therefore, I do not make a decision for Christ or offer some work to God that places me in God's good grace. Willimon says, "… repentance is the joyful human response to God's offer of himself to us, the necessary, quite appropriate turn of a life which is the recipient of God's gracious turning toward us."[8] Now all people, Jew and Gentile, may turn to God.

Revelation 21:1–6—Chapter 21 marks the beginning of Revelation's climax. John's vision prepares us for something that is difficult to explain: the world as we know it will pass away. God's throne comes down from heaven and God proclaims God's home is among mortals. Once again we see that God initiates the relationship with God's people. God comes to us and not us to God (sorry rapture fans). John offers more words of comfort and hope by painting a picture of God in which the tears of the faithful are dried and God promises, "Death will be no more." God also says, "See I am making all things new." These words indicate not only the renewal of creation but also God's activity of making things new in the here and now.

7. William H. Willimon, *Acts*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press; 1988), 99.

8. Ibid., 100.

John 13:31–35—The new commandment follows Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet and the prediction of his betrayal. While the commandment itself is not new, the disciples'—and our—relationship to Jesus is what makes it new. Jesus exemplified this in the washing of the disciples' feet, including Judas, the one who was about to betray him. As Jesus loves us, we are to love one another.

Interpreting the word for today

Introducing new hymns to a congregation can be a challenge. Suggest trying a new hymn and folks wrinkle up their noses as if smelling curdled milk. "But, we like the OLD hymns! Why do we need to learn a new hymn?" is a common response. Sometimes, people are pleasantly surprised after singing a few verses of the new tune with the words flowing easily and a melody that catches even the greatest skeptics off-guard. Some time ago, those old hymns were new and somebody introduced them to a community and favorite hymns were born!

A baby is born to a young couple. There is excitement for the mother, father and perhaps a brother and or sister. Each individual looks forward to having a new baby in the family. But there will be changes within the family structure that may not be readily welcomed. The only child suddenly discovers that he or she isn't the only child. The youngest member of the family may find him or herself now the middle child or the oldest. In this family the old order has changed and with the changes come adjustments.

Congregations find themselves in a similar situation. Every congregation wants to grow in number—or does it? Having the pews filled with new members is exciting but with new members come new ideas and changes in leadership. Some prefer

to keep the status quo. New members are welcomed—just don't rock the boat.

Is it any wonder the church in Jerusalem questioned Peter when he returned from Cornelius' home? "What were you thinking, Peter?" they asked. But following Peter's explanation, they fell silent. In silence there may have been the frightening realization that this young church was about to take a new path no one anticipated. Taking steps into the unknown presents both exciting and terrifying possibilities. The moment of *kairos* presents the new. We experience this today as a nation that struggles to birth a national health plan or a design for renewable energy resources. The church wrestles with understanding human sexuality, learning to heal divisions created through disagreements, and new expressions of worship.

As in the birth of a child, the "new" can be messy. John's terrible vision in Revelation is a world in its death throes from which comes a new heaven and a new earth. For the faithful, words of comfort and hope are given to "stay the course." Jesus lays out to his disciples that he will be betrayed, delivered over to the authorities, and crucified. He kneels before each of the disciples—Peter the denier, Thomas the doubter, and even Judas the betrayer. And Jesus washes each of their feet. This is an awkward moment for the disciples; the Lord should not be washing the feet of his followers. But Jesus is introducing a new understanding. Jesus explains his actions ultimately with, "Love one another as I have loved you." From the crucifixion comes resurrection. From death comes life. And like the church's response to Peter's ministry to the Gentiles, we give praise to God for making all things new! DMB

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 9, 2010

Acts 16:9–15
Psalm 67
Revelation 21:10, 22–22:5
John 14:23–29 or John 5:1–9

Acts 16:9–15—This passage presents two firsts. Paul heeds a call from God and embarks on a journey to Philippi (a community in Greece), the first time the gospel is introduced on European ground. Secondly, Paul stays in the home of Lydia, a Gentile. This is the first time Paul breaks the cultural boundary. Lydia is a woman of wealth and the head of her household. She is a worshipper of God who meets with others at a place of prayer near the river. Luke reports God opens Lydia's heart to Paul's words. She and her household are baptized and Lydia invites Paul to stay at her home. Here again, we witness God's love upon the people, since God (not Paul nor Lydia) opens Lydia's heart and calls her into relationship. Today, Christians celebrate Lydia as the founder of the church in Philippi and as the first Christian in Europe.

Revelation 21:10, 22—22:5—This text describes the New Jerusalem. There is no temple for the whole of the city is God's sanctuary. God does not remain behind the temple curtain as in days of old but is accessible to all. The gates of the city will never be closed. No sun or moon is needed as the light is the glory of God and its lamp is the Lamb. The water of life flows as a river from the throne of God and the Lamb through the city. The tree of life also finds a place in the New Jerusalem. However, unlike the book of Genesis where the tree of life was the downfall for Adam and Eve, here in this

marvelous city the tree of life gives its abundance and healing for all nations. The paradise lost to the old Adam is now regained in God's new creation. Here, also we shall see God face to face. In days of old the subjects of the king would bow and never make eye contact but perhaps only take a glimpse as the king rode by. Those lucky and important enough to be granted an audience before the royal court could see their king face to face. In the new day God will be present with God's people, will know them by name and will be their light forever.

John 14:23–29—Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure. He tells them that the Holy Spirit will guide and help the disciples to keep Jesus' presence before them. Jesus promises he and the Father will come to the faithful and make their home with them. Jesus bequeaths a final gift to them in the form of peace (*shalom*). Raymond Brown says, "this is not the thoughtless salutation of ordinary men—it is the gift of salvation."[9] In saying "my peace I give to you," Jesus proclaims, "I give to you eternal life."

Interpreting the word for today

As a youngster I loved to crawl into the family station wagon as it was parked in the driveway. I'd imagine I was a driver in the Indianapolis 500, racing at top speeds on the stretch and just barely keeping all four wheels on the road. On the last lap I'd pass the last car and cross the finish line in record time. Victory!!! It was a scenario I reenacted over and over again. One day in my excitement I actually pulled the shift into neutral. Our driveway had a slight grade that led out to the main road of the neighborhood. The emergency brake was not employed so the car began to creep down the driveway out into the road. I froze in fear, as a five-year-old I didn't know how to stop the car. Down the car rolled out of the driveway and onto the road. At that moment, high school students were walking home. One of them, a senior, opened the door, jumped in and brought the car to a stop. I was saved! But then it hit me, how were my parents going to react to my imaginary race gone awry? My father came out of the house, asked what happened, thanked the young man who brought the car to a stop and then asked me, "Are you all right?" We took the short ride back up the driveway. He parked the car and was quiet! He must have seen the fear in my face from my ill-begotten adventure. His only comment, was, "How about we go inside?" That was it. It was a grace-filled moment. It wasn't that he wasn't concerned for my safety and my well-being. He was happy to know I was okay and knew I had scared myself silly and wouldn't do it again. I didn't.

God desires a relationship with all people. God opens our hearts as with Lydia to become more godlike and be generous servants. A servant motivated not out of guilt but out of love. My father's reaction to my misadventure was an encounter with a graceful God. Luther says we are to be little Christs to one another. I am reminded of an old public service announcement on television that portrayed a child crying who needed help (I believe she was lost). A caring soul among the crowd turned to her, offering comfort and help. The child looked up at the person and asked, "Are you God?" As Easter people we bring the resurrection to the world. In our daily encounters with family, co-workers and strangers, others see Christ in us and receive his love. In these encounters we come face to face with God. DMB

9. Ibid., 651.

The Ascension of Our Lord
May 13, 2010

Acts 1:1–11
Psalm 47 or Psalm 93
Ephesians 1:15–23
Luke 24:44–53

Acts 1:1–11—The Acts of the Apostles is Book 2 of the writer known as Luke. Both of Luke's books are written to Theophilus (lover of God). Acts overlaps a little of what Luke writes at the end of his Gospel and some of the details are not the same. However, Acts tells us that the ascension of Jesus occurred forty days after his resurrection. Jesus instructs his disciples during this period, preparing them for the mission that lies ahead. The disciples ask Jesus when will be the time for his return. He responds by saying it is not for them to know. They are told they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit and sent forth as witnesses. While speaking to them Jesus is lifted up into heaven and the disciples gaze up into the sky as Jesus is ascended. While staring up into space they are confronted by two angels who ask why they are looking up when they need to be looking outward toward the world? It is unfortunate this lection does not include vv. 12–14. During the next ten days in anticipation of what is to come, Luke shares that the disciples gather frequently with the women and the brothers of Jesus in prayer.

Ephesians 1:15–23—While Acts and the Gospel speak of Jesus' ascension, the writer of Ephesians addresses Christ's enthronement at the right hand of the Father. The words "rule," "authority," "power," and "dominion" address the cosmic Christ as king of the universe. While we live in a world between resurrection and return, Jesus is neither idle nor abandoning care for his people. He actively reigns over his church.

Luke 24:44–53—The Gospel shares a different version of the Ascension in that it occurs on Easter Day. The resurrection, the Emmaus story, Jesus' appearance to the disciples and the Ascension are all jammed into a 24-hour period. Jesus opens the disciples' minds to the Scriptures, so they understand that the crucifixion and resurrection were all part of God's plan. They are told that they are to wait in Jerusalem, where they will be empowered with what God has promised. From Jerusalem all nations will come to know the Christ as the disciples witness to the life, death and resurrection of the Lord. In departing Jesus blesses the disciples and is carried up into heaven. Unlike Acts where the disciples gazed up into heaven, the Gospel says the disciples worshiped Jesus. When they returned to Jerusalem, they were continually in the temple blessing God.

Interpreting the word for today

I find the story of the disciples looking up into the heavens a little on the comical side. After all, it had to be a remarkable if not somewhat frightening experience witnessing Jesus' ascension. Imagine, there they stood dumbfounded, mouths ajar, looking off into space. And then in a moment, two angels appear and snap them out of their starry-eyed gaze. They were saying, "Hey, what are you looking at up here? Don't you have things to do?"

I wonder how often, as the church, we find ourselves gazing up into heaven (figuratively speaking). It seems to me people spend lots of time trying to calculate when will be the end of the world. Even though it's clear in the text, it is not for us to know, we still make our futile

attempts to know what God is up to. I think that's a kind of staring off into space. Or those moments in our lives when frustrated we toss our hands up in the air and say, "What's the use?" and then choose to do nothing. We kind of just "space out." Then there are those of us in the church who worry, fret and fight about declining membership, shrinking budgets, special interests to the point we are focused inward and forget about the proclamation of the gospel. It becomes a sort of navel-gazing.

Jesus explicitly says in both Acts and Luke, "You are witnesses to these things." Yes, we know the story. We have heard it a multitude of times. We know it inside and out. We are not meant to be sponges that just soak up the message of God's love. God's love is to be given away. Twenty years ago, the congregations of the old Western Pennsylvania-West Virginia Synod's Warren-McKean Conference gathered for a special evangelical outreach presentation. The speaker that night shared ways in which the love of Christ is witnessed: a helping hand, bowed heads and a quiet prayer at a restaurant, driving to Sunday worship services. People observe others doing these things and with each vignette the speaker said to the crowd, "You can do that." Yes, we can and we do!

Luke's Gospel says the disciples responded to Jesus' ascension with worship and blessing God. In Acts 1:14 the disciples spend the next ten days meeting together frequently for prayer. A theme in the ELCA's Upstate New York Synod is "Pray First," a reminder that prayer is one of the building blocks of the Christian community. As the disciples gathered in prayer waiting for the Holy Spirit, we too are called to pray and wait to be empowered by the Spirit. In worship, committees, counseling sessions, congregation councils, and synod assemblies we pray first. In our homes before meals, when important decisions are being considered, before beginning the day or at the end of the day we pray first! The Apostle Paul says, "pray without ceasing." (1 Thess 5:17) As the disciples patiently prayed in anticipation of the day of Pentecost, so too, are we called to pray and ultimately give witness to the living Lord. DMB

Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 16, 2010

Acts 16:16–34
Psalm 97
Revelation 12:12–14, 16–17, 20–21
John 17:20–26

Acts 16:16–34—Paul and Silas are on their way to pray when they encounter a woman who is possessed. For several days the woman follows them and cries out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God." Paul is agitated by the woman's shouting and casts out the demon. The woman is freed of the spirit but she is owned by others who have profited by her prophecies. Now that she is healed, the woman could no longer foretell the future and her owners feel cheated out of their monies. Paul and Silas are dragged before the authorities and charged with the following: 1) disturbing the peace; 2) they are foreigners (Jews) and 3) they are advocating customs not accepted by Romans. As a result, Paul and Silas are stripped, flogged and thrown in jail. Later as Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns, a violent earthquake shakes the prison doors open and releases them from their chains. The jailer awakens, sees the prison doors open and assumes his charges have escaped. As the jailer prepares to

dispatch himself, Paul shouts out not to harm himself because the prisoners have not escaped and are all there. The jailer is so moved that he asks what he must do to be saved. The jailer and his whole family are baptized and minister to Paul and Silas. Those who appear to be imprisoned or enslaved—Paul, Silas, the woman once possessed, and the jailer—are free and those who consider themselves free—the owners of the woman and accusers of Paul and Silas—are enslaved to sin. Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31)

Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21—As we come to the end of Revelation, the writer encourages the people that Jesus is coming soon. Those who read Revelation today must remember the historical context from which John writes. Roman persecution of the church is rampant. The emperor proclaims himself Lord and God and it is a belief among Rome itself that it will be eternal. Revelation contests Rome's immortality. Rome's rule will come to an end. God's kingdom will be eternal. The persecution of the Christian community will cease. Jesus is Lord and not Caesar. The faithful are comforted with the promise that God will reign and live among the people.

John 17:20–26—This is the final section of Jesus' prayer. The prayer reveals Jesus' deep sense of love for his disciples. The love that the Father has for the Son is now given to the faithful. Raymond Brown suggests the prayer for oneness is not necessarily a prayer for ecumenical unity.[10] If it does suggest unity among the church then it should recognize diversity among its membership. Just as the Father and Son are one so, too, are they two distinct persons. As the Father and Son are unique persons then so, too, as we are one with another, we are also unique to one another. It is a prayer for oneness in love with the Father and Son and then a oneness in love for one another. The source of love is found in intimate relationship with Jesus and with God.

Interpreting the word for today

The aspen is a magnificent tree known for its brilliant red and yellow leaves in the fall. They grow in colonies where a single tree is responsible for the new tree growth that surrounds it. Each tree shares a common root that connects the entire colony. In an earlier chapter of John (15) Jesus speaks about being the vine and that we are the branches. Each of the faithful is connected to a common root (Jesus). Paul exemplified this oneness in Christ. In the middle of jail and joined by prisoners whom he most likely did not know, Paul still shared the message of God's love through Christ. Even the jailor became connected to Christ in response to Paul's care and concern.

Grape growers have a certain term for describing common characteristics that influence the grape. These include climate, soil and farming techniques. It is called *terroir*. Loosely translated it means a sense of place. Each grape-growing region contributes certain characteristics of the grape that are unique to that region.

We have a sense of place with Jesus. Rooted in our Baptism and nourished by Holy Communion we are continually sustained by the love of Jesus. As grapes from each region have unique characteristics so too there is diversity among God's people. Lutherans, Orthodox Catholic, Roman Catholics and Baptists each offer a unique opportunity in worship and yet we are bound to Christ in love. Even in a singular denomination

10. Ibid., 775.

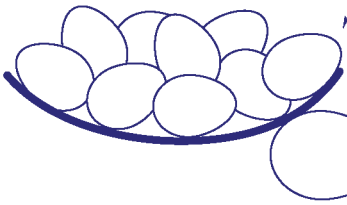
that shares a common foundation in our love for Christ, God's people are diverse and as unique as a thumbprint. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is living in this common love for Christ as relationships develop regarding full communion partnerships with the Presbyterian, Reformed, United Church of Christ, Episcopal (ECUSA), Moravian and most recently the United Methodist Churches. Each full communion partner has a unique history, customs and different polity and yet all are united as one through Christ.

Samuel J. Stone embraced the oneness of the church with Jesus through the words of his hymn: "The Church's One Foundation" written in 1866.

"The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
she is his new creation
By water and the word.
From heaven he came and sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her
and for her life he died.

She is from every nation,
yet one o'er all the earth;
her charter of salvation
one Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses
with every grace endued.

DMB



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http://tithing.lstc.edu/events.php

The October 2009 issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* was published in partnership with the Tithing and Stewardship Foundation. Dedicated to the memory of the Rev. Robert J. Furreboe and the Rev. Dr. Connie M. Kleingartner, it contains articles that explore the relationships of stewardship, liturgy and preaching and provide practical guidence for leaders who want to help their church steward its resources. A single copy of the issue is available through the Tithing and Stewardship Foundation without charge. Additional copies may be purchased for $2.50 each (includes postage and handling). Contact Ruth Ann Deppe at rdeppe@lstc.edu or 773-256-0712.

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