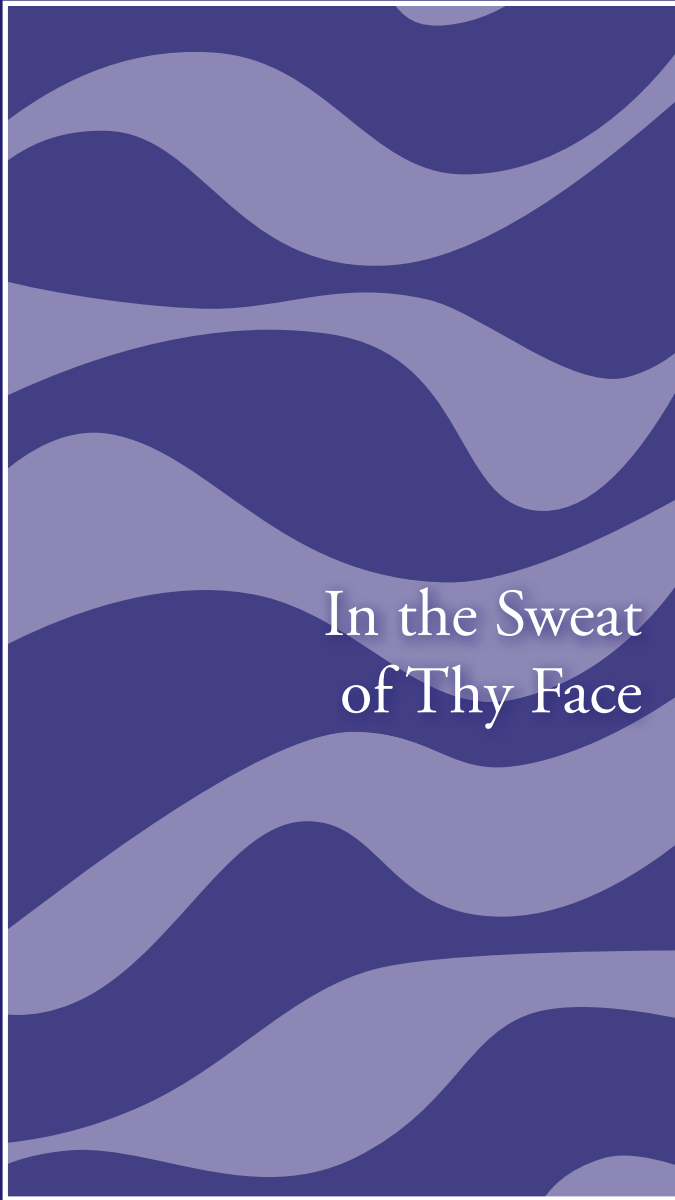


February 2009

Volume 36

Number 1



In the Sweat
of Thy Face

CURRENTS
in Theology and Mission

Currents

in Theology and Mission

Published by
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
in cooperation with
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Wartburg Theological Seminary

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CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (ISSN: 0098-2113) is published bimonthly (every other month), February, April, June, August, October, December. Annual subscription rate: \$18.00 in the U.S.A., \$23.00 elsewhere. Two-year rate: \$35.00 in the U.S.A., \$45.00 elsewhere. Three-year rate: \$51.00 in the U.S.A., \$65.00 elsewhere. Published by Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a nonprofit organization, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60615, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. Printed in U.S.A.

CURRENTS is indexed in *ATLA Religion Database, Elenchus, IZBW, NTA, OTA, Religion Index I (formerly IRPL), Religious and Theological Abstracts, and Theologische Literaturzeitung.*

MICROFORM AVAILABILITY: 16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm, 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Inc., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

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In the Sweat of Thy Face

A recent book, *The Bible and its Influence*, is designed to help people teach the Bible in public education. It notes the significant role that the Bible has played throughout American life and history. In my lifetime, Martin Luther King said he had been to the mountaintop and seen the Promised Land, a vision clearly based on Deuteronomy 34. Abraham Lincoln, whose natal bicentennial will come about the time you receive this issue, often peppered his speeches with biblical references. In his Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln made reference to the sweat of Adam's face (Gen 3:19) as he spoke the following words: "It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces." With these words, Lincoln expressed his astonishment over the American institution of slavery which his Emancipation Proclamation would soon bring to an end. A new crack in another ongoing dividing wall of hostility (Eph 2:14) can be seen in the election of Barack Obama as the American President in 2008. So what issues would our writers want people of faith to sweat about today?

Dwight N. Hopkins points out that there are two major contemporary environmental movements, one stressing the preservation and conservation of the earth, and the other focusing on the struggle against environmental racism. While largely separate enterprises in the United States, they have been brought together in the World Council of Churches. Environmental justice advocates try to prevent locating waste facilities in working class and people-of-color communities. In some cases, environmental racism is part of intentional policy practices on the part of global financial institutions. The government of the United States penalizes at a much higher rate pollution-law violators in white communities than in people-of-color communities. Hispanic farm workers are intimately interwoven in pesticide production and application. Strong resistance to environmental racism comes from Black Environmental Liberation Theology. Dianne D. Glave is one of the foremost advocates of this theology. History and theology will be a spearhead for reform for African Americans embattled by environmental racism in the future.

Jennifer Hockenbery offers a meditation for Lent based on the thought of Hildegard of Bingen from the 12th century. Hildegard believed that if there was going to be any sort of afterlife for the soul, the body was going to have some share in it. Hildegard saw hatred of the world as hatred of its divine creator. The soul cannot perform its functions without the body. A belief in the fundamental separation between body and soul dominates the popular viewpoint today. People think of their bodies as worthwhile for the short-run, insofar as they are vehicles for the soul. Hildegard affirmed that we are "human beings whom God formed from the slime of the earth and breathed life into." A Christian ought to see herself as a person who is both body and soul. A Christian cannot ignore the needs of the world. The world is our real home. Loving the world means refraining from these things that keep us chasing shadows and deceptions and ignoring true beauty.

Jochen Teuffel asks whether the Book of Esther should be called God's written word since neither God nor God's word is mentioned in the Hebrew text of the book. The article notes the various helpful theological additions in the Greek version of Esther and the unsatisfying attempts by some to find indirect references to God in the Hebrew text of Esther. Similarly, evidences for divine providence in Esther are also not fully satisfactory or salvific. Rather, a canonical reading of Esther relates the preservation of that Jewish community to God's election of Israel and God's promise of deliverance in the Exodus. Scripture is therefore interpreted by Scripture. The faithfulness of God's word of promise (Isa 55:11) is then experienced in this interpretation of Esther as well. The absence of God in the book of Esther often resembles our own situation where we have to apply the word witnessed in Scripture to ourselves so that it can evoke our own faith and joy.

George Murphy writes in response to the recent wave of popular atheistic publications and asks how things happen in the world and what do they mean. Scientific advances mean that phenomena in the world can be understood as if God were not given, and this has fueled the atheistic argument. Science and atheists have more difficulty with the questions of meaning and purpose. After reviewing previous attempts to justify religion in a scientific world, Murphy seeks to provide a theology that takes seriously the successes of science and an account of divine purpose which is integrally connected with the understanding of God's action in the world. God created the world so that there would be flesh in which God could become enfleshed and unite all things with God. The cross-resurrection event is the key to understanding how God works to accomplish the divine purpose for creation and bring it to its intended goal. The hiddenness of God in the world corresponds to the divine concealment in the darkness and God-forsakenness on Calvary.

Lawrence H. Williams observes that the weakness of the contemporary black family may be seen as a direct result of centuries of white oppression. The main difference between the independent black church and its white counterpart was its overriding belief in a theology of liberation and reform. In the black church a janitor could be a deacon, and a domestic worker head of the usher board. In the black church the lowest person was affirmed and confirmed. The present time is the first time in black history that in urban areas a generation of young people is growing up that knows nothing about the black church. The contemporary African American religious organization that is having success among the poor and marginalized is the Nation of Islam. The church has become the most homophobic institution in the black community. The black church still stands as a symbol of the best hope for nurturing and reinvigorating children and youth. Islamic and other religious groups of African descent need seats at the table as well.

L. Roger Owens notes that "participation" is making a comeback in theology. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's lectures on homiletics can help us begin to develop a theology of practical participation. For Bonhoeffer, Christ is the founder of the church, Lord over it, and Christ is the church itself. Christ's existing as church is possible because of Christ's *pro nobis* structure. Through the practice of proclamation the church is enacting participation in Christ. Through the church's practice of proclaiming the Word, Christ makes the church his own body. Proclamation is participation in the life of God precisely because

the proclaimed word is the Logos of God who includes us into himself through the Holy Spirit. The Word's assumption of humanity as displayed in the Gospels is the obedience of the man Jesus to the will of the Father. The contemporary truth of the church is revealed in that it preaches and lives the Sermon on the Mount and the admonitions of Paul.

The Bible recalls a time when nature yielded easily to human agriculture, but it also knew first hand a time when achievements on the farm came only with the sweat of one's face. Most of us know more about mental and emotional sweat than hard physical labor and find in the routines of daily ministry more "calling" than Adamic curse. The ELCA slogan "God's Work, Our Hands" reminds us, however, that God's achievements among us are often mediated through helping human hands, feet that hasten to bring glad tidings, and even the sweat of our own faces as we bear one another's burdens. Here's hoping that your brows are wet with such honest sweat.

Ralph W. Klein, *editor*

Holistic Health & Healing: Environmental Racism & Ecological Justice

Dwight N. Hopkins

Professor of Theology, University of Chicago Divinity School

The environmental movement in the U.S. is comprised of at least two major sectors. One is known to the public because of its emphasis on the preservation and conservation of Mother Earth, and Greenpeace is usually the face of this grouping. The second important dimension of environmental concerns is the struggle against environmental racism and for ecological justice. Here, poor and working class communities of African Americans, Latino-Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans have taken the lead against sickness in human bodies, social relations, and nature.

The Greenpeace wing of the movement has consistently fought for the healing of the planet. It teaches us that "...environmental degradation caused by massive pollution of air, water and land threatens the very life of the earth. Rapid depletion of non-renewable resources, indeed of species themselves, the thinning of the ozone layer, exposing all living creatures to the danger of radiation, the buildup of gases exacerbating the greenhouse effect, increasing erosion by the sea—all these are documented by scientific research."¹

1. K.C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis," in *Ecotheology: Voices From South And North*, ed. David G. Hallman

The primary foci of the earth-emphasis environmental wing have been historically "wilderness and wildlife preservation, wise resource management, pollution abatement, and population control." Preservation examples include the spotted owl and the snail darter. The leaders and followers of this movement have mainly been middle and upper income white people with above average education and easy access to political, cultural, and economic resources.²

For instance, in April 2007, roughly one thousand scientists from about seventy-four countries constituted the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The final report disclosed the dire impact of global warming on the earth's ecosystems. Increased populations and growing urbanization coupled with adverse climate changes will eventually result in hazardous flooding, drought, and slow extinction for up to twenty to thirty percent of plant and animal species.³ More than ever, Mother

(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 66.

2. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement," in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1993), 22.

3. *Newsweek* (April 16, 2007): 46.

Earth is sick with acid-rain pollution. The greenhouse effect is increasing. Carbon dioxide traps the sun's heat in the atmosphere and consequently warms the earth. Industrial pollution is another part of the problem. What many people don't know is that carbon dioxide remains in the atmosphere for about two hundred years. The increase in temperatures and sea levels will give rise

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to massive famine and damaging flooding. It is possible that in the year 2040, sea ice in the Arctic might disappear totally, preventing polar bears from hunting sea animals on which to live. For us humans, a radical climate change will drastically lower rainfall in the western United States and global storms will intensify.⁴

Though the two wings of the environmental movement in the United States are mainly separated, on the global scale, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has united the two positions of protecting Mother Earth and also struggling for ecological justice.

For instance, the 1974 Bucharest meeting of the WCC sub-unit on Church and

Society introduced the notion of "sustainability." Sustainability acknowledges that there are finite resources and, consequently, one needs to develop new technologies and social systems less dependent on these limited resources. Non-renewable resources demand alternative means of sustaining human progress. However, at this meeting, poorer countries emphasized a definition of economic justice and development which contrasted with the northern hemisphere's focus on limiting the use of non-renewable sources to facilitate human development.⁵

At the World Council of Churches sixth assembly in Vancouver (1983), there was a gradual merger, at least conceptually, of these two approaches to healing the environment. Earth was recognized as an agent along with human beings in the creation process. Simultaneously, talk about ecology had to take into account justice. Thus this WCC assembly agreed on a "process of mutual commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation" (JPIC). "Integrity of creation" was a new phrase in the ecumenical lexicon, and it cried out for definition.⁶ To solidify organizationally this new thrust, the WCC established the unit called Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. One could no longer talk about creation's integrity without linking it directly to justice and peace. Today, as a result of the WCC's forging a conceptual and organizational link, the unity of conserving the earth coupled with the demands of justice is, at least verbally in globally ecumenical conversation, embraced by most churches.⁷

In the words of K.C. Abraham (India):

5. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, "Creation in Ecumenical Theology," in *Ecotheology: Voices From South And North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 97.

6. *Ibid.*, 98.

7. *Ibid.*, 102.

4. *Newsweek* (April 16, 2007): 65 and 66.

The interconnectedness between commitment to the renewal of society and to the renewal of the earth is clearly seen in the struggle of many marginalized groups all over the world. Indigenous peoples (Native peoples in the USA and Canada, Marois in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Aborigines in Australia, tribal people in many countries of Asia) and groups who have traditionally depended on the land and the sea (small farmers, fisherfolk, agricultural laborers) have kept these two dimensions together in their movements for liberation.⁸

Kwok Pui-lan, formerly of Hong Kong, affirms the ecological crisis resulting from a break in the human-earth connection. She attests to the need to care for both earth and for marginalized human communities. She lifts up especially the vulnerability of women and children in the Third World. "Deforestation, acid rain, soil erosion and the indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides lead to the breaking down of the local sustenance economy on which most women and children are dependent." Women, therefore travel to the cities to care for themselves and their children. Unfortunately, many end up in the sex industry. Here, the rape of Mother Earth through deforestation and poisons yields the rape of Third World women's bodies.⁹

Environmental racism and ecological justice

Though conservation and justice emphases are nominally if not substantively recognized on the global stage through the WCC, the two emphases still comprise mainly two separate environment movements within the U.S.A. Again, the conservation and preservation wing of the environment ef-

fort is most widely known in America. That is why many people are surprised to hear that African American communities have been struggling against environmental racism and for ecological justice long before the formal launching of the struggle in the 1980s. Among black folk, environmental racism symbolizes profound illness of both the earth and humans in people of color neighborhoods. Holistic disease requires ecological justice, i.e., holistic health and healing.

For example, Thomas Calhoun Walker was a black man and the Advisor and Consultant of Negro Affairs for the Virginia Emergency Relief Administration in Richmond, Virginia. During WWI, Walker was the architect of environmental initiatives for blacks, including providing black children with access to swimming pools and parks, eliminating rats on wharves, promoting gardening among blacks, and stressing hygienic homes.¹⁰

Likewise few realize that many of the urban rebellions in the 1960s derived from black folk's anger about lack of garbage collection and sanitation services. And the famous riot at predominantly black Texas Southern University in Houston in 1967 erupted partially because community people protested an eight year old black girl's drowning at a city garbage dump. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated because he was helping black working class garbage workers in Memphis, Tennessee, who went on strike for a holistic healthy environment. They sought increased wages, the same pay scale as

8. K.C. Abraham, "A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis," in *Ecotheology*, 65.

9. Kwok Pui-lan, "Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity," in *Ecotheology*, 108.

10. Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll, "African American Environmental History: An Introduction," in *To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History*, ed. Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 1-2.

white city workers, and a quality work environment.¹¹

However, not all agree that the black community initiated the ecological justice dimension of the environmental movement. Some point to the United Farm Workers struggle against pesticide poisoning in the 1960s. And others mark the 15th century European occupation of Native American lands as the start of environmental justice struggles.

Yet general consensus cites the formal launching of the environmental racism and ecological justice movement in the year 1987. That year the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ) published its landmark study *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*. Rev. Benjamin Chavis (a UCC black clergyman) headed the Commission whose report substantiated the reality of “environmental racism.” Having created this new phrase “environmental racism,” the report suggested:

the existence of clear patterns which show that communities with greater minority percentages of the population are more likely to be the sites of commercial hazardous waste facilities. The possibility that these patterns resulted by chance is virtually impossible, strongly suggesting that some underlying factors, which are related to race, played a role in the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities. Therefore the Commission for Racial Justice concludes that, indeed, race has been a factor in the location of hazardous waste facilities in the United States.¹²

11. The U.S. National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968) documented these causes of civil disobedience in black areas. Robert D. Bullard, ed. *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 9-10.

12. Vernice D. Miller, “Building on Our Past, Planning for Our Future,” in *Toxic Struggles: The Theory and Practice of Environmental Justice*, ed.

The UCC-CRJ (1994) updated study found that the situation had worsened. More black and brown people were disproportionately living near hazardous waste areas. In seven years, there had been a six percent increase of people of color located near toxic disposal sites.¹³

After releasing their landmark 1987 report, the UCC assembled the historic First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C., in October 1991. The Summit assembled indigenous peoples, civil rights activists, labor organizers, anti-toxic veterans, and academics. A final conference report directly accented the role of race in environmental analysis:

environmental inequities cannot be reduced solely to class—the economic ability of people to “vote with their feet” and escape polluted environments. Race interpenetrates class in the United States and is often a more potent predictor of which communities get dumped on and which ones are spared. There is clear evidence that institutional barriers severely limit access to clean environments. Despite the many attempts made by government to level the playing field, all communities are still not equal.

As the head of the UCC-CRJ, Ben Chavis understood the Summit as a key process for people of color to organize self-empowerment and self-determination focused squarely on environmental justice. U.S. minority populations were claiming their own voice and their own agency within the larger environmental effort.¹⁴

This Summit produced a major docu-

Richard Hofrichter (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1993), 128.

13. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 55.

14. Vernice D. Miller, op. cit., 129.

ment called the “Principles of Environmental Justice.” The seventeen principles are the plumb line for the environmental racism and ecological justice thrust.¹⁵ With this statement, it becomes crystal clear that ecological justice combines nature with social justice. Both require healing. The ecological justice movement does not treat the problem of oppression and social exploitation as separable from the rape and exploitation of the natural world. Instead, it argues that human societies and the natural environment are intricately linked and that the health of one depends on the health of the other. It understands that if the human environment is poisoned, if there are no opportunities for economic survival or nutritional sustenance, or if there are no possibilities to be sheltered, then we have an inadequate environmental program.¹⁶

Environmental justice activists target the prevention of locating waste facilities in working class and people of color communities. They also broaden their organizing efforts to clean up the toxic impact on Mother Earth. For instance, local communities fight for their participation in decision-making on environmental health issues; oversee implementation of governmental and industry policy and guidelines; clean up poisonous industrial areas; and organize to end dangerous practices harming workers on the job. Moreover, the “movement for environmental justice is also about creating clean jobs, building a sustainable economy, guaranteeing safe and affordable housing, and achieving racial and social justice.”¹⁷

15. For the “Principles” document, see *Toxic Struggles*, 237-239.

16. Dorceta E. Taylor, “Environmentalism and the Politics of Inclusion,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 57.

17. “Introduction,” in *From the Ground Up*, 17.

Five strands within ecological justice

The current state of the ecological or environmental justice organizing results from five strands that have coalesced around environmental racism and for a healthy ecology.

The 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s civil rights struggle is probably the major foundation upon which the ecological justice movement is built. In fact, the black church and black community opposition to a PCP dump in Warren County, North Carolina, in 1982 shows a direct tie between civil rights movements and environmental justice movements. It is this history of organizing, sacrificing, and strategizing that grassroots civil rights and church leaders (led by the UCC) bring directly into the ecological justice process. The Warren County protest was initiated by black church women.¹⁸ Likewise, some of the Chicano student leaders of the 1960s Latino civil rights organizations are part of the historical foundation of environmental anti-racism efforts.

After the civil rights struggles of blacks and Latinos, grassroots anti-toxic activists have brought their wisdom and experience to the ecological justice process. These veterans gathered momentum in the late 1970s in opposition to the construction of incinerators, landfills, and waste facilities. A large representation of women exists here because women were often the ones who rallied to protect the health and lives of their children.

Both the civil rights and anti-toxic waste organizers came to understand that their local and specific efforts were linked to a larger systemic and structural problem, complicated by race and the wealthy class.

Thirdly, academics have joined the envi-

18. Dianne D. Glave, “Black Environmental Liberation Theology,” in *To Love the Wind and the Rain*, 194-195.

ronmental justice struggle by contributing vital research and providing systemic and structural analyses, publications, lobbying, and networking. The United Church of Christ helped to organize academics into conferences to focus on environmental racism.

Fourth, Native American activists have perhaps the longest history of combating environmental racism and building ecological justice. This began 500 years ago with

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the arrival of European Christian colonialists. In fact, the formation of the American Indian Movement (AIM) was influenced by environmental and land demands. A key contribution in the environmental racism/ecological justice philosophy is Native American's stress on self-determination; that is to say, oppressed communities must speak for themselves.

And, after American Indians, a fifth strand of the ecological justice organizing has been the labor movement. The United Farm

Workers (headed by Cesar Chavez and comprised mainly of Latino farm laborers) built a national network emphasizing both the banning of pesticides and worker input in the decision-making process on their jobs.¹⁹

Concrete examples of environmental racism

What these five different strands of ecological justice activists recognize is that environmental racism is a profound illness impacting the holistic body of creation. Such life-threatening sickness disproportionately targets people of color and working class communities. To bring about the needed health and healing work, one has to have a deep appreciation for the depth of the attack on Mother Earth and social dying caused by unchecked individualistic human greed. Examples of environmental racism expose the broad scale nature of the suffering and sickness. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. argues that:

Millions of African Americans, Latinos, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans are trapped in polluted environments because of their race and color. Inhabitants of these communities are exposed to greater health and environmental risks than is the general population. Clearly, all Americans do not have the same opportunities to breathe clean air, drink clean water, enjoy clean parks and playgrounds, or work in a clean, safe environment.

Environmental racism is racial discrimination in environmental policymaking. It is racial discrimination in the enforcement of regulations and laws. It is racial discrimination in the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste disposal and the siting of polluting industries. It is racial discrimination in the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in communities of color. And, it is racial discrimination in the history of excluding people of color from the mainstream

19. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 20-28.

environmental groups, decision-making boards, commissions, and regulatory bodies.²⁰

In some cases, environmental racism and the resulting sicknesses it causes are intentional and deliberate policy practices on the part of global financial institutions. For example, Lawrence Summers, chief economist at the World Bank in 1991, released an internal memo that targeted Third World countries, or, in his words “Less Developed Countries.” The memo indicates that the primary intent of the World Bank is to make profits for monopoly capitalist corporations at the expense of the health of working class people and poor countries in the world. Summers begins his memo with the phrase “dirty industries,” indicating his awareness of how pollution causes sickness for the earth and for human beings. Because the memo gives an insider’s view on the dire implications for health and death, we quote an extended excerpt:

“Dirty” Industries: Just between you and me, shouldn’t the World Bank be encouraging MORE migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs [Less Developed Countries]? I can think of three reasons:

1) The measurement of the costs of health-impairing pollution depends on the foregone earnings from increased morbidity and mortality. From this point of view a given amount of health-impairing pollution should be done in the country with the lowest cost, which will be the country with the lowest wages. I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

2) The costs of pollution are likely to be non-linear as the initial increments of pollution probably have very low cost. I’ve always thought that under-polluted areas in Africa are vastly UNDER-polluted; their air quality is probably

vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City.

3) The demand for a clean environment for aesthetic and health reasons is likely to have very high income elasticity [i.e., meaning in the developed countries of the northern hemisphere]....

The problem with the arguments against all of these proposals for more pollution in LDCs (intrinsic rights to certain goods, moral reasons, social concerns, lack of adequate markets, etc.) could be turned around and used more or less effectively against every [World] Bank proposal...²¹

Larry Summers and the World Bank are plainly considering causing illness and death in the poorer countries of the world in order to make more profits. He calmly offers proposals to dump toxins and pollution in the Third World because the developed countries have high incomes that would cause opposition. And he concludes by rationally calculating how arguments against his proposals for more pollution in Third World countries can be used against the World Bank.

Likewise, in 1975 the Trilateral Commission released its report titled *The Crisis of Democracy*. While the World Bank memo deals with poor people and countries of color internationally, the Trilateral Commission focuses on people of color and other former silent communities within the U.S. Yet, the same intentional calculations are at play. The report shares a definition of capitalist elite democracy.

The vulnerability of democratic government in the United States [thus] comes not primarily from external threats, though such threats are real, nor from internal subversion from the left or the right, although both possibilities could

20. Rev. Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr., Foreword,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 3.

21. Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 19-20.

exist, but rather from the internal dynamics of democracy itself in a highly educated, mobilized, and participant society... Previously passive or unorganized groups in the population—blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students, and women—[have] now embarked on concerted efforts to establish their claims to opportunities, positions, rewards, and privileges, to which they had not considered themselves entitled before.²²

External factors do not threaten American democracy. Rather, the people, the citizens of the United States, are the threat. Clearly the monopoly capitalist representatives on the Trilateral Commission see democracy from their class perspective. That is why the report states that the “vulnerability of democratic government in the United States [thus] comes not primarily from external threats..., but rather from the internal dynamics of democracy itself.” These global capitalist lords are talking about how everyday Americans can threaten bourgeois democracy, the democracy of the monopoly capitalists themselves. Clearly in the eyes of the Trilateral Commission, democracy is not an objective, universal principle, but one deeply ensconced in class interests; that is to say, democracy in America is one of class struggle.

The World Bank represents monopoly capitalist financial institutions. The Trilateral Commission represents major capitalist governments. But a similar approach is found among experts of environmental systems. For instance, Cerrell Associates, a consulting firm for toxic waste companies, wrote a report suggesting toxic waste companies intentionally “target small, rural communities whose residents are low income, older people, or people with a high school education or less; communities with

a high proportion of Catholic residents; and communities whose residents are engaged in resource extractive industries such as agriculture, mining, and forestry. Ideally,” the report states, “officials and companies should look for lower socioeconomic neighborhoods that are also in a heavy industrial area with little, if any, commercial activity.”²³ Moreover other criteria for dumping toxic waste included being near highways, and far from schools, nursing homes, and hospitals, which communities of color lack; areas with cheap land values; commercial zoning; and unemployment. The overarching purpose of the report was to advise toxic companies how to bring about toxic sickness in communities that would not cause public opposition. These recommended guidelines for dumping poisonous wastes fit existing California hazardous sites largely populated by Latinos, and fit east coast urban sites, largely populated by blacks.

Given similar world views of capitalist industry, governments, and private consultants, it should not surprise anyone that the “most polluted urban communities are those with crumbling infrastructure, ongoing economic disinvestment, deteriorating housing, inadequate schools, chronic unemployment, a high poverty rate, and an overloaded health-care system.”²⁴

The expendability of people of color doesn't end with capital, policy, and consultants, but also extends to the practices of the U.S. government's own regulatory agencies. The *National Law Journal*, a leading legal publication, conducted a comprehensive analysis of every U.S. environmental lawsuit from the last seven years. Evidence shows

23. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 71-72.

24. Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 17.

22. Cynthia Hamilton, “Coping with Industrial Exploitation,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 73-74.

that the U.S. government penalizes pollution-law violators at a much higher rate in white communities than in people of color communities. In fact, there is a 506 percent disparity between white and black communities. Similarly the *Journal* examined the 12-year history of the federal government's Superfund, an account that provides funds to clean up toxic sites throughout the U.S. The review of all residential toxic waste sites showed that "the government takes longer to address hazards in minority communities, and it accepts solutions less stringent than those recommended by the scientific community. This racial imbalance, the investigation found, often occurs whether the community is wealthy or poor."²⁵ Indeed, sicknesses resulting from environmental racism is about race, as it cuts across class divides within the African American community.

Even studies by official regulatory offices document how African American and Latino communities in California experience closer proximity to toxic industries and the most workers in poisonous work environments, and endure an overall life of unhealthy factors yielding illness of the body and decreased quality of life.²⁶

Robert D. Bullard, author of the ground-breaking text, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (1990), likewise discovered how race trumps class in environmental racism.

People of color are exposed to greater environmental hazards in their neighborhoods and on the job than are their white counterparts. Studies find elevated exposure levels by race, even when social class is held constant. For example, research indicates race to be independent of class in the distribution of air pollution, contaminated fish consumption, location of municipal landfill and

incinerators, abandoned toxic-waste dumps, and lead poisoning in children.²⁷

Lead poisoning, for instance, impacts children of color at all class levels regardless of their parents' salary and educational status.

The Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry concluded "that, for families earning less than \$6,000, 68 percent of African American children had lead poisoning, compared with 36 percent for white children. In families with income exceeding \$15,000, more than 38 percent of African American children suffer from lead poisoning, compared with 12 percent of whites."²⁸ Regardless of household income, black children are two to three times more likely than white children to have sicknesses derived from lead poisoning.

What accounts for this illness across class? Disproportionately, white citizens can leave toxic areas that cause death and not healing. Working class and poor African Americans and even many black professionals and upper income households remain stuck in lethal situations due to residential segregation, bank redlining, and housing discrimination. When white families left, blacks moved into harmful situations of stockyards, warehouses, factory pollution, noise, dirt, and railroad tracks. Children grow up exposed to the stench of unhealthy land, water, and air and harmful noise levels.²⁹ Factually, "An African American who has an income of \$50,000 is as residentially segregated as an African American on welfare."³⁰

27. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environmental Racism," *Toxic Struggles*, 26 and 27.

28. Ibid.

29. Cynthia Hamilton, op. cit., 71.

30. Robert D. Bullard, "Anatomy of Environ-

25. Marianne Lavelle and Marcia A. Coyle, "Unequal Protection: The Racial Divide in Environmental Law," in *Toxic Struggles*, 136-137.

26. Cynthia Hamilton, op. cit., 70.

Physical illnesses and death are closely linked to psychological and mental stress-related diseases in areas of concentrated toxicity. Blacks are disproportionately situated in these conditions compared to whites and, therefore, experience higher levels of stress-related sickness and deaths. “For example, studies of both iron and steel foundry workers and laundry and dry-



cleaning industry workers show an increase in the incidence of stress-related mortality and morbidity among blacks as compared to white workers.”³¹ Consequently, talk of healing from environmental racism has to be a holistic approach encompassing the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels of illnesses among blacks.

Native American and Latino-Hispanic communities are similar. Janet Phoenix (M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D. in children’s health) has studied Navajo teenagers and discovered that they have organ cancer seventeen

times the national average. She concluded also that black children are fifty percent of the nation’s youth who suffer from lead paint poison.³² Dr. Phoenix cites the following symptoms of lead poisoning among children of color: behavior challenges, restricted vocabulary, low attention span, fatigue, loss of appetite, irritability, sleep disturbance, sudden behavioral change, development regression, clumsiness, muscular irregularities, weakness, abdominal pain, persistent vomiting, constipation, and changes in consciousness. Lead exposure is particularly harmful to children. It damages their developing brains and nervous systems, which can give rise to emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, and attention disorders.³³ Environmental racism is a severe disease affecting minority children.

Native American nations (called reservations) are receiving increased attention by industrial toxic corporations. The latter view the former as spaces to avoid some of the tougher environmental regulations promulgated by state governments. The weaker federal policies have less bite when applied to Native Americans because of the particular status and nominal sovereignty of Indian nations.³⁴ Federal governmental offices also are forging ahead to cause sickness and death for Native Americans. Winona LaDuke, co-chair of the Indigenous Women’s Network claims that the “U.S. government recently solicited every Indian tribe within U.S. borders to host a possible nuclear waste storage facility. Officials entice tribes with ‘no strings attached’

mental Racism,” *Toxic Struggles*, 26-27.

31. Beverly Hendrix Wright and Robert D. Bullard, “The Effects of Occupational Injury, Illness, and Disease on the Health Status of Black Americans,” *Toxic Struggles*, 156 and 159.

32. Cynthia Hamilton, op. cit., 68.

33. Janet Phoenix, “Getting the Lead Out of the Community,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 77.

34. Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism,” *Toxic Struggles*, 32.

grants of hundreds of thousands of dollars. The federal office of Nuclear Waste Negotiation states its mission as finding 'a state or Indian Tribe willing to host a repository or monitored retrievable storage facility for nuclear waste...'”³⁵ Given the low wealth and financial base in Indian territories, federal bribery can be enticing. The federal government is persistent because, at least for one reason, two thirds of all U.S. uranium is under Indian territory. Yet the immediate financial rewards are overshadowed by the health risks. One of the elements that results from the uranium production process remains radioactive for a minimum of 16,000 years.³⁶

Latino and Hispanic farm workers are intimately interwoven in the entire pesticide production and application. They mix, load, and apply health- and life-threatening pesticides. Brown people are also the flaggers in the fields, the laborers who guide and direct airplanes that spray pesticides over fruit and vegetable fields.

The highest exposure is from grapes, citrus fruit, peaches, apples, and other tree fruits that grow

35. Winona LaDuke, "A Society Based on Conquest Cannot Be Sustained," in *Toxic Struggles*, 105.

36. Winona LaDuke, op. cit., 103. She also writes: "Over fifty million indigenous populations inhabit the world's remaining rain forests; over one million indigenous people will be relocated to allow for the development of hydroelectric dam projects in the next decade; The United States has detonated all its nuclear weapons in the lands of indigenous people...; Two-thirds of all uranium resources within the borders of the United States lie under Native reservations...; One third of all low-sulphur coal in the western United States is on Indian land, with four of the ten largest coal strip mines in these same areas; Fifteen of the current eighteen recipients of nuclear-waste research grants...are Indian communities; and the largest hydroelectric project on the continent, the James Bay project, is on Cree and Inuit lands in northern Canada," 99.

with a lot of leaves, or from crops that are sprayed often and close to harvest such as strawberries and tomatoes.... Farmworker children are also at high risk of pesticide exposure whether or not they work in the fields alongside their parents. Frequently, young children, including infants and toddlers, are taken to the fields by their parents because childcare is not available. The fetus is exposed as well when pregnant women work in the fields...³⁷

Even children not brought to the fields are exposed to the clothing and footprints of their parents' shoes and work outfits. Pesticides cause skin diseases, cancer, male infertility, abortion, birth defects, and neurological disorders. In fact, some pesticides sprayed on fruit and vegetables contain a chemical similar to nerve gas. Though there are obvious immediate negative health outcomes, some of the long term deadly impacts of these pesticides become evident 10 to 20 years after exposure.

Over 95 percent of migrant farm workers are people of color, and 92 percent are Latinos and Hispanic laborers. Every day thousands of Spanish-speaking workers and their children are sprayed, infected, and poisoned by the pesticides that go on the fruit and vegetables we eat throughout America.³⁸

Like other people of color, Latino health is subject to hazardous dump areas. "California has three Class I toxic waste dumps—the dumps that can take just about every toxic substance known to science." One is in Kettleman which is 95 percent Latino, and the largest toxic waste dump west of Alabama. The second one is in Buttonwillow with the majority of the population being Latino. And the third is

37. Marion Moses, "Farmworkers and Pesticides," in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 165, 166, and 167.

38. Marion Moses, op. cit., 162.

in Westmorland with a 72 percent Latino population.³⁹ Chemical Waste Management, the company that owns these California toxic waste dumps, also owns the largest one in the country, found in Emelle, Alabama. Some suggest that this dump is the largest in the world. The population

“**T**heir separation from each other is unfortunate because they are fighting the same enemy—human beings’ domination of one another and nature.”

here is 95 percent black. Chemical Waste Management also owned a toxic incinerator on Chicago’s south side, with a 55 percent black community and 24 percent Latino; and one in Sauget, Illinois with a 95 percent black population; and also one in Port Arthur, Texas, comprised of 80 percent Latino and black residents.

Charles Lee, a Chinese American and the lead author of the landmark UCC-CRJ report that coined the phrase “environmental racism,” sums up the critical state of

39. Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 2 and 3.

toxic health among communities of color:

Three out of every five African Americans and Hispanic Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.... African Americans were heavily overrepresented in the populations of metropolitan areas with the largest number of uncontrolled toxic waste sites. These areas include: Memphis, TN (173 sites); Cleveland, OH (106 sites); St. Louis, MO (160); Chicago, IL (103 sites); Houston, TX (152 sites); and Atlanta, GA (94 sites). Los Angeles, CA, has more Hispanics living in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites than any other metropolitan area in the United States. Approximately half of all Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans lived in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites.⁴⁰

Devastation is an understatement when applied to people of color’s holistic health; that is to say, environmental and social wellness. Environmental racism undergirds decisions about contaminated fish consumption, air pollution, hazardous toxic sites, urban incinerators and landfills, lead poisoning in children, Native American land rights, the use of technologies in sustainable development, and farm workers’ proximity to pesticides.⁴¹

Black Environmental Liberation Theology

Framing environmental racism within the context of holistic environmental and social sickness suggests the important need of holistic healing, especially for communities of color. Perhaps one move in this direction is the creation of a Black Environmental Liberation Theology. James H. Cone hints at

40. Charles Lee, “Beyond Toxic Wastes and Race,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 49.

41. Robert D. Bullard, “Anatomy of Environmental Racism and the Environmental Justice Movement,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 21 and Robert D. Bullard, “Introduction,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism*, 9.

this direction when he laments the divide within the U.S. between the conservation/preservation and environmental racism/ecological justice wings of the environment movement. Cone writes: “Justice fighters for blacks and the defenders of the earth have tended to ignore each other in their public discourse and practice. Their separation from each other is unfortunate because they are fighting the same enemy—human beings’ domination of one another and nature.... Connecting racism with the degradation of the earth is a much-needed work in the African American community, especially in black liberation theology and the black churches.”⁴²

This challenge from James H. Cone, the father of black theology of liberation, to link racism and degradation of the earth with black liberation theology can be informed by the biblical witness to help tie together these concerns. Rom 8:19-23 reveals that the work of Christ includes the redemption of the entire universe, that creation might be freed from decay and share in sacred freedom. Eph 1:1-10; and Col 1:15-20 point to Christ kneading together and unifying all that is in heaven and in earth and bringing the entire creation back to God’s bosom. And we know Luke 4:18-27 speaks to Jesus’ mission with the oppressed and Matt 25:31-46 has the only test to enter heaven. How we spend our earthly lives serving the lowly and healing earth is actually serving Christ. Therefore there “is a unity between the hope for the inward liberation of the children of God and the hope for the liberation of the entire physical creation from its bondage and oppression.”⁴³

Ps 24: 1-2 reads: “The earth is the Lord’s and all this in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers.” To have holistic healing of the environment and social ills, we must unveil the fallacy in an ideology and theology that says monopoly capitalist corporations, world financial institutions, and governments can own nature and the labor of working people. How is it possible for these mega-toxic and deforestation entities to own privately that which was created and still remains in God’s hands? It is sin to monopolize the environmental wealth and resources from earth given to all of creation. So healing can begin in one domain at least—the theological level. Liberation theology can under gird ecological justice.

Indeed, Dianne D. Glave, an African American scholar and a leader in the environmental racism and ecological justice movement, is the first person to advance a Black Environmental Liberation Theology (BELT). Hers is a direct response to the above mentioned challenge of James H. Cone. Glave unites environmental efforts with the ecological justice sectors. Hence she attempts to provide a working model for what she calls a “black environmental liberation theology (BELT), a strand of black liberation theology.”⁴⁴

Moreover, she claims the following in her constructive BELT:

Black liberation theology, which decries the oppression of African Americans based on biblical principles—is the foundation of BELT, a nascent theology based on environmental justice history and activism by African American Christians. Like black liberation theology, BELT is both a theology and an ideology that is actualized by shielding contemporary

to the Ecological Crisis,” 72.

44. Dianne D. Glave, “Black Environmental Liberation Theology,” in *“To Love the Wind and the Rain,”* 189.

42. James H. Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of A Black Theology Of Liberation, 1968-1998*, 138 and 139.

43. K.C. Abraham, “A Theological Response

African Americans exposed to toxins and pollution from landfills, garbage dumps, and auto mechanics' shops, and sewage plants.⁴⁵

For Glave, BELT is built on three sources: the Bible, history, and grassroots organizing. Glave quotes Gal 3:28 as a biblical basis for her BELT. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." She complements this text with Psalm 82:3-4: "Defend the poor and fatherless; Do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; Free them from the hand of the wicked." Yet her foundational biblical text is the Genesis story, where she finds that the earth belongs to God, and Adam and Eve were only given stewardship and not dominion over God's earth.

Glave cites "the history of environmental justice by the African American church and Christian organizations. Church environmental justice activists, part of the long history of civil rights in the African American community and an underpinning of BELT, struggled to reverse twentieth-century environmental racism." A prime example was the Memphis black garbage workers' strike. Glave argues that King's April 3, 1968 "I've Been to The Mountain Top" speech serves as a "template for the justice of black liberation theology and BELT."⁴⁶ This address the night before his murder situated the garbage workers' struggles within an ecological lens and environmental demands. King's words also expose various forms of white racial discrimination as attacks against nature.

Glave uncovers a history of black church involvement in environmental justice in Rev. Ben Chavis' talk at a national

environment conference. Chavis' offered a theological interpretation of race and the environment: "The fact that we [African Americans] are disproportionately dumped on," says Chavis, "is just consistent with being in America.... And the demand that God puts on us is that we will face up to the contemporary responsibility that God has given us to not let God's creation be destroyed by sin.... Environmental injustice is sin before God."⁴⁷

And regarding her third source for BELT, Glave pinpoints local grassroots activists as they fight against environmental racism. It is this material sector, writes Glave, that defines BELT. Here she notes especially the role of everyday church folks struggling alongside clergy and community leaders.

Glave acknowledges that BELT has its origin in black theology of liberation. To transform BELT into what she calls a theology incorporating twenty-first century action, she advances a twelve-point environmental justice agenda for action:

(1) Establish goals of self-sufficiency and autonomy in the African American community to eradicate environmental racism, applying the language, along with the theological and historical framework of BELT.

(2) Teach the interrelated history of the African American church, civil rights, and environmental justice to the African American community as a foundation for meeting these goals.

(3) Co-opt organizational, strategic planning, and management tools from mainstream or white environmentalists, including networking, tailoring them to the needs of the African American church and community.

(4) Reverse the political apathy in

45. *Ibid.*, 190.

46. *Ibid.*, 193.

47. *Ibid.*, 194.

the African community by modeling and combining historical civil rights activism—sit-ins and marches—with modern 21st century lobbying, legislation, and law enforcement.

(5) Focus narrowly on critical environmental problems, at least temporarily, that have threatened and diminished the health and longevity of African Americas, including solid waste management, incineration, pollution, and toxins, avoiding—for now—a drift toward the mainstream issues of wilderness and conservation, even if coalition-building remains limited among ethnic groups with conflicting agendas.

(6) Create coalitions with other ethnic churches, including Native Americans and Latinos, without losing autonomy—in turn gaining power through increased numbers.

(7) Acknowledge that coalitions with mainstream and other ethnic organizations are short- to midterm tools that ebb and flow depending on the needs of the African American church and the community, and on existing relationships with other ethnic groups.

(8) Model and teach selfless Christian service for environmental justice in the African American community, as described in Gal 5:13: 'For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.'

(9) Limit the role of mainstream environmentalists until they develop a more holistic and equitable understanding of environmentalism pertinent to the African American community.

(10) Discard the historical model in which the African American church relies on one or two charismatic religious leaders like King to maintain a cohesive movement; instead train many new leaders to

develop management, coalition building, facilitation, and collaborative skills for environmental justice.

(11) Organize church and community members, mixing tradition and modern activism, including the use of fliers, telephones, letters, e-mails, cellular phones, and the Internet.

(12) Develop the growing national movement further, always remembering the importance of the first grassroots initiatives, the foundation of environmental justice activism.⁴⁸

With her creation of BELT, Glave has advanced not only black theology of liberation, but more specifically she provides one way to heal the illnesses caused by environmental racism. Her BELT offers the balm to heal the body, mind, emotions, and feelings of those forging ecological justice on the ground. She acknowledges the component parts of progressive black church leadership, biblical justice warrants, public policy, people of color coalitions, tactical alliances with mainstream environmental groups, and the plumb line of grassroots efforts. "In response to African Americans being inequitably exposed to toxic chemicals and waste, the church is called to further expand grassroots and national reform looking at BELT—justice, grassroots activism, spirituality, and organization—all based on the Bible. Combined, history and theology can be a 'spearhead for reform' for African Americans embattled by environmental racism in the future."⁴⁹ BELT is part of faith, health, and healing in African American life.

48. *Ibid.*, 197-198.

49. *Ibid.*, 198-199.

A Philosophical Meditation for Ash Wednesday

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*“Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!—
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.
Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.”*

(Longfellow, *Psalm of Life*)

Longfellow was an alumnus of Bowdoin College, my alma mater. As a college student, I would walk the halls of the Hawthorne-Longfellow Library whispering his *Psalm of Life*. This poem encouraged me as it might any young college student who hopes to make her life sublime. Yes, Longfellow's *Psalm of Life* impressed me as a teenager, impressed me enough that I would retreat to it for reassurance on Ash Wednesday when the pastor would rudely dust me with dirt and tell me that I was made from ashes, and to ashes I would return. “I am not dust,” I would shout in my head. “I am not my flesh, not my body. I am something infinitely more interesting, more important, more Real. I think, therefore, I am! Dust, Ha! Don't confuse me with my body.”

My students, today, agree with the sentiments I had when I was their age and which I still secretly harbor on those holy days when we are told that we are creatures of the flesh. Indeed, the idea for this paper

came after a class period spent discussing Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* with a group of traditional age students at the Catholic women's college at which I teach. The point where my students balked at Hildegard is telling.

Hildegard was a 12th Century German philosopher, scientist, musician, theologian, preacher, visionary, and political advisor to the Pope and the Emperor. As the tenth child in her family, at age seven she was given to be the helper to Jutta, a respected woman hermit. As a result, she received an education that was rare for most 12th century girls. She learned to read and write Latin. While she and her superiors claimed that her only childhood text was the Latin Psalter, the number of Platonic, Augustinian, and Scholastic allusions in her writings and letters indicates that she absorbed much of the philosophy of her day, whether through reading, or more likely through listening and conversing with the many scholars and leaders who prized Jutta's and later Hildegard's own insights.

Hildegard insisted that her insights were given by God through visions. These were not ecstatic visions or dreams, but intellectual visions that helped her understand Scripture and doctrine in order that she might guide others. While Hildegard claimed to gain her knowledge through “visions,” she was neither anti-empiricism nor anti-reason. Rather, she was and remains the most im-

portant female natural scientist of her era. Her studies of nature and the body led to the first European study of obstetrics and gynecology. The broader medicine of Hildegard is still renowned throughout Germany. Her science was not separate from her theology. Her interest in nature and in the body came from her deep faith that creation is good. She spent many of her sermons preaching specifically against the heretical Cathars who claimed that the key to moral purity was repudiation of the body and all things material. They took their Gnostic doctrine so far that they believed even the Eucharistic bread and wine and the waters of baptism to be tainted with the filth of this world. Hildegard saw this hatred of the world as a hatred of its divine Creator.

All of this, my students found satisfactory and interesting. But in the midst of the *Scivias*, Hildegard had painted a picture of her intellectual vision of the final resurrection and written the following to accompany it.

After this I looked: and behold! All the Elements and all Creation were set in rigorous motion. Fire, air, and water erupted and made the earth shudder; thunder and lightning crashed, mountains and woods fell, so that all living things breathed forth their life. And all the Elements were purged so that whatever had been foul in them vanished and no longer appeared. And I heard a voice sounding with the greatest amplitude through the whole earth saying: "O Children of men who are lying in the earth, all rise." And behold, human bones, in whatever part of the earth they lay, were reassembled as in a moment and clothed in flesh, and all people arose complete in their bodies of either sex, the good shining brightly and the evil appearing in blackness, so that every person's works were openly seen in them.¹

My students were incredulous that anyone (even in the 12th century) could have taken the resurrection of the body seriously. Love of nature is one thing, but surely, they said, she saw that the human soul was distinct and separate from the mud of the earth. After all, they had read Plato and Descartes in the introduction to philosophy course. They knew that the soul was a thing distinct from the body, a thing which did not need a body, a thing which should not want a body. They were shocked that Hildegard was saying that the body and the soul were inextricably bound together.

"Is the soul not immortal and distinct from this dust that forms our limbs?" my intelligent students asked, echoing Descartes. No, says Hildegard, "the soul cannot perform its function without the body. For the body is nothing without the soul, and the soul cannot operate without the body, whence they are one in a human being, and they are that human being."² Thus, Hildegard told them. The final implication was that, if there was going to be any sort of afterlife for the soul, the body was going to have some sort of share in it. There would never be emancipation from the body. The class was disgusted.

Thinking about the class and my students' disgust I began to think about our societal views on the soul and the body. There is a belief among academics and churchgoers that the men and women in the street are materialists who believe that nothing transcends the dust of the Earth. However, on closer inspection, this does not appear to be the case after all. Indeed, whether people have read Plato's *Phaedo* or Descartes' *The Meditations on First Philosophy* or not, most modern people take comfort in a belief that the soul is metaphysi-

1. Scivias. 3:12, *Secrets of God: Writings of Hildegard of Bingen*. Selected and translated, Sabina Flanagan. (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), 37.

2. *Liber Divinorum Operum* (LDO) 1.4, Flanagan, 72.

cally separate from the body. And many believe that Christianity affirms this.

Indeed, a belief in the fundamental separation between body and soul dominates the popular viewpoint. While many people might not, and might not even be able to, articulate their view on the connection between body and soul, the prevalent attitude appears to be an image of the body as rather like a car or a house that belongs to the soul. The body is seen as a machine that the person uses to act in daily life. The body is a machine that one can decorate, beautify, even radically change in order to better work, play, or encourage admiration. The body is something you train for the race. The aerobics instructor might urge you to listen to your body during exercise as you might check the gauges of your car. Your doctor might prescribe pills to help you regain control of your body. The implication is usually that you and your body are separate entities.

Of course most people hold that the body is a machine with which the person is intimately connected, certainly. But still it is a machine none the less which the person will often disown claiming “but I am not my body.” The teenager may ask that she not be judged by her newly dyed hair. The obese woman might ask that we see past her fleshy thighs. And the beautiful model might suggest that we admire her body, much as we admire her new car, but not as we might admire “the real person inside.”

The opinion on the street, about “Who am I?” in relation to the body is Platonic or Cartesian at best. In this view, people think of their bodies as worthwhile for the short-run, in so far as they are the vehicles of the soul. But it is Gnostic at its worst. While the internet claims that the Cathar heresy has no modern adherents, a simple survey shows otherwise. Gnostics viewed their bodies as prisons that they longed to escape

so they could be their true, ethereal selves. Further, Cathars did not see the purpose of taking care of the fleshy bodies and the earthly needs of this world. So concerned for the moral purity of the soul, they were content to ignore the needs of their own and others’ flesh. Such opinions are still prevalent.

After all, I think all of us harbor feelings that these stretch-marked, calloused, easily injured bodies have anything to do with who we really are. Yet, this separation is continually more ill-founded. In the 21st century, we are finding more and more scientific evidence for the claim of the connection that “the person inside” and the body are connected so intimately as to make discussion of the soul separate from the body virtually impossible. For example, neuroscience and medical psychiatry have shown that changes in the structure or even the chemistry of the brain cause radical shifts in emotional and rational faculties. What appears logical to a person on one day of her hormone therapy does not on the next. What appears in tune with the Good on one day of the patient’s psychiatric therapy does not appear such on the next day after the brain tumor is removed. The clarity and distinctness of mathematics becomes fuzzy to a mathematician whose brain is disabled by Alzheimer’s. Indeed, the personality, the mores, the thought process, and all those things that configure “the person inside” are radically changed as the chemistry or structure of the matter that is the body is changed.

This is not to say that 21st century science is advocating strict materialism. If anything, there seems to be less and less evidence that there is any sensible reductionist theory of the person, defining us only by the bare molecules that make up our chemistry. The form, the breath, the soul that informs these molecules is extremely

important. New research demonstrates that prayer and spiritual meditation change the chemistry and structure of the brain and body. This news has led many doctors to encourage a spiritual dimension of healing. Of course, other researchers wonder whether the spirit is influencing the body or whether certain chemicals are simply experienced as religious experiences. In other words, when a person has a desire to pray, prays, and feels better, perhaps this is just the person's interpretation of a certain firing of neurons in the brain. This flusters some spiritualists. But it shouldn't. Instead of asking "does the soul affect the body" or "does the body affect the soul," we should look to an answer that collapses the duality. Of course a change in material organization is experienced as spiritual and vice versa. That is not to say there is no soul, but it is to say that there is no soul that exists apart from the body.

While such news might be unsettling to Platonists and Cartesians, it should be no surprise to Christians, who have always declared that the body and soul are created together. The Judeo-Christian tradition shares much with Platonic philosophy, but its philosophy of body is in direct opposition to the theory that the soul pre-dates the body and is un-created or divine. Plato's Socrates tells of the life of the soul before birth, when the soul is able to see the forms clearly without the dark glasses of the physical eyes. He claims that humans pass through this life as through an interesting prison sentence, according to the *Phaedo*, until we are freed from the flesh to return to the world of intellect. Later Gnostics took this doctrine to cynical extremes, speaking of a blissful life before the "fall to flesh" which we are forever trying to escape. But *Genesis* speaks of God forming dust and breathing life into it. By this account a human is formed body and soul together.

Hildegard interprets the Scripture beautifully, writing,

Then that same flame extended its glowing heat to a little clod of sticky earth which lay below—this means that when all the other creatures had been created, the Word of God, in the strong will of the Father and in the love of supernal sweetness, looked on the poor, fragile matter of the soft and tender frailty of humanity, from which both good and bad were to come, lying heavy and insensate, not yet aroused by the passionate breath of life; and warmed it so that it was made flesh and blood, that is infused with the freshness of warmth, since earth is the bodily material of humanity, nourishing it with moisture as a mother nurses her children, and breathed on it so that a living person was raised up; since God aroused him by heavenly virtue and marvelously drew forth a man discerning in body and soul.³

The Christian view indicates that the body and soul are woven together seamlessly. This has radical implications. On Easter, when Jesus is raised, he has his body—even the holes from the nails. Is this the resurrection in which we will participate? Yes, said many early Christians. Indeed, Irenaeus proclaimed that the main difference between Christians and non-Christians was the belief in the resurrection of the body. "All the solemn declarations of the heretics come down ultimately to this: blasphemy against the creator. Denial of salvation to God's handiwork—which is what the flesh is."⁴ Hildegard's battle with the Cathars shows that this blasphemy is one that continued.

Blasphemy and heresy seem strong words of condemnation considering how difficult a doctrine of bodily resurrection is

3. Scivias, 2:1-7-8, Flanagan, 21.

4. Irenaeus IV praef, *The Scandal of the Incarnation: Irenaeus Against the Heretics*_selected. Hans Urs von Balthasar. Trans. John Saward. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 14.

to understand. After all, there are all kinds of good questions about what these bodies are going to be like. For example, questioners once asked early Christian theologians questions such as: If a man eats a bear which ate his father, who, the man or his father, will receive the resulting flesh in heaven? A more modern questioner might ask: If we give blood or organs to another, who will have these in the resurrection? However, as tricky as these questions first appear, these are not the real stumbling block. After all, the molecules that formed each of us when we were babies are not the same molecules that form us now. One can imagine that the relationship of the adult body to the child's body is akin to the relationship of the resurrected body to the earthly body. There will be radical differences, but they will still be bodies. And that is the stumbling block. The hard issue is accepting that the soul and body are not dual parts, but work together as a whole. This means that we have boundaries and weaknesses that we will never transcend. This means that we are creatures of God, not gods ourselves.

Polytheists, Platonists, Stoics, and Gnostics gagged, just as my students did, at the idea of bodily resurrection. The reason they gagged at the resurrection of the body was because they didn't want to believe that their bodies were really part of them. They didn't want to think that we really are these smelly, wrinkly, sickly masses of flesh. Perhaps, there is a certain hubris in us that so desperately wants to believe that we more than our bodies, more than dust. It is difficult to say with Hildegard that we are "human beings whom God formed from the slime of the earth and breathed life into."⁵ This requires a humility that most of us lack. Hildegard says that Lucifer fell because he could not bear this humility. And by try-

ing to make himself God, he made himself nothing. We are not nothing, she declares, we are God's most "precious pearls."⁶ Our weaknesses, our softness, and our passions are what allow us to grow and move. They are ultimately what allow us to be saved.

And here we see the importance of this for stewardship. What we hear on Ash Wednesday has real consequences in living and acting in the world. For example, Descartes' insistence that the soul is a thinking thing separate from the body, encouraged him to think of animals (those lacking a mind) as simply body and thus standing reserve for human consumption and experimental science. The Cartesian dualism, inevitably, ends up as a materialist view of the world as nothing more than a large machine made of dust, for the use of the more important thinking things. This affects how we treat not only the earth and animals, but also the bodies of people. If we believe that poverty and war affects only the bodies but not the souls of children and adults, we more easily ignore our responsibilities. Worse, we may take on the Gnostic position that the body is a prison for the soul and that the Earth is not our real home, but a place of heaviness, filth, and hardship only to be endured. This leads to quietism at best and willful destruction at worst.

On the contrary, a Christian view of the indissoluble connection between body and soul transfigures how we treat both bodies and souls in ourselves and the world. A Christian ought to see herself as not "a person inside" her body, but as a person who is both body and soul. She realizes that the chemicals and structure of her flesh determine how she lives, thinks, and believes. Thus, she cares for her body, not as she cares for her car or her house (attempting to keep it clean, organized, and working for

5. Hildegard. *Scivias Part II vision 2:4* p.89

6. *Ibid.*

the service of the soul/owner), but as she cares for herself. Moreover, she cares for the bodies of others in the same manner. Malnutrition does not affect only the limbs of the child, but her very ability to reason logically and morally. A Christian cannot fix the soul and ignore the body any more than she can fix the body and ignore the soul. A Christian cannot ignore the needs of the world. The world is our real home, made of the same matter of which we ourselves are made. Indeed, it is made of the same matter of which we will always be made. We will not transcend the dust. With such thinking, stewardship to the planet is intensified. We ought serve the dust that we are, that others are, that our world is.

This was the point I made about Hildegard to my students. She was the first European to study the female anatomy. She invented gynecology. She set up a clinic for poor women and their babies, she offered health care and food to the poor, she was as politically involved in making the world more tolerable for serfs as she was theologically involved in clarifying the gospels from the pulpit. It was never a question of whether to care for the soul or the body, or the mind or the state, they were all mixed together. Hildegard knew that to care for one was to care for the other. That is profound, and if we honor her work and that of those like her, we should look at the metaphysics that guided it. She understood the importance of this metaphysics. Despite the law that forbade women to preach publicly, she took a boat and traveled the Rhine, preaching

from Mainz to Cologne, and then traveling to Paris and beyond. She preached against the Cathars who discredited the beauty of the created world, reminding listeners that the greatness of creation was an image of the greatness of the Creator. She preached to fellow Catholic Christians who failed to see the pure beauty of women's bodies and hair when they demanded she and her nuns cover themselves entirely, reminding listeners that sinful action is impure but not the body in itself. And she preached about the importance of music, art, and excellent preaching in worship, reminding listeners that the heart must be moved along with the mind. She also preached about the importance of behaving morally, for loving this world did not mean being greedy, lustful, or covetous. Loving this world meant refraining from these things that kept us chasing shadows and deceptions and ignoring true beauty.

Hildegard calls us today to renew our discussions and meditations on the nature of the body and the soul. Lent is a time to reflect about who we are and who we will always be. It is sin that weighs us down, and it is from sin that Christ redeems us. But our bodies are ours forever.

The philosophical discussion of the body and the soul is a discussion that is important for stewardship and life. Seeking the truth about this relationship, through faith, science, Scripture, and creeds, is seeking more than a solution to a medieval debate. The goal is to see who we truly are in order that we might behave accordingly.

Fate and Word: The Book of Esther as Guidance to a Canonical Reading of Scripture*

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As Protestants, we are familiar with the equation of Scripture and God's Word. Such identification was first introduced in 1536 by the Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger at the very beginning of the *First Helvetic Confession*: "We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true and genuine Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures." If Scripture is identical with God's written Word, how about the book of Esther in its Hebrew version, which is unanimously regarded by Protestant churches as part of the Old Testament canon? Does God speak to us through the book of Esther as part of the Holy Scriptures? After all, God and his word are never mentioned in the ten chapters of that book, not even by epithet or circumlocution. Likewise, there is no human religiosity depicted that is particularly related to God. Literally speaking, the book of Esther is a God-less book.

In one of his table talks, Martin Luther said bluntly: "I am so hostile to Second Maccabees and to Esther that I would wish they did not exist at all; for they Judaize too

greatly and have much pagan rubbish."¹ Luther was certainly not the only one who had serious reservations about the canonicity of the book of Esther. It was contested in the church for centuries, even in the Greek version with its several theological additions.

These six supplements in the Greek Septuagint locate the plight of the Persian Jews squarely in the context of God's story of Israel as his elect people and place the life of the Jews completely in God's hands. In particular, Esther's prayer in Additions to Esther 14:1-19 more than compensates for the lack of religiosity in the Masoretic Text. Such supplementary passages in the book of Esther might be reassuring to the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, who receive those additions as part of their canon. Jews and Protestants, however, have to come to terms with the literal absence of God in the Masoretic text of Esther.²

*I thank Luke DeKoster and James A. Rimbach for their stylistic and textual amendments.

1. *Weimar Edition*, "Tischreden," vol. 3 (Weimar: Hermann Boehlaus Nachfolger, 1914), No. 3391b, p. 302 (author's translation).

2. For an excellent Jewish interpretation which takes God's absence seriously, compare Michael Fox, "The Religion of the Book of Esther,"

Various attempts have been made to discover God in the Hebrew book of Esther, at least in indirect ways that can vindicate it as part of God's word.³ The only problem with such posthumous "discoveries" is that they are not convincing as activities of the God of Israel.

Mordecai's refusal to prostrate himself before the vizier Haman, which triggered Haman's plan to slaughter all the Jews in the Persian kingdom (Esth 3:5-6), for example, was not an act of obedience to God. After all, falling down before a superior was common in Israel as an act of showing proper respect, even if the superiors were gentiles (e.g., Abraham in Gen 23:7, 12). Never was such posture considered to be an act of adoration, as this would have violated the first commandment. One may try to explain Mordecai's refusal historically, on the grounds that Mordecai, from the tribe of Benjamin, could not bow to Haman because Haman's ancestor, King Agag of the Amalekites, had once been defeated by King Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 15). But such animosity between a Benjaminite and an Amalekite certainly would not have justified the violation of a royal order (Esth 3:2).

When Haman tried to convince the Persian king Ahasuerus of his genocide plan, he depicted the laws of the Jews as being different from those of every other people (Esth 3:8). One might assume that this portrayal gives honor to God's Torah. However, the relevant Hebrew term *dāt*, which means "law" or, better, "decree" is—apart from Deut 33:2 and Ezra 8:36—used only in the book of Esther, where it commonly refers to the decrees of the *Persian*

king. Such Jewish decrees are thus to be considered as self-enacted laws, not those received from God on Mount Sinai.

When Haman wanted to fix the day for the genocide of the Persian Jews, he came to a decision by having lots cast (Esth 3:7). Certainly we find in Scripture various examples of lotteries: Josh 7:10-26, 1 Sam 14:41-42; 1 Chronicles 24-26. Though the throwing of lots was a human action, the result was regarded to be a direct message from God (cf. Prov 16:33). However, in the book of Esther, it is the lot of a foreigner—cast before a pagan deity!—which determined the date of the Jewish festival of Purim, totally different from all the other festivals commanded by God himself in the Torah.

When Mordecai was pressing Queen Esther to entreat Ahasuerus for her people, he passed on the following words to her: "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." (Esth 4:14) Such a message does not predict God's intervention or his punishment if Esther fails to go to the king and make supplication to him. The "other quarter" is not a code name for God,⁴ but simply envisions another human being as a source of deliverance. In addition, Mordecai perceived the royal dignity Esther possessed as something like good fortune.

Fate seems to rule the course of events, and God remains absent. Therefore Esther's heroic promise to approach the king is without any divine reference: "I will go to the king, though it is against the law (*dāt*);

Judaism 39 (Issue 2, Spring 1990), 135-147.

3. Cf., for example, Carol M. Bechtel, *Esther*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 13-14.

4. Cf. Michael Fox, *The Religion of the Book of Esther*, 138 (fn 19).

and if I perish, I perish.” (Esth 4:16) There are no theological implications in her announcement “If I perish, I perish,” no confidence towards the future; not even Sheol, the abode of the dead, is mentioned. The possible negative outcome of that mission reveals the unconnectedness and isolation of human life, since it lacks God’s promise. Esther’s words are nothing less than a confession of the fate of life and death: “If I perish, I perish.”

Since human beings may be able to influence such inner-worldly fate, this reference to fate goes together with the fasting of the Jews, required by Esther in preparation for her mission (Esth 4:16). Such a fast was not aimed at God, but was intended to show solidarity with Esther so that her mission would succeed. How different is such fatalistic fasting to the common purpose of fasting as an act of penance and mourning towards God! Even the king of Nineveh ordered it after he had heard about Jonah’s announcement of Nineveh’s extinction: “No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.” (Jonah 3:6-9; cf. Jonah 4:2) The fateful fasting of the Persian Jews, on the other hand, does not address God’s will at all.

Finally, the warfare of Jews against their potential enemies (Esth 9:1-16) was not a war in the name of God, since it was enacted by a decree of the Persian king in order to deal with a dilemma. It was Ahasuerus himself who could not revoke his previous edict extinguishing the Jews, which had been promulgated in his

name and sealed by his ring (Esth 3:12-13). Since the laws of the Persians and the Medes could not be altered (cf. Esth 1:19; 8:8), all that could be done was to elicit a preemptive strike by the Jews against their foes as an act of self-defense.

Once again, the unchangeable decrees of the Persian king here refer to the guiding question of the book of Esther: how to act, react and counteract within the sphere of fate. Dealing with such a fateful question, the book of Esther is necessarily a God-less story. The absence of God is even recapitulated in the names of both Jewish actors, which are all but theophoric. “Esther” derives from the Persian *stara* (“star”), which resembles “Ishtar,” the name of a goddess in the Akkadian pantheon; “Mordecai,” the name of Esther’s cousin, derives from “Marduk,” the primary deity of Babylon.

Now, then, what to do with the book of Esther? It works very well as the story of how queen Esther preserved the life of the Jewish Diaspora under Persian rule. Its happy end endorses the enjoyable Purim festival with its carnival atmosphere, where children bring noisemakers to the synagogue and the congregation members stamp their feet every time Haman’s name is read from the scroll. Even drunkenness for adult Jews is encouraged, since the Talmud (*Meg.* 7b; cf. Esth 1:8) commands men to drink so much wine on Purim that they are unable to tell the difference between “blessed be Mordecai” and “cursed be Haman.” Purim even has a moment of travesty. Besides the carnival-like masquerades, some Jewish communities appoint a “Purim rabbi” whose frivolous duty it is to manipulate even the most sacred texts. The term *purim*, which is of Akkadian origin, can thus be seen as a motto of life, since *pur* like the English “lot” connotes the meaning of chance. In a way, the festival of Purim can mean the celebration of the “lots of life”

in a very secular way. Such a “lottery” view of life makes it excusable that Esther, the “star” of the story, apparently violated the dietary instructions of the Torah while staying at the court of the Persian king and in addition married a Gentile.

But such a confinement to “Jewishness” remains unsatisfying for Christians as long as they want to read this book in the church. Something has to be added through our own reading. In the language of reader-response theory, the text of Esther contains certain structured “blank spaces,” which prompt the reader to supply the missing information in order to make sense of what is narrated.⁵ Reading the book of Esther in church certainly requires such an input from the reader.

The common way of Christians to fill in the blanks of the book of Esther is the general concept of divine providence. Readers may discover various “coincidences” in the story where divine providence came into play. For example, Mordecai “accidentally” witnessed the conversation between Bigthan and Teresh at the king’s gate (Esth 2:19-22) and uncovered a plot to kill the king, which had to be rewarded by Ahasuerus. Likewise the Persian king’s insomnia can be linked to such providence, since it led to the recollection of the unrewarded deed of Mordecai (Esth 6:1-2). Finally, Esther’s being chosen by Ahasuerus as his wife and queen of Persia can be imagined under God’s providence, since it provided her with the position and ability to stand up for her people.

Still, whatever traces of divine providence can be detected by the reader, they all fail, for they are based on our own, all-too-human imaginations of God’s providence. God, in this way of reading, is merely the

hidden actor behind the scene (*deus ex machina*), responsible for the peripatetic moments so that things apparently slipping towards a catastrophe finally arrive at a happy ending. This comes dangerously close to a pagan belief in deified fate, whereby the lottery of life is simply named “God.”

In order to avoid any fortune-reading of Scripture, the plain (and unbiblical) equation of Scripture and the written Word of God has to be abandoned. We can then state plainly and clearly: there is no word of God in the book of Esther. Such an acknowledgment by no means questions the canonicity (or even the divine inspiration) of the book of Esther, for this book contains a unique lesson for us, one given by God himself: The book of Esther drives us to a proper canonical reading of Scripture, which is nothing but the self-interpretative reading of Scripture, as described by Martin Luther in his *Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book of Goat Emser* (1521): “When they [the Church fathers] interpret a passage in Scripture they do not do so with their own sense or words (for whenever they do that, as often happens, they generally err). Instead, they add another passage which is clearer and thus illumine and interpret Scripture with Scripture.”⁶

Interpreting Scripture by Scripture implies that the “blank spaces” of a biblical text—instead of being filled up with our religious imaginations—are to be related to other parts of Scripture in such a way that God’s Word addresses the reader. The Word of God is not simply Scripture but has to be found in Scripture when Scripture is read in a coherent way. Whenever God’s Word is simply identified with Scripture, it leads

5. Cp. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

6. *Luther’s Works*, ed. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, vol. 39 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 164.

to an isolated reading of Bible texts. The reader, with her own imaginations, is then responsible for the creation of the Scripture text as meaningful communication. However, such imaginative readings of Scripture have no promise for our life; nothing can be expected from our own religious imaginations. In contrast, the canonical reading of Scripture relates the blank spaces of texts to Scripture as a whole. Only within a self-referential reading of Scripture can the reader enter into a communicative relationship with God's Word, which already has addressed him prior to his own reading. Such a coherent reading is what Martin Buber advises us to do, in a wonderful passage from *On Translating the Praisings*:

The Bible seeks to be read as One Book, so that no one of its parts remains self-contained; rather every part is held open to every other. The Bible seeks to be present as One Book for its readers so intensely that in reading or reciting an important passage they recall all the passages connected to it, and in particular those connected to it by linguistic identity, resemblance, or affinity; so intensely that all these passages illuminate and explain one another, that they cohere into a unity of meaning, into a theological doctrine not taught explicitly but immanent in the text and emerging from its connections and correspondences.⁷

Now let us apply this to the book of Esther. As long as we read this book in an isolated way, we interpret its content according to our own imaginations of divine providence. However, divine providence (Greek *pronoia*) is not a biblical concept but a pagan one, used as a technical expression of Stoic and Neo-Platonic philosophy to designate the rule of divine reason or *logos* over all events. Such a philosophical *logos* is

essentially silent, totally different to the utterance of God's Word. Philosophical providence in its metaphysical generalization remains unbound to human life—there is no personal promise to believe in. With regard to such a “logical” providence human beings have either to manipulate the course of events or to adapt to them “stoically.”

It is, then, a canonical reading of the book of Esther which relates the Jews as descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to God's election of Israel. As God said to Moses from the bush: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.... I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.” (Exod 3:6-8) What can be read in the book of Esther as divine preservation from the threat of genocide is bound not to abstract ideas of providence but to God's election of Israel. God preserved the Persian Jews for the sake of his particular relationship with Israel, which had become manifest in God's covenant with them. “In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” (Esth 4:3; Ex. 2:24) Allowing one scriptural story to illustrate another also allows us to experience a strikingly new hearing of God's Word.

Apart from God's verbal election and his covenant, there can be nothing said

7. Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, trans. L. Rosenwald with E. Fox (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 91.

about God's involvement in the occurrences narrated in the book of Esther. For us as Christian readers, this means that we have to refer to our election in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1:3-6) in combination with the new covenant established in Christ's blood: "He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant." (Heb 9:15; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25) Only in Christ are we related to God's faithful acts (not just decrees or gifts) of preserving his sanctified people.

To read Scripture faithfully, it is crucial to abandon the notion of providential cause-effect mechanisms behind the events narrated, because such speculations give rise to a pseudo-evangelical "engineering theology" embracing "open-view theism" and "omniscience theism." Instead of all-too-human causal-mechanical imaginations it is God's efficacious Word that needs to be heard as it addresses people and situations. As God asserts: "So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11) Apart from his Word, God does not relate himself to human beings. Therefore occurrences in our "lived world" are not to be explored in terms of divine causation but they are to be related to God's Word. Nothing is more perilous than to read God in a non-verbal way into our life because, in the very end, such misreading evokes the fatal equation:

God is fate. Dealing actively with this equation can only prompt pagan practices: divination as the art of determining the future (for example by casting of lots), attempts to influence fate by self-referential supplications, high-handed sacrifices and offerings to please the insatiability of fate, and, finally, making vows as unconditional pledges of special submission to an assumed agent of fate. As we already have demonstrated, several of those practices can be found in the book of Esther.

Nevertheless, the book of Esther is a most important *book* of the Bible, at least for Christians. Its importance is certainly not because of its narrated content but because of its lack of any reference to God. Such a crucial blank resembles our own situation as readers, for none of us has been addressed by God's Word in an exclusive way. As the actors in the book of Esther are not addressed by God's Word, we likewise as readers have not received a personal Word of God. Therefore, no matter whether we are reading the book of Esther or living our own lives, God's Word witnessed in Scripture has to be related to the various incidents and occurrences in a way that they become salutary events, even when they are to be judged by God's Word. Our life with its blanks can be mirrored in the Scripture so that it becomes addressed by God's Word. By that we can confess with the prophet Jeremiah: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts." (Jer 15:16)

Divine Action and Divine Purpose

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What need for God?

The recent wave of popular atheist writings, though often ill-informed about the mature in Christian theology, needs to be taken seriously by those who want to proclaim the Christian message in today's world.¹ Since the authors of some of these works develop many of their arguments from the natural sciences, an adequate response calls for special attention to basic issues raised by scientific understandings of the world. Two questions in particular will be dealt with in this essay: how do things happen in the world and what do they mean? Or to put it another way, what are the causes of phenomena and what—if anything—are their purposes?

In conventional Christian theology God is the ultimate answer to both questions. A traditional doctrine of providence distinguishes three aspects of God's activity in the world: God preserves creatures, cooperates (or concurs) with their actions and governs them toward the ends which God

desires.² Thus God is the ultimate cause of everything that takes place (although, in the vast majority of situations, in cooperation with creatures as secondary causes), and God's governance gives the meaning of events, and eventually of all the history of the world.

The successes of science have challenged this picture. Especially in recent centuries science has been doing an excellent job of answering the first question about the causes of events with precise quantitative laws. Some of these laws—and especially those of quantum theory—have a statistical character, but that does not change the general picture. Phenomena in the world can be understood—to use the phrase of Grotius that was popularized by Bonhoeffer—*etsi deus non daretur*, as if God were not given.³

The idea that we need make no appeal to the concept of God in order to understand how things happen in the world has, of course, been disturbing to many Christians. Newton was accused by some of materialism and atheism because his laws of

1. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Houghton-Mifflin, Boston MA, 2006); Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (Viking, New York, 2006); Victor J. Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* (Prometheus, Amherst NY, 2007).

2. Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3d ed. (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1961), 170-194.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, enlarged edition (Macmillan, New York, 1972), 360.

mechanics and gravitation were able to explain planetary motions in terms of natural processes,⁴ and theories of biological evolution stemming from the work of Darwin and Wallace continue to encounter a great deal of religiously motivated resistance.⁵ The fact that science has not, at particular points in time, explained all phenomena has sometimes been taken as an opportunity to introduce God as the cause of still puzzling classes of events. Today's "Intelligent Design" movement is a good example of this tactic.⁶ But such a "God of the gaps" approach has fatal flaws. It fails to emphasize the traditional theological claim that God is at work in everything that happens in the world, not just in things we don't understand. In addition—and this is the point that is usually made—the "gaps" to which the argument appeals have consistently shrunk and disappeared as a result of scientific research.

If the concept of God makes no difference in our description of phenomena or in our ability to explain and predict events,

4. In response to criticisms Newton added a "General Scholium" to the second edition of the *Principia*: Isaac Newton, *Principia* (Berkeley, University of California, 1962), pp.543–547.

5. One classic religious criticism of Darwin's theory is Hodge's 1874 "What is Darwinism?" reprinted in Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism? And Other Writings on Science and Religion*, edited by Mark A. Noll and David N. Livingstone (Baker, Grand Rapids MI, 1994). Hodge's final answer to his title question was "It is Atheism" (156). While it is common to refer only to Darwin in this connection, Alfred Russel Wallace should be given his share of credit as an independent discoverer of natural selection as the key to the evolutionary process. See, e.g., Michael Shermer, *In Darwin's Shadow: The Life and Science of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Oxford, New York, 2002).

6. See, e.g., William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science & Theology* (InterVarsity, Downers Grove IL, 1999).

Occam's razor tells us that we should drop that concept. This has been a major argument in the hands of atheists: the successes of science are supposed to have shown that God does not exist since a putative God makes no difference in the world. Even if we're not that radical, God apparently becomes a *deus otiosus*, a kind of honorary deity with nothing to do.

It's true that there is a limit to the ability of science to explain things. Given our present universe, we can explain why things happen in terms of scientific laws, but why is there the present universe? Why does any universe exist at all? Science can't answer that question, but it doesn't have to. "The world as a whole just is, that's all. We start there," was Bertrand Russell's answer to a question about the existence of a universe.⁷ One can postulate the universe as easily as one can postulate a God.

The pointless universe of pure science

But science has greater difficulty with the second question. Granted that scientific explanations of things ranging from quarks to the big bang, from amino acids to the human brain, are completely satisfactory, what does it all mean? "Meaning" and "purpose" are not, in the strictest sense, even parts of the scientific vocabulary, so superficially the scientist can simply ignore the question. But it is a question that people who are not superficial, scientists and otherwise, ask. Tillich identified emptiness and meaninglessness as one of the three major types of anxiety, the type of issue most relevant to people of the 20th century, succeeding the

7. Quoted in W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "Is a Natural Theology Still Viable Today?" in Eugene Thomas Long (ed.), *Prospects for Natural Theology* (The Catholic University of America, Washington DC, 1992), 165.

problems of mortality and guilt of previous epochs.⁸

Scientists, including those who are not theists, have recognized this limitation of science. Hedwig Born told of once asking Einstein, a Jewish pantheist and music lover as well as a great scientist:

“Do you believe that absolutely everything can be expressed scientifically?”

“Yes,” he replied, “it would be possible, but it wouldn’t mean anything. It would be description without meaning—as if you described a Beethoven symphony as a variation of wave pressure.”⁹

Steven Weinberg, a Nobel laureate in physics who is also a rather outspoken atheist, concluded his excellent description of the way in which modern cosmology has been able to understand the universe from the first minutes of the big bang by asking what meaning can be derived from this knowledge. “It is almost irresistible for humans to believe that we have some special relationship to the universe, that human life is not just a more-or-less farcical outcome of a chain of accidents reaching back to the first three minutes, but that we were somehow built in from the beginning.” But Weinberg does resist that belief. “The more the universe seems comprehensible,” he says, “The more it also seems pointless.”¹⁰

Weinberg later expressed some embarrassment about this statement and said he “did not mean that science teaches us that the universe is pointless, but rather that the universe itself suggests no point.” In addi-

tion, he argues (as he implied in the earlier book) that “we ourselves could invent a point for our lives.”¹¹ But when all is said and done, these statements—and those of other physicists quoted by Weinberg in the later book—agree that scientific study of the universe is unable to discern any cosmic meaning. Of course we can “invent” any “point for our lives” that we wish but that is a very different thing. The point that someone else invents for his or her life might require me to play a role inconsistent with the point that I invent for my own life.

We need not rely only on quotations from isolated scientists to make the case. Especially those engaged in the study of evolutionary biology will often argue that science doesn’t deal with final causes and that teleological explanations characteristic of Aristotelian science are invalid. Implicit in such arguments is the belief that there is no “last final cause”—that there is no goal which evolution is trying to achieve. (Of course this does not mean that organs developed through evolution, such as the eye, have no “purpose”—i.e., no function. But evolution, seen as a purely biological process, was not trying to achieve such a purpose. Instead, new features which develop because of “purposeless” genetic changes and which are adaptive in the sense that they increase the likelihood for an organism to survive and procreate will probably be retained in future generations.)

Is there then simply no meaning, purpose or goal for the world? Is all the grand story which science gives us of inflation and a big bang, the formation of stars, galaxies and planets and the origin and development of life merely “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing”?

8. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (Yale University, New Haven CT, 1952), especially 46-63.

9. Quoted in Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times* (World, New York, 1971), 192.

10. Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes* (Basic, New York, 1977), 144.

11. Steven Weinberg, *Dreams of a Final Theory* (Pantheon, New York, 1992), 255-256.

Or is there some meaning discernible from outside the realm of scientific investigation? And if the latter is the case, what connection is there between the scientific description of the course of events and the non-scientific meaning which can be ascribed to it?

Failed theological responses

Serious theologians have, of course, recognized the successes of science in accounting for physical processes. One response has been to concede the explanation of natural phenomena to science and limit the role of religion to some inner realm of personal experience and commitment. Bultmann's existential theology is a good example of this approach.¹² While this seems superficially to be consistent with the *pro me* emphasis which Luther gives to the doctrine of creation in the Small Catechism, it is quite inadequate. A person is who she or he is only as a product of the environment and in interaction with it, and if I can't speak of God acting in the world at large, I can't really speak of God acting "for me."

Another approach favored by some theologians is that of what Barbour has called "linguistic" theologies of God's role in nature.¹³ Here, science and religion are two different languages for speaking about what goes on in the world. Religion can, for example, speak of God as an agent who acts in the world to accomplish some large-scale purposes, but should not insist on seeing God acting intentionally in all phenomena, something that is the domain of science. "Each story [those told by science and by

religion] has a complete cast of characters, without the need for interaction with the other story, but quite compatible with it."¹⁴

"Without the need for interaction with the other story" is a statement that is typical of such a view. The theological approaches described here are in accord with Stephen Jay Gould's NOMA—"Non-Overlapping Magisteria" proposal for avoiding conflict between religion and science.

Science tries to document the factual character of the natural world, and to develop theories that coordinate and explain these facts. Religion, on the other hand, operates in the equally important, but utterly different, realm of human purposes, meanings, and values—subjects that the factual domain of science might illuminate, but can never resolve.¹⁵

The separation here is not absolute, for science "might illuminate" religious concerns, but Gould does not envision any real interaction between the two magisteria, and later in the book is quite critical of attempts to promote conversation between them.¹⁶

It should also be noted that Gould speaks here of "human purposes, meanings, and values." Religion—and Christianity in particular—speaks also of divine purposes, meanings, and values. The distinction is, of course, significant.

The fundamental problem with all such approaches is that the supposed meaning or purpose which is attributed to natural phenomena—a "point" of the universe to revert to Weinberg's language—seems to

14. John J. Compton, "Science and God's Action in Nature" in Ian G. Barbour, *Earth Might be Fair: Reflections on Ethics, Religion and Ecology* (Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1972), 39.

15. Stephen Jay Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (Ballantine, New York, 1999), 4-5.

16. Gould, *Rocks of Ages*, 212-220.

12. E.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1958), 69.

13. Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1997), 318-320.

be an idea merely tacked on to a scientific description of the world. It has no connection with the scientific description itself. From a purely scientific standpoint, such a meaning or purpose is quite arbitrary. Christian, Hindu or Marxist claims about the meaning, or lack of meaning, of world history are equally plausible. Why is the biblical statement that through the growth of plants YHWH provides bread and wine for humanity (Psalm 104:14-15) any more plausible for a scientifically literate person than a belief that Ceres and Bacchus provide those things?

Science-theology dialogue as if Christ matters

A Christian theology of divine action and purpose must first of all be rooted in the fundamental faith tradition of the Christian community. But if such a theology is to inform a message which is convincing to people in a scientific world it must provide an account of divine action which takes seriously the successes of science *and* an account of divine purpose which is integrally connected with that understanding of God's action in the world. I believe that the best way to do this is to look at issues raised by science in the context of a theology of the cross.¹⁷

Considerable care is needed in talking about divine purpose, for any attempt to say why God created the universe runs the risk of putting some limitation on God, as if God had to bring the present universe into being for one reason or another. In order to keep speculation to a minimum it is best to begin reflection on God's purpose for cre-

ation from an explicit statement of scripture. Ephesians 1:9-10 (NRSV) tells us that God "has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

The purpose, the meaning, the point of the universe is then centered on Jesus Christ. When we think about this in light of what Scripture and the Christian tradition has said about Christ, we begin to understand more fully what that purpose is. If Christ is indeed God Incarnate then we can say that God created the world so that there would be flesh in which God could become enfleshed and unite all things with God. The Incarnation is then not to be understood as God's "Plan B" which would have been unnecessary had humanity not sinned. On the contrary, creation itself is to be seen as contingent upon the Incarnation—a view espoused most notably by Karl Barth. As he put the matter:¹⁸

The world came into being, it was created and sustained by the little child that was born at Bethlehem, by the man who died on the cross of Golgotha, and the third day rose again. *That* is the Word of creation, by which all things were brought into being. That is where the *meaning* of creation comes from, and that is why it says at the beginning of the Bible: 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth, and God said, 'Let there be...'

In speaking here of the universe we have to understand the world as it actually is, a world in which suffering, death and sin are realities. We know that life has developed on earth through an evolutionary process driven by natural selection, and the nature of that process makes it very hard to see how an intelligent species could have arisen with-

17. For further detail on this program see George L. Murphy, *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross* (Trinity Press International, Harrisburg PA, 2003).

18. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York, Harper & Row, 1959), 58.

out a long history of behavior that, for moral agents, would be considered sinful. That conclusion is confirmed by observations of our nearest primate relatives. The appearance of sin thus appears to be almost inevitable. It should be seen, however, not as an abrupt fall from a state of perfection but as newly evolved humanity choosing to develop in a direction which would take it away from the goal which God intended for it.¹⁹

If this is the case, then God's purpose for creation would have included not only the Incarnation but also the means by which the Incarnation accomplished the reconciliation of creation. The verses from Ephesians which speak of God's plan for "all things" should be read together with the statement in the Christ hymn of Colossians (1:15-20) that "Through him [Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." The historical event of the cross of Christ and his resurrection are thus a key to the meaning of creation.

The cross-resurrection event is also the key to understanding how God works to accomplish the divine purpose for creation and bring it to its intended goal. God's supreme act is described by Paul, in the words of another early hymn (Philippians 2:5-11) as a work in which the one

Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied (*ekenōsen*) himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

The statement that in becoming human the pre-existent Son of God "emptied (*ekenōsen*) himself" implies self-limitation: In his state of humiliation Christ did not make use of divine power but fully accepted the human condition. If Christ is indeed God's supreme self-revelation of God then this self-limitation or "kenosis" should be seen not just as a divine tactic employed on one occasion but as a characteristic of God's work in the world generally. A number of workers in the recent science-theology dialogue have argued for kenotic understandings of divine action.²⁰

This provides theological understanding of something that we have already noted, the fact that natural phenomena can be described without any reference to God. If God limits divine action to what can be accomplished through natural processes, then a scientific account of those processes will be able to account for what goes on in the world. A kenotic theology of divine action explains why we should not expect to have observable evidence for God's ongoing work in the world.

It is important to realize that such a kenotic view is not in itself an adequate theology of divine action. Kenosis tells us what God does *not* do rather than what God does. We also need to use something like the traditional view of God cooperating with creatures, as a human worker makes use of a tool to accomplish a task. Kenosis then means that God does not work with creatures in arbitrary ways or beyond their capacities, but in accord

19. This understanding of human origins and sin is discussed in greater detail in George L. Murphy, "Roads to Paradise and Perdition: Christ, Evolution, and Original Sin," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 58, 109, 2006.

20. Barbour, *Religion and Science*, pp.315-318; Murphy, *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross*, Chapter 6; Nancey Murphy and G.F.R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics* (Fortress, Minneapolis, 1996); John Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (William B. Eerdmans, Grand Raids MI, 2001).

with the properties with which God endowed them with in creating the universe.

But while that is an important qualification, the fact remains that it is the kenotic aspect of divine action which is the distinctively Christian dimension of such a theology. This has the result that things in the world—atoms, bacteria, human brains, stars or whatever—are seen not only as God’s “instruments” but also, in Luther’s words, as “masks of God” which conceal God from our direct observation.²¹ The hiddenness of God in the world corresponds to the divine concealment in the darkness and God-forsakenness of Calvary.

The unity of action and meaning

In the Christian tradition there have been a number of ways of thinking about God’s action in the world. Ian Barbour has listed and discussed ten such theologies of divine action.²² There are also several ways to speak about God’s purpose for creation: we might use the image of the Great Sabbath (foreshadowed as the goal of creation in Genesis 2:2-3) or language about the Kingdom of God. When we consider both of these questions together, there is a distinct advantage to the choices which I have made here. The understanding that God’s action in the world follows the pattern of the Incarnation, together with the belief that God’s ultimate plan for creation is the unification of all things in Christ, means that there is a natural connection between divine action

and divine meaning. Our understanding of the way God acts in the world follows once we have been brought to see the central meaning of creation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the way in which the argument has been presented here, but it would also be possible to go in the opposite direction: The picture of divine action given in Jesus Christ directs us toward the “point” of the universe.

In this way, the claim that God acts in the world through natural processes is seen to be something more than a superfluous addition of another layer of causation to scientific explanations which themselves are quite capable of describing and predicting what happens in the world. On the contrary, that claim is closely connected with a belief about the meaning of creation, something that science is not able to provide. Christian belief in the meaning of creation is not something that has simply been tacked on to a scientific description of events in the world, for it is related to Christian beliefs about what happens in the world that go beyond scientific accounts.

It should be clear, however, that the argument given here cannot be considered as anything like a definitive refutation of atheistic arguments. While Christian theologies of creation and eschatology should be coherent with well-tested scientific theories, they are explications of faith commitments and not themselves scientific claims. An “existentialist” theology of divine action²³ is in itself inadequate but it does make the critical point that we can understand God to be at work in the world only by faith. And that does not mean that they involve a “blind faith” in traditional religious doctrines but that they are expressions of trust in the God revealed in Jesus Christ.

21. Martin Luther, “Psalm 147” in *Luther’s Works*, Vol.14 (Concordia, St. Louis, 1958), 114.

22. Barbour, *Religion and Science*, Chapter 12, discusses nine such theologies. In an earlier edition [Ian Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science: The Gifford Lectures 1989-1991*, Vol. One (HarperCollins, San Francisco, 1990), Chapter 9] he included an Existentialist theology, in which God is understood to act only in one’s personal life.

23. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science*, 254-256.

The Influence of the Black Church on Black Parenting

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*An Address at the 32nd Annual Conference on the Black Family,
March 10-13, 2005. University of Louisville*

In his "Address before the National Press Club," on July 19, 1962, Martin Luther King, Jr. lamented that the most segregated hour in the United States is 11:00 A.M. on Sunday morning, and this is still probably true today.¹ However, in retrospect, integration has not served the purpose for which it was intended. This means the reasons for this kind of segregation today are primarily self-imposed, based more on ethnic and cultural solidarity, and they yield psychological benefits. This paper considers the benefits of black church membership on black parenting.

To gain a better understanding of the contemporary black American family, it is first necessary to understand at least a couple of things in relation to the history of the white American family. According to Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame, in the 19th century the nature of the white American family was based more on myth than reality. This situation has made charting the black family difficult to do as well.²

1. Quoted in James Melvin Washington, *A Testament of Hope: Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986), 101.

2. Mary Berry and John W. Blassingame,

The first myth to be debunked is that the 19th century white American family was a "close-knit patriarchal institution," that was in many ways "a carbon copy of the 17th century European family." Instead, this kind of reasoning never considered "the differences in the democracy of America [versus] European life." The "shortage" of women on the American frontier caused their role to be extremely "dominant." This was regardless of laws enacted against women. Making a major contribution to the situation was the fact of the home, which increased the voice of women and children. By 1880, the American family was more democratic than patriarchal or matriarchal.

There were important changes in the American family that took place in the latter half of the 19th century. The changes were industrialization, improvements in transportation, weakening of religious bonds, birth control, increase in working women, premarital sex, and the downgraded economic importance of family. Likewise, there developed a lax attitude toward divorce. By the 1970s, one in every three marriages ended in divorce. A large number

Long Memory: The Black Experience in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 70-71.

of whites were being accused of practicing serial polygamy—having a number of wives and husbands, one at a time.

For Berry and Blassingame, from the perspective of the black family, the most dangerous part of the myth was the Moynihan Report of 1965. Popularized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the report argued that the black family had a “pathological weakness,” that was capable of perpetuating itself

by white church oversight. Monogamous family practices also were encouraged in the slave quarters, and adultery and fornication were scorned. Often excommunication was the punishment for abandoning mates, premarital pregnancies, and extramarital sex. Regardless, 30% of all slave marriages were broken by slave masters.

What about the formation of the American black family itself? For Berry and Blassingame, it grew out of a complex combination of African traditions, Christian beliefs, and adjustments made to slavery. In Africa the family was a strong communal institution, stressing the dominance of males, the importance of children, and extended kinship networks. African families generally forbade extramarital sex, yet regarded sexual intercourse as healthy, a natural act, unconnected with sin. The consequences of “enslavement” led to a change in family behavior in the slave quarters, where men were required to share authority with women. Unlike in Africa, parents did not assume the responsibility of determining the “destiny” of their children.

So “monogamy” was the norm in the slave quarters. Although Christian marriages took place, they still were not recognized by law. Most slaves lived in a two-parent household. Separation of the family could take place anytime, due to heartless masters, rendering the slave family very much a powerless institution.

Giving impetus to the strength of black women was their deep religious faith. This was especially true in relation to those holding membership in the independent black church. The main difference between the independent black church and its white counterpart was its overriding belief in a nationalistic theology of liberation, reform and uplift. The first independent black church denomination was founded when blacks started the African Methodist Epis-

The main difference between the independent black church and its white counterpart was its overriding belief in a nationalistic theology of liberation, reform and uplift.

without any assistance to the black family from the white world. However, in Berry’s and Blassingame’s analysis, “the weakness of the [contemporary] black family may be seen instead as a direct result of centuries of white oppression...and not so inherent and immutable.”

The push for morality among slaves caused white churches to insist that slave marriages be consummated. Beginning in the 1740s, Christian marital ceremonies were started, with white ministers marrying slave couples. Between 1800 and 1860, thousands of slaves were married, primarily

copal Church in Philadelphia, in 1816. A number of other independent all-black denominations followed. By 1840, there were more than 300 separate northern black churches, including 6 Episcopal, 3 Presbyterian, 1 Congregational, and 1 Lutheran.

According to Mary Berry and John Blassingame, the black church and black families have been “enduring institutions.” From the time of slavery to the modern period of radical oppression, there has been a perspective in relation to raising children that has been quite different from the one held by American society in general.³

After slavery, the black church made informal slave marriages legal, demanded marital fidelity for black males, and encouraged families to function as an extended church family. Children were taken to church by parents, in part, because of the belief that church provided moral and spiritual education.⁴ The Sunday school was equally important for adults and children. It also doubled as a school. The church was the first opportunity for blacks to learn to read and write. Booker T. Washington said, “It was the case of an entire race attempting to go to school.” None were too young or too old. Day schools, night schools, and Sunday schools were full. The primary book studied was the spelling book.⁵

According to Adam Fairclough, the independent black church has been the only organization owned entirely by black people, which caused it to be invulner-

able to persecution during the civil rights movement.⁶ It has provided a psychological advantage for black children, who participated in children’s choirs, children’s day or junior church. The birth of children has been publicly announced, infants consecrated, and pastors sought for advice. Stable families were viewed as important.⁷

Dating back to the age of slavery, there has been an informal system of adoption and fictive kinship, which developed among black extended families. Unlike white traditions, children born out of wedlock were not labeled as “bastards” or “illegitimate.” Instead, they were accepted as extended family members. Usually there was no formal adoption, and children were often reared by relatives other than their parents, or by a fictive or non-blood relative, regardless of cost.

According to Lincoln and Mamiya, in the majority of black communities in urban and rural locations, the black church has been a part of the extended family network as well. Being composed of one to several families, these churches are family churches or kin churches.

In a related manner, Staples and Johnson have stated, “Through preaching, teaching, cooperative benevolence, symbols, belief systems, morality, and rituals, the church welds community and unrelated families to each other.”⁸ Likewise, the church is representative of a modern-day tribe. In the church, members are referred to as brother and sister, elders are respected, and the minister is respected as earthly spiritual chief. Likewise there are a host of angels, and a supreme father, who governs

3. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 310.

4. Robert Staples and Leonor Boulton Johnson, *Black Families at the Crossroads* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993), 212.

5. Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 44-45.

6. Adam Fairclough, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 44-45.

7. Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 312.

8. Staples and Johnson, *Black Families*, 211.

the living and the dead.

How then is the black church able to cope with the psychological stigma of living in a racist society? Some critics believe that the black church has helped to facilitate this negative attitude, especially in relation to black children. According to Kenneth Clark's doll test, black children preferred white dolls over black dolls. In the 1950s, this also was an indictment against the racial separatism of the black church. However, today, this kind of indictment is far from absolute, and it is still necessary to struggle with the meaning of race.⁹

According to Lincoln and Mamiya, *Brown vs. Board of Education* was related to Kenneth and Mamie Clark's doll test, showing the connection between racial segregation and inferior school systems. The case was brought by Leon Oliver Brown, pastor of St. Mark's AME Church in Topeka, KS, and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, on behalf of 9-year-old Linda Brown and other black children. According to the Clarks, "67% of the black children preferred to play with a white doll, but 66% of them also identified with the black doll. However, they concluded that the 34%... who did not identify with the black doll suffered from low self-esteem."¹⁰

According to Fine's and Bowers' research in 1984, black boys also preferred white dolls, more so than black girls.¹¹ In the late 1960s and 1970s there was less preference for black dolls, and this was a return to the status of the 1940s.

In his 1964 research, Robert Coles reported that black children drew themselves smaller than white children, and in inferior positions to whites. For Coles, the mean-

ing of skin color for black children comes at the period of 'preparation,' "the lessons devised by black parents and major black institutions, like the black church, must struggle with the meaning of race, particularly where children are concerned."¹²

With this thought in mind, from the time of slavery until the 1960s, the main philosophy of the black church was equality before God. It was a church in which a janitor could be a deacon, and a domestic worker head of the usher board. It was a place where the lowest person was "af-firmed" and confirmed.

Social activities for blacks of all ages were informed by the black church. All day church services and dinners were common. According to Jualynne E. Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "since the meat most often served in U.S. African American churches is chicken, it is referred to as the 'gospel bird.'¹³ Often the first trip outside the black community by many youngsters was a church trip: there were picnics and visits to other churches.

Likewise, there were church recreational activities: athletic teams, churches doubled as concert halls, art galleries, public forums, and the first public performance given or seen by many children occurred in churches.

Important also is the opportunity for older adults to serve as role models for children. This is the process of how a major portion of the socialization of children and young people has taken place. Studies have shown the importance of role modeling for black youth. It was especially important in rural areas. In a recent survey, although not assured of positive reasons for their own

9. Ibid., 212.

10. Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 313.

11. Ibid., 314.

12. Ibid., 315-316.

13. Jualynne E. Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "There's Nothing Like Church Food," *JAAR* 63, 523.

church attendance, a number of youths were critical of the double standard in adult behavior.

Another issue is black images and figures in Sunday school literature. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, out of 1,765 respondents, (68%) believed that the images portrayed in Sunday school literature are positive, but there were 550 (32%), who said no. Many responding in the negative felt that skin color played no great part in the message of Jesus. However, one minister said, it gave self-esteem and self-awareness and aided against inferior feelings. Yet another minister spoke of the importance of Simon of Cyrene—for tradition believed him to be black—carrying Jesus' cross. And Moses' wife is portrayed as an Ethiopian woman. He believed this to be important for black self-esteem.¹⁴

Although the majority felt it important to have black figures in Sunday school literature, an informal survey showed that black Methodist denominations constantly used black figures in Sunday school literature. On the other hand, several black Baptist and Pentecostal denominations still used white Sunday school publications. Among Baptists, this is especially true in Southern Baptist publications.

With images in mind, then, there also is the issue of too much television watching on the part of black children. This has had a major impact on socialization in general. Some children spend two to five hours per day watching television. According to Jesse Jackson, the National Association of Broadcasters has been primarily a lily-white organization.

For Albert Mimmi and Eugene Perkins, educational systems also have played a critical role in the socialization of oppressed people, especially the young. In the 1980s

the black drop-out rate "averaged 25% nationally, but in some urban areas it had exceeded 50%."¹⁵

Since the black cultural revolution in the late 1960s, the negative evaluation of blacks is more inclined to be disregarded. Staples and Johnson have said, "It is unlikely that the soul of black folk is based primarily on the opinion of whites."¹⁶ Undoubtedly, in a number of ways the issues of segregation, integration, and cultural diversity are still being unraveled. And what we have witnessed is a changing of paradigms.

The question is how would Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech, about 11:00 o'clock Sunday morning being the most segregated hour in America, play itself out today. When King made this speech in July, 1962, segregation was very much still the law of the land, especially in many places in the South. Today, after attending schools and churches with whites, many blacks have decided that it is not important. And what is more important is ethnic separation, which also was carried out by several European immigrant groups to America, such as Norwegian-Americans in the Upper Midwestern states, where I teach. In recent decades, with the rise of cultural diversity and multiculturalism, African Americans have been able to learn from these examples as well as from Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam.

According to Berry and Blassingame, however "scholars regularly lament the emotionalism of the black church, the illiteracy of its ministers (in 1960 only 33 percent of black clergy had college degrees), and claimed that the church was primarily other worldly in its concern." This harsh criticism included a number of middle class blacks, and Malcolm X, who opposed the

15. *Ibid.*, 318-319.

16. Staples and Johnson, *Black Families*, 212-213.

14. Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 317.

crude Negroisms and Africanisms of the black church. In a recent video, Wyatt T. Walker, presently pastor of the New Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem, thanks black pentecostal and holiness denominations for carrying on our legacy in relation to music, until we came to our senses (This was a period when most black intellectuals and middle class members were thorough-going Eurocentrists).

Modern black families have required church attendance by children, including older ones. This is because of the belief that within the extended family of religion, children receive “moral education, positive group identity and personal worth, morality, and rituals providing unity—a glue that welded families and communities to each other.”

In their outstanding book, *The Good Society*, Robert M. Bellah, and William M. Sullivan and associates have made the point that African American church attendance is holding its own today. This is at a time, when white mainline American denominations are decreasing in membership.¹⁷

Yet there are still other problems confronting the contemporary black church. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, this is the first time in black history that, in the urban areas, there is a generation of young people who know nothing about the black church and couldn't care less. Nor do they have “any respect for the black church and its traditions.”¹⁸

A major factor is the problem of poverty and the underclass. “Poor black families are one third of all black families, but only half of these (16 to 18%) are caught in the cycle of several generations of welfare

dependency. The other half is the working poor, with marginal incomes supplemented by food stamps.” Likewise, 49% of all black youth grow up in female-headed households. This means many are growing up in poverty, with little chance of overcoming the situation. Thus “the feminization of poverty” is a reality also among the black poor, leading to the increase of female-headed households.

Although there is an individual increase of people returning to church, the church is losing ground in relation to black males, youths, and adults. For Eugene Perkins, “the socialization process for many black males growing up in urban ghettos” is what he calls ‘the street institution,’ including gang activity. “Gang membership often leads to illegal activities such as robbery and stealing, prostitution, the sale and/or use of drugs.” These new gangs are quite different from the ones in earlier generations. Gang activity now is more related to drug wars, and the massacre of entire families has been involved. Gang involvement usually has been anti-church, along with the avoidance of other mainline institutions.

In turn, other than unemployment, “a common experience among young blacks, especially males, is prison.” In the 1980s, the national “incarceration” rate for black males was 48%. Women as a whole made up 4% of those in prison in 1981, and black women made up 51% of all women.¹⁹

What can the black church do in the face of the current challenges facing African American youth? This includes such problems as teenage pregnancies, which Joyce Ladner also sees as a “major challenge to the tradition of black churches.” According to Lincoln and Mamiya, “the fact is that the whole Christian tradition has a great difficulty in dealing with issues of sexuality,

17. Robert M. Bellah and William M. Sullivan, *The Good Society*, (New York: Random House, 1992), 187.

18. Lincoln and Mamiya, *Black Church*, 310.

19. *Ibid.*, 323.

involving not only premarital sex, abortion, and homosexuality, but also including acceptance of women clergy....”²⁰

Indeed, Berry and Blassingame were correct in referring to the family and church as “enduring institutions.” They both have long legacies surviving slavery and being present in the 21st century. Referring to the black church in the new millennium, Lincoln and Mamiya have said that there will be a black church but there is no clue as to how it will look. And the same can be said in relation to the black family. Unlike the black family, the black church has been so successful in recent years that it has become primarily a middle class institution. In other words, its contemporary success has led to its present day failure, especially among the poor.

Instead, the contemporary African American religious organization that is having success among the poor and marginalized is the Nation of Islam. The Nation has had tremendous success among urban street people, and those in prison, in particular. These are areas in which most mainline black churches have drastically failed.

For Lincoln and Mamiya, the situation has led to a near “bifurcation” of the black church, with mainline black denominations attracting mainly the middle class, working poor, and a small group of the poor, especially in rural areas. The hard-core poor have deserted the mainline denominations, some for various other religious cults. Likewise mainline churches were populated by women. In several cases, young males had opted for Islam. A broader interpretation of black religion is needed, one which encompasses Islam and the African-based religions as well. There is no indication that such alternatives to Christianity will decrease. Indeed the opposite is closer to the truth.

Another pressing issue for the black church and family is homosexuality. If women preaching has been difficult to deal with, homosexuality has been swept under the rug. The latest storm is centered in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court recently ruling that gay and lesbian couples have the right to marry. The discussion has sent a chill through the black religious community as well. There was criticism of same sex marriage everywhere by more organized black clergy. However, some support favoring it came from a smaller group. Usually this favoritism was from groups outside the larger group of historically black denominations. Likewise, Jesse Jackson astonished many of his liberal supporters by saying that the situation of “slavery still shaped current black opinion on the issue.” Furthermore, “the comparison with slavery is a stretch in that some slave masters were gay.” Then, he said, “In my community, marriage means a man and a woman.”²¹ The Reverend Walter Fauntroy, Congressman from Washington, D.C., supported an amendment opposing same sex marriage, claiming it hurt black families. He also said that blacks did not need to be confused by another definition of marriage, for they had already “been victims of deliberate family destruction.” In response, Keith Boykin, a leading gay black activist, formed the National Black Justice Coalition. He said a truce had been worked out between gays and lesbians, allowing them to serve quietly. As a result, the church has become the most homophobic institution in the black community and the most homo-tolerant. In the meantime, coming out in support of gay marriage or opposing the Federal Marriage Amendment were such people as Coretta Scott King, Julian Bond,

21. Christine McCarthy McMorris, “Black Pastors Bridle at Gay Marriage,” *Religion in the News* (Summer 2004), 8-9.

20. *Ibid.*, 325.

and Congressman John Lewis. This also was true of the NAACP and Urban League.

Considering the issue of sexuality and manliness, worthy of mentioning also is the

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position taken by Johnny Ray Youngblood, pastor of St. Paul's Missionary Baptist Church in Brooklyn. Taking his philosophy from the Nation of Islam, Youngblood has stood firm and in favor of a strongly male-supported church. And he had been quite successful in doing so. He also has taken a position against homosexuality in the black church as a way to build a strong church and family.²²

Evidently, the problems confronting the black church and family are far from being solved, but by all indications, there are efforts at work toward a meaningful solution. In the early decades of the 20th cen-

tury, Carter G. Woodson lamented that the black church had followed its white church prototype in sectarian strife and division, when the black church was a black-owned institution.²³ During the modern civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Mary R. Sawyer has profoundly said, it was a case of ministers crossing denominational lines, and putting their lives on the line, in order to be the church. She also said that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was the leading black ecumenical organization of the period.²⁴ In terms of the contemporary crises in the black church and family, it is necessary for the black church and Islam to embrace in areas of mutual concern. For example, in an effort to prevent drug dealing in Brooklyn and Washington, D.C., orthodox Muslims and the Nation of Islam have established community patrols. Then "strong-arm tactics" also have been duplicated by Baptists in Harlem. Although a small step, it is one in the right direction.

Here, fifty years since the Brown decision, for a number of reasons, the dream of an integrated American society is one that is still deferred, and the black church is, at least for many adults, still the most important organization in the black community. This means that it remains as a major symbol of the super-extended family. At the broadest level, it still stands as a symbol of the best hope for nurturing and reinvigorating children and youth. And Islamic groups and other religious groups of African descent need seats at the table as well.

23. Carter G. Woodson, *Mid-education of the Negro* (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1933), 57-61.

24. Mary R. Sawyer, *black Ecumenism* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1994), 60.

22. Samuel G. Freedman, *Upon this Rock: The Miracles of a black Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 6-10.

Preaching as Participation: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology of Preaching

L. Roger Owens

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Talk of participation is making a comeback in theology. Theologians are re-awakening to the heart of the mystery of Christianity, which Henri de Lubac calls the mystery “of our participation, through the grace of Christ, in the internal life of the Divinity.”¹ This reawakening finds its most articulate voice in the efforts of the movement called Radical Orthodoxy, led by John Milbank. Milbank and others have forcefully, and rightly I think, argued that all knowledge, all the efforts of culture, the works of humans and the works of all other creatures, find their true source and meaning in their being created and held in creation by a God who shares his being with them. Art, music, sociology, sex, and many other subjects have been approached from the perspective of a theology of participation to show that, rightly conceived, these disciplines find their intelligibility in the heart of the Christian mystery, the mystery of creation's participation in the Triune God.²

1. Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sr. Sergia Englund, O.C.C. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 113.

2. See, for instance, *Radical Orthodoxy*, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999). In the introduction they write, “The central theological

Yet I suspect that this return to participation does not have much purchase among pastors and practical theologians concerned with the very real transformation of the church into the image of Jesus because this account of participation too often appears primarily as an affair of the mind. It can seem unrelated to the mundane tasks of the church, its day-in and day-out affairs of administration, eating, preaching, singing—tasks aimed at the church's own transformation and the transformation of the world. Radical Orthodoxy has gotten theologies of participation off the ground; pastors and practical theologians are still waiting for them to land. As R. R. Reno has astutely argued, “Whether the focus [of Radical Orthodoxy] rests on Scripture, creed, or tradition, a certain ‘ideality’ seems to govern, a tendency to think theologically in terms of higher, purified, and untainted forms. A formal claim, a ‘way of being,’ supersedes the determinate particularity of apostolic teaching and

framework of radical orthodoxy is ‘participation’ as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity. . . . Underpinning the present essays, therefore, is the idea that every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing.” 3.

practice.”³ In other words, the return to an ontology of participation has been achieved at the expense of the particularities of the church's embodied life.

If this talk of participation stands at the heart of the Christian mystery, then we have every reason to believe it can be articulated in a way that does not disregard the particular, embodied nature of ecclesial practice, but rather finds its own intelligibility in the very practices that constitute the church as God's transforming and liberating community in the world. If the God in whom we participate is the God incarnate in Jesus Christ, then participation, rightly understood, will show itself to be particular, practical, and visible.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's lectures on homiletics can help us begin to develop a theology of practical participation. By conceiving preaching in terms of christology and ecclesiology, in terms of Christ and Christ's relationship to the church, he offers a social account of the church's task of proclamation, showing this task to be one mode of the church's embodied participation in God's own life. Proclamation for Bonhoeffer is the task of the whole church, the church as *totus Christus*, as it embodies its obedience to the Lord, its practical participation.

Bonhoeffer's christo-ecclesiology

For Bonhoeffer, preaching is decidedly christological; it is also a properly ecclesial practice, finding its source, its intelligibility, and its goal in the church. In his works, spanning from his first doctoral dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* (1927) through his *Discipleship* (1937; commonly known as

The Cost of Discipleship) Bonhoeffer articulates a coherent and consistent ecclesiology, an ecclesiology intimately tied to his christology.⁴ A brief account of the salient features of this christo-ecclesiology is necessary as a background to his theology of the proclaimed word, for preaching is nothing other than the church's enacting one of its core practices of participation by which God takes the church into his own life.

Bonhoeffer writes near the end of *Sanctorum Communio*:

We believe that God has made the concrete, empirical church in which the word is preached and the sacraments are celebrated to be God's own church-community. We believe that it is the body of Christ, Christ's presence in the world, and that according to the promise God's Spirit is at work in it... We believe in the church as *una* [one], since it is "Christ existing as church-community," and Christ is the one Lord over those who are all one in him; as *sancta* [holy], since the Holy Spirit is at work in it; as *catholica* [catholic], since as *God's church* its call is to the entire world, and wherever in the world God's word is preached, there is the church.⁵

When Bonhoeffer writes, "We believe in the church as *una* because it is 'Christ existing as church-community,'" he is expressing the ecclesiological insight which comprises the culminating thesis of Bonhoeffer's book and, in a way, of his career. Bonhoeffer writes, "In and through Christ the church is established in reality. It is not as if Christ could be abstracted from the

4. The following account of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is greatly influenced by Clifford Green's *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), especially my emphasis on the consistency of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology across his career and on the identification of and distinction between Christ and the church.

5. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: a Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 280.

3. R. R. Reno, *In the Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 72.

church; rather, it is none other than Christ who 'is' the church. Christ does not represent it; only what is not present can be represented. In God's eyes, however, the church is present in Christ. Christ did not merely make the church possible, but rather realized it for eternity."⁶ What Bonhoeffer means when he says that the church is "Christ existing as church-community" and "Christ 'is' the church" is the heart of Bonhoeffer's christo-ecclesiology.

Christ, for Bonhoeffer, is at once the founder of the church, Lord over it, but also, the church itself; as Bonhoeffer writes, "Thus the church is already completed in Christ, just as in Christ its beginning is established. Christ is the cornerstone and the foundation of the building, and yet the church, composed of all its parts, is also Christ's body."⁷ Christ's work of reconciliation brings human individuals, condemned after the fall to an unfulfilled social reality characterized by isolation, "into the church—that is, into the humanity of Christ."⁸

Some might fear that Bonhoeffer simply identifies Christ with the church. Though it can look that way, we should not be afraid to say with Bonhoeffer that "Christ 'is' the church" if we keep in mind some appropriate qualifications. For Bonhoeffer, Christ is always over the church, its head and Lord, creatively and freely present in the church. So the "church 'is' Christ" only on Christ's terms, in his freedom. While the church somehow "is" Christ, the church never "has" Christ as a possession.⁹

6. Ibid., 157.

7. Ibid., 142.

8. Ibid., 143.

9. As Green writes, "Bonhoeffer is not identifying Christ and the church but describing their dialectical relationship." Green, *Bonhoeffer*, 60.

The christo-ecclesial themes introduced in *Sanctorum Communio*—Christ existing as church-community, Christ as representative of the new humanity because Christ *is* the new humanity, and Christ as Lord over the church—are maintained throughout Bonhoeffer's teaching and writing career.

The language Bonhoeffer uses to talk of Christ and the church in his lectures on



christology (1933) shows the development of the themes introduced in *Sanctorum Communio*. Here he elaborates and reworks the theme of Christ as the vicarious representative of the new humanity:

Christ stands for his new humanity before God. But if that is so, he is the new humanity. There where mankind should stand, he stands as a representative, enabled by his *pro me* [for me] structure. He is the church. He not only acts for it, he is it, when he goes to the cross, carries sins and dies.¹⁰

Bonhoeffer's articulation of the *pro nobis* (for us) structure of Christ is the most significant development in Bonhoeffer's

10. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 48.

christology, largely present in *Sanctorum Communio* in the discussion of Christ as vicarious representative who gives himself for the church. In his christology lectures, Bonhoeffer presents the *pro nobis* structure of Christ as an ontological description of who Christ is. Christ would not be Christ if he did not exist “for us.” For Bonhoeffer, there is no such thing as Christ existing for himself. “Christ is not first a Christ for himself and then a Christ in the Church. He who alone is the Christ is the one who is present in the Church *pro me*.”¹¹

While Bonhoeffer's earlier work on the church and Christ finds its fulfillment, so to speak, in these christology lectures, they also point forward to themes in later writings. Indeed, in *Discipleship* (1937) these christological themes are similarly expressed. What we notice, however, is that certain themes are even strengthened, particularly the theme of Christ's identity with the church based on the *pro nobis* structure of Christ, that is, his vicarious giving of himself for, and standing in the place of, the new humanity as the new humanity.

When Jesus takes on flesh, Jesus takes on all humanity and thus makes it the new humanity. Having taken on the weakness and sin of humanity, Jesus lives, dies, rises, and ascends on behalf of this new humanity, indeed with this new humanity in his flesh. Jesus did everything that he did “for us” so that he might constitute the new humanity, the church.¹² According to Bonhoeffer, Paul was able to express in many ways the mystery of the Incarnation, but one way sums up all the rest: the *pro nobis* structure of Christ's existence. Bonhoeffer writes, “The Body of Christ is in the strictest sense

of the word ‘for us’ as it hangs on the cross and ‘for us’ as it is given to us in the Word, in baptism and in the Lord's Supper. This is the ground of all bodily fellowship with Jesus Christ.”¹³

Because the *pro nobis* structure of Christ is “the ground of all bodily fellowship” with Christ, Bonhoeffer can reiterate certain claims with a clarity and force found in neither *Sanctorum Communio* nor the christology lectures:

The Body of Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has taken upon him. It is in fact the Church. Jesus Christ is at once himself and his Church....To be in Christ therefore means to be in the Church. But if we are in the Church we are verily and bodily in Christ....Since the ascension, Christ's place on earth has been taken by his Body, the Church. The Church is the real presence of Christ....We should think of the Church not as an institution, but as a *person*, though of course a person in a unique sense....Hence the new man is both Christ and the Church. Christ is the new humanity in the new man. Christ is the Church.¹⁴

At this point let us summarize the three aspects of Bonhoeffer's christo-ecclesiology. First, Christ exists in and as the church; the church is really the Body of Christ, Christ's presence in history, in time and space, and thus Christ's availability to the world. Second, Christ's existing as church is possible because of Christ's *pro nobis* structure. Christ cannot exist other than “for us,” as the collective person, the representative of the new humanity who is himself the new humanity and stands in place of the new humanity and redeems the new humanity. Third, while Christ is the church Christ cannot be confused with the church, but Christ remains Lord and Head of the church, ever calling it to fol-

11. *Ibid.*, 47.

12. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 263-268.

13. *Ibid.*, 268-269.

14. *Ibid.*, 269-270

low obediently. Christ exists as the church freely and graciously.

Proclamation as an ecclesial practice of participation

Even though Bonhoeffer does not use the language of participation, the language of ontology, he is nonetheless offering a theological account of how the church participates in Christ and therefore in God. The dependence of his ecclesiology on a strong, one could say Alexandrian, reading of Chalcedon establishes his claim that Christ is the church insofar as the church is the new humanity assumed by Christ as Christ's own humanity.¹⁵ "Christ 'is' the church" is, with appropriate qualifications, the foundation of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology. It is also his christological account of participation. What we need to see is how, through the practice of proclamation, the church is enacting this participation in Christ; or, in other words, how the church's practicing itself is God's sharing of his life with the church. For that account, we turn to the lectures on homiletics which Bonhoeffer delivered to his students at the underground seminary Finkenwalde beginning in 1935.¹⁶ The discussion can be divided into two parts: 1) Proclamation as christological participation in the life of God; and 2) Proclamation and the shape of participation.

15. By strong Alexandrian reading of Chalcedon I mean one that, like Cyril of Alexandria himself, tends toward a very close identification between the divine and human in the person of Jesus. Those who opposed this reading of Chalcedon feared that the human was being overshadowed, even swallowed, by the divine.

16. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Worldly Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics*, revised ed., trans. and ed. Clyde E. Fant (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

Proclamation as christological participation in the life of God

That the church's proclamation of the Word enacts the church's christological participation in God follows directly from Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology and christology summarized in the previous section. If the church itself is the new humanity assumed by Christ, then to show how proclamation is christological participation in the life of God, Bonhoeffer needs to make one more move, namely, to show that it is through the church's practice of proclaiming the word that Christ makes the church his own body. In these lectures he reiterates the seminal christological principle: "In the incarnation the Word became flesh. God, the Son, took on human form. So he accepts all humankind with its genuinely sinful nature.... This also means that in the incarnation the new humanity is established.... The congregation is already present in the embodied Christ... the Church is included in the incarnation as the *sanctorum communio* [communion of saints]."¹⁷ These claims repeat many of the christo-ecclesial themes we have already encountered; there is no new information. Then he adds: "The proclaimed word *is the Christ bearing human nature*."¹⁸ I have already suggested that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is dependent on the christological tenets of Chalcedon. He is employing a similar Chalcedonian logic here. Since, on the principle of Chalcedon, after the incarnation there is no Logos without humanity just as there is no human Jesus without the Logos, and if the proclaimed word is

17. *Ibid.*, 101-102.

18. *Ibid.*, 102. emphasis mine.

indeed the Logos of God, then it follows that the “proclaimed word is the Christ bearing human nature.” This very point he clarifies, using his strongest participation language: “This Word is no new incarnation, but the Incarnate One who bears the sins of the world. Through the Holy Spirit

We become
like God
through participation
in a way appropriate
to our created natures;
we never become
divine so as to be
not-created.

this word becomes the actualization of his acceptance and sustenance.... Because the Word includes us into itself, it makes us into the body of Christ.”¹⁹ Proclamation is participation in the life of God precisely because the proclaimed word is the Logos of God who “includes us into himself” through the Holy Spirit. A few paragraphs later he puts it a little differently: “As the Logos has adopted human nature, so the spoken word actualizes our adoption.”²⁰ Proclamation itself is participation in the life of God. This follows organically from his account of Christ and the church when one sees that the proclamation of the word is the proclamation of the same Word who

19. *Ibid.*, 102.

20. *Ibid.*, 103

includes the new humanity in himself as the very gathered congregation.

There is one passage in particular that deserves special attention, for in this passage it sounds like Bonhoeffer is denying the very claims about participation I have been outlining. Rather than denying participation, he is once again employing the logic of Chalcedon to set the parameters of faithful Christian speech about participation. Bonhoeffer writes, “While the Word accepts and sustains us, there is nevertheless no fusion of God’s being with ours, no identification of the godly nature with the human nature.... There is no mystical metamorphosis that occurs, but rather faith and sanctification.”²¹ Here he is saying what the Christian tradition has always maintained needs to be said when talking of participation. Even when the church uses the language of deification, it must make clear that we become like God through participation in a way appropriate to our created natures; we never become divine so as to be not-created. Bonhoeffer is guarding against a latent eutychianism that is like the shade at the church’s right hand whenever it talks about deification.²² In his use of words like “fusion,” “identification,” “metamorphosis” we can hear Bonhoeffer’s attentiveness to the issues of Chalcedon, which denies any confusion between the human and divine natures of the one Christ. He is not denying the notion of participation, but setting the parameters, so to speak, for faithful Christian talk of participation, speech that respects the limits set on the church’s

21. *Ibid.*, 104.

22. Eutychianism is that Christological heresy, named after, if not actually advocated by, the monk Eutyches (c. 430 CE), that denies that Christ has a human nature. According to advocates of this position, Christ’s humanity is swallowed, or overcome, by his divinity.

speech at the Council of Chalcedon. Within these parameters we have ample space to say quite faithfully, "the Word [in this case the preached word] includes us into itself." Thus, the practice of proclamation is God's drawing us into the active life of God's triunity. As Bonhoeffer says, "In the proclaimed word Christ is alive as the Word of the Father. In the proclaimed word he receives the congregation into himself."²³

Proclamation and the shape of participation

It must be remembered that Bonhoeffer is giving these lectures while he is living and teaching in an illegal, underground seminary, hidden from the Nazi's penetrating gaze. We cannot think that he is dabbling in speculation about the christological and ecclesial foundations of proclamation because he has the luxury of time. Rather, for Bonhoeffer, the gift of participation, which the church enacts in its own practice of proclamation through which Christ assumes humanity, has a particular shape, a form; it has its own peculiar visibility because it is Jesus Christ of the gospels whose identity the church is enacting in its proclamation. For this very reason, Bonhoeffer's account of participation stands in stark contrast to any account that approaches participation in terms of our created being alone. Bonhoeffer, remarking that "word and deed were a unity in the life of Christ," says, "to the preaching word belongs the acting of the church."²⁴ Again he writes, "The witness of Christ involves both preacher and listener in word and deed."²⁵ That the proclaimed word is the Logos of God assuming the new humanity is not an empty abstraction

precisely because the Word's assumption of humanity as displayed in the Gospels is the obedience of the man Jesus to the will of the Father. His is the obedience in which the church participates when its proclamation of the gospel finds its fulfillment in the word and deed of preacher and listener. If the church is in some sense the continuation of the Incarnation, as Bonhoeffer's Chalcedonian logic leads him to suggest, then the unity of word and deed in the life of Christ, a unity which is nothing other than the unity of humanity and divinity in the man Jesus, continues in the Word's assuming human visibility in the practices of the church, especially in the church's practice of proclamation. Participation has a particular shape, and his name is Jesus.

In a remarkable passage, reminiscent of George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic account of truth,²⁶ Bonhoeffer writes:

It is possible for the church to preach pure doctrine that is nonetheless untrue. The truthfulness of it hinges upon the form of manifestation that the church adopts for itself. This form, however, implies discipleship and not proximity to what people expect or unity with their culture.²⁷

Bonhoeffer's Chalcedonian account of Christianity hits the ground, so to speak, in this statement, which can only be read as a critique of the culturally accommodated Christianity of Nazi Germany. The Logos-assuming-humanity cannot be abstracted from the narratives of the Gospels, where that same Logos calls people to follow in a costly, life-giving way. The accommodated Christianity of Bonhoeffer's day might have maintained the "true" doctrines of Christianity, but truth for Bonhoeffer is not, in

23. Ibid., 103.

24. Ibid., 106.

25. Ibid., 106.

26. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 31-41.

27. Bonhoeffer, *Worldly*, 113.

this case, getting the words right, but it is the very form that participation takes when it is participation in a Christ who cannot be separated from the calling-to-discipleship Christ of the Gospels. In other words, for Bonhoeffer, truth is visible, and thus so is participation. Critiquing again the accommodated, indeed apostate, Christianity of his day, Bonhoeffer writes, "The basis of the preaching church is not flesh and blood, customs and culture, and its form is not one of cultural unity, but rather its basis is the Word and its form is obedience."²⁸ The shape of participation is obedience.

In a striking line that should ring as a wake-up call to the culturally accommodated Christianity of our own day, Bonhoeffer writes, "The contemporary truth of the church is revealed in that it preaches and lives the Sermon on the Mount and the admonitions of Paul."²⁹ At the end of all of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological and christological reflections, along with his rich theology of preaching, lies this conclusion: the shape of participation, the shape of the church as it practices its participation in the life of God, is the church's transformation into the shape of the life of Jesus, and thus its liberation from cultural accommodation.

Practical participation

At the beginning of *The Word Made Strange* John Milbank writes that "it is uncertain as to where today to locate true Christian practice...the theologian feels almost that the entire ecclesial task falls on his own head."³⁰ This is not a sentiment Bonhoeffer can share. It is not unclear to Bonhoeffer

how to identify true Christian practice. Bonhoeffer's articulates an eminently practical account of the church's christological participation in God, an account that allows him to discriminate between true and false Christian practice. Participation is not first of all the hidden depths of the meaning in all creation, though it will be that too. First of all, participation is the church's visible sharing in the obedience of the Son because the Son, through the participatory practices of the church, especially the practice of preaching, assumes the church's humanity as his own visible presence in the world. Since this Son is the very Jesus whose walking the earth is recorded in the Gospels, Bonhoeffer's account of participation is far from a theoretical abstraction; it is quite realistic because the church Bonhoeffer is talking about participates in the embodied humanity of Christ.

Finally, Bonhoeffer gives a preacher and the congregation a way to think about their task together of proclaiming God's word that goes beyond homiletical technique. The success of the sermon will no longer be judged by whether it made the congregation think or by whether it made the congregation feel. Rather, the whole church will step back, review the shape of its life, and ask, "Does this life conform to the obedience of the Son? Have we embodied the Sermon on the Mount and the admonitions of Paul in a way that shows forth the truth of our proclamation?" Indeed, the preacher and the congregation will no longer talk about the "success" of a single sermon. They will consider instead the shape of their life together, a shape which, by God's grace, they might find to be their visible participation in God's own life, their being made holy, their sanctification, their transformation, their becoming the humanity of Christ.

28. Ibid., 113.

29. Ibid., 113.

30. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 1.

Book Reviews

Dimensions of Evil: Contemporary Perspectives. By Terry D. Cooper. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. 285 pages. Paper. \$22.00.

Evil has been studied, experienced, and committed by people since the beginnings of history, and is a topic of fascination for both scholars and laypersons alike. In this volume, Terry Cooper gives both academic and lay communities a solid resource for examining evil through a psychological lens. In this account, Cooper presents a diversity of opinions from both the psychological and theological communities, interacting with them and giving relevant, descriptive commentary on each.

The book is divided into seven chapters, "Evil and Evolution," "Evil, Ethics, and Evolutionary Psychology," "Evil and the Psychoanalytic Tradition," "Human Potential and Human Destructiveness," "Ordinary People and Malevolent Circumstances," "Individual and Systemic Evil," and a concluding chapter that summarizes the book nicely. Cooper draws upon the work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, David Augsburger, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and Langdon Gilkey, just to highlight some. He does a stellar job of integrating these many psychological and theological thinkers, pointing out both strengths and weaknesses without dismissing their work "out of hand."

Early on in the book, Cooper states that he is working with a definition of evil derived from Scott Peck's, which describes "evil as that which destroys the flourishing of life," but goes on to admit that the debate over the use of the word "evil" continues. He shows prowess in the religion and science dialogue by critically analyzing certain scientific thinkers, as shown in the statement, "As so often happens, Freud moves from a scientific method to scientism without fully acknowledging that he has switched an empirical hat for a metaphysical one." Cooper's even-handed treatment of

scientists and theologians is refreshing, and touches on a major concern of religion-science dialogue, that of scholars speaking out of their range of expertise without acknowledging the switch. The text gives a solid overview of psychological and evolutionary thought, covering the past 200 years as it relates to the topic at hand. In addition, the author's use of quotations and endnotes solidify the presentation so that the book reads, not only to educate, but as a source of reference for this dialogue.

Evil has been an overwhelming topic for the brightest minds that history has offered, and it would be impossible to produce a comprehensive description, let alone solution to the multifaceted nature of this topic in a short volume. Cooper has presented a text that focuses on the psychological, giving the reader a fair look at the lay of the land and introducing those without a psychological background to the great names of that tradition. The book is well written, and is an excellent text for anyone interested in evil as it relates to the psychological-theological discussion.

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Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

A Broad Place: An Autobiography. By Juergen Moltmann. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008. 406 pages. Cloth. \$27.00.

Moltmann provides readers with a fascinating journey through the expansive contours of his theological life, "a broad place" (Psalm 31:8). Moltmann belongs to the previous generation's theological giants. Hans Kueng on the Roman Catholic side together with Moltmann on the Protestant side are the two primary continental theologians who most helped to usher in the new global climate in theology. In their generation, theology became noticeably less Eurocentric, due in no small measure to their own openness to learning from and incorporating insights from other diverse perspectives. Of particular interest to those educated in the



last third of the twentieth century, this volume helps situate Moltmann within the theological landscape of Germany in the post-World War 2 era and the emerging movements across the globe—from black liberation theology in the United States to anti-apartheid theology in South Africa, from Latin American liberation theology to Minjung theology in Korea. From modest beginnings growing up in an a-religious family who lived in a counter-cultural settlement, Moltmann was drawn to the study of theology in a prisoner of war camp in Scotland where he was incarcerated until April 1948. His profound questions about death and life were fostered through the innovative theological education that was provided prisoners.

Moltmann's distinctive theological viewpoint burst onto the global stage with the publication of his *Theology of Hope* in 1964. Moltmann's work resonated with the *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s, appealing to Christ's resurrection and the promises of God as the basis for hope. Moltmann's thought encouraged Christians to participate in the transformation of society and the Christian-Marxist dialogue. Seeking to avoid misinterpretation, Moltmann's next major work, *The Crucified God* (published in 1972) reclaimed the theology of the cross to address the agonies of the present age. In a series of further theological contributions, Moltmann located both the cross and resurrection of Christ within a social teaching of the Trinitarian God, always mindful of the social and political currents. His numerous books, involvement in the ecumenical movement, and wide-ranging travels to lecture and teach made him one of the most significant theologians of recent times, a truly global figure.

Throughout the book, the reader can participate vicariously in the theological debates at the end of the previous century and the beginning of a new one. Moltmann offers his theological judgments along the way, such as this comment on America: "But whether God blesses America will become apparent when it emerges whether America is a blessing for the peoples of the world, or their burden and curse; for one is blessed only in order to be a blessing oneself." Theological autobiography, such as this one, is

a wonderful way to learn about and review the history of contemporary theology. Both those familiar with the story and those desiring an introduction will benefit from the tale. Moltmann deserves our ongoing attention.

Craig L. Nesson
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Feminist Theologies: Legacy And Prospect. Edited by Rosemary Radford Ruether. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. vii & 175 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

This volume is a compilation of presentations originally delivered at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California in March of 2005, to celebrate the work of the Center for Women and Religion (CWR) at the GTU. The essays are organized into two parts. The first part gives a detailed history of CWR, with interesting and insightful reflections from three former CWR directors, and the second part includes a variety of essays discussing feminist theologies from different vantage points. As such, this book is of particular interest to those of us who attended the GTU [this reviewer included], and also those who are interested in the development and evolution of what Rosemary Ruether calls "perhaps the first important center of women and religion at a major seminary or consortium of seminaries in the United States (or anywhere.)"

The variety of introductory essays in the second part of the book ensures its relevance for a much broader readership, as they discuss Latina theology, Womanist theology, and Eco-theology, among others. Of particular interest are the essays on Muslim Feminism, in which Nayereh Tohidi discusses the controversial term "Islamic Feminism," and notes the development of feminism within the Islamic world today. Also of particular interest is the essay on "Buddhist Feminist Scholars," in which Sandy Boucher traces the lineage of important feminist scholars working on topics related to the place and role of women in Buddhism. Finally, Mary Hunt has a superb article in which she both examines what feminist/womanist schol-



ars have accomplished thus far in the field of religion, and also describes what she sees as the tasks that still remain before us.

All the essays are well-written, easily accessible, and very interesting, offering helpful suggestions for thinking critically about the role of feminist scholarship in both the academy and the church in the 21st Century.

Kristin Johnston Largen
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women. By Nicola Denzey. Boston: Beacon Press, 2007. xxii + 290 pages. Cloth. \$27.95.

Imagine a competitive world of beautiful murals, wealthy women, and elaborate collections of bones in underground caverns. The catacombs of fourth century Rome are just such a place. In reading Nicola Denzey's book *The Bone Gatherers*, I was reminded of previous visits to the catacombs in Rome, and the ancient city came alive for me. Denzey presents the world of Christian women, predominately from fourth century narratives. She states, "In remarkable ways, the catacombs came to represent women's sacred space – a fact never recognized anymore."

In this text, the tales of ancient Christian women are retold in a series of historical narratives, each piecing together facts in the telling of these stories. In an age of postmodern thought, it is fitting that this Early Church story is conveyed through the narratives of women whom history seems to have forgotten. Denzey reinterprets some of the artistic evidence, treating questions fairly, but persuasively. The book is divided into seven chapters, ranging in title from "Death Takes a Bride" to "Pope Damasus, Ear Tickler." This last chapter is valuable on its own, tracing the reign of Pope Damasus and his reconfiguration of the landscape of Roman Christian piety. Perhaps his intent was not to relegate women to the sidelines in the practice of Christian piety, but this was the result. After Damasus, the venerated martyrs were almost

wholly male. The ideal martyr moved from female to male as the prior veneration of women's chastity was contrasted with men who stood against military service, the "most troubling social demand of the late Roman Empire." In another key thread of the book, female benefactors of the Early Church are given their due, as Denzey explains the Christian patronage system of the time. Women were quite influential in the building of a Christian empire, with one woman's donations totaling around 900 million of today's dollars. Denzey gives solid insight into the patronage system and its value to the women of the time.

Pastors and scholars will find this book helpful in contextually viewing the roles of women in the Early Church. Patristic study is usually negligent in this regard, but the text educates as well as entertains on that point. This volume lays groundwork for future study of church spirituality, especially in Byzantine and Roman Catholic contexts. For those interested in patristics or spirituality, as well as those wishing to better understand historical gender relations in the church, this book is a valuable read.

George Tsakiridis
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas. By Francis Oakley. New York: Continuum, 2005. 143 pages. Cloth. \$39.95.

This book comprises four lectures given by Oakley at the University of Wisconsin Madison, which examine the secularization of political and social theory. Counter to political theorist Leo Strauss, Oakley sees the development of a secular social theory not in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with Hobbes and Grotius, but much earlier in the thirteenth century with the thinking of William of Ockham. Now, Ockham was no secularist. However, Oakley contends that his thinking as volunteerist in orientation makes him the "grandfather" of later thinkers such as Hobbes and Locke. Hence, it is not a stretch to see Ockham as the "father of subjective right,"



what we Americans would call individual liberties or the rights of the individual.

Natural law affirms that humans have access to norms of justice that are natural and universal rather than conventional and provincial. Such norms of justice are species-centered, then, and not ethos-centered. Natural law, as it developed from the Stoics and through the Middle Ages, assumes some form of “ontological essentialism” or realism, that is, that such law is grounded in cosmic, ultimate reality. Most importantly for Oakley, the Middle Ages offered no monolithic viewpoint on such realism; there were a plurality of natural law theories for medieval thinkers and this fact bears upon theories of natural rights in early modernity. The break with the essentialist bias was with the Nominalists who, with their commitment to the untrammled freedom of God, pushed a volunteerism that Neoplatonic thinking inherent in Thomism could not accommodate.

This view of late antiquity drew an analogy between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between nature and humans. For the Stoics, then, the concept of law could envelop both prescriptive and descriptive propositions. Likewise, Augustine reconciled the Neoplatonic god with the God of the Bible. In this light, we encounter a specific conundrum: if the universe is rational, is God willful?, but if God is willful, is the universe rational? The Thomists accentuated God’s reason, while the Nominalists accentuated God’s will. The latter’s affirmation of God’s absolute power underscored the contingency of order in nature. In this regard, they hearkened back to the scriptural Yahweh who limits his power by means of establishing a covenant. For Ockham and the Nominalists, unlike the Thomists, it is God’s will which is the only immutable and objective standard of morality. Acts are good, then, not because they are analogous to truth, beauty, and goodness as such, but because they conform with God’s will. A secondary strain which helped to secularize modern social theory was Machiavelli’s position that reoriented people from the question of how we ought to live to realistic approaches to how people actually live.

This short book is meaty, but offers a rel-

evant critique of the rise of the modern views of ethics. It suggests that modernity is not anti-medieval, but an extension of a certain form of medievalism, Nominalism. While there is no direct correlate between his thesis and ministry, Oakley offers an important theory about how we are to understand the context in which we do our ministries.

Mark C. Mattes
Grand View College

Crisis in the Village: Restoring Hope in African American Communities. By Robert M. Franklin. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. 271 pages. Paper. \$15.

Crisis in the Village issues a call for strategic action to address the critical issues—social, economical, and political—facing the Black community. Identifying three pillars within the African American community, families, churches, and colleges, Franklin offers a developmental approach to framing solutions and strategies, promotes a culture of accountability, and presents a theological foundation which focuses on the territory that exists between individuals and institutions; civil society and its mediating structures.

In authentic “village” fashion, Franklin illuminates the storied backgrounds, experiences, and histories of African-American families, churches, and colleges, and outlines what can be considered wrong and right in each regard. Touching on several contemporary controversies—Bill Cosby’s indictment against the African American community, the prosperity versus prophetic movement within the Black church, and the lack of support for historic Black Colleges and Universities—Franklin investigates the possibilities of a shared, common ground becoming the basis for collective action on behalf of the common good.

Invoking the images, messages, and methods of past leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, W.E.B DuBois, and Booker T. Washington, the strength of *Crisis in the*



Village is that it transcends nostalgia with a framework for the future. In demanding accountability, challenging leadership, and seeking collaboration, *Crisis in the Village* calls for a reconciliatory work that taps into the power of community in an effort to heal, restore, and mobilize Black America.

David L. Everett, Ph.D. Candidate
Luther Seminary

Luther For Armchair Theologians. By Steven Paulson. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004. 224 pages. Paper. \$14.95.

On the heels of the recent resurgence of popular interest in Martin Luther comes this introduction to the theology of the Wittenberg Reformer by Steven Paulson. In recent years, there have been at least 3 biographies of Luther oriented to a popular audience: *Martin Luther* by Martin Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life* by James Nestingen, and *Luther: Biography of a Reformer* by Frederick Nohl. Each of these biographies are helpful for filling in the gaps for those who have seen the 2003 film, "Luther," directed by Eric Till and starring Joseph Fiennes. However these biographies only treat the theology and thought of Luther in a cursory fashion. Paulson's book seeks to fill this gap.

Paulson's book is intended for that audience which does not know Luther's theology but wants to know more. As such, Paulson avoids the minutiae of academic debates about, for example, Luther's understanding of justification or the doctrine of the two kingdoms. That is, he does not engage the Finnish school's interpretation of Luther. In some respects, there is little in this volume that suggests that it could not have been written a generation ago. This does not detract from its usefulness. In some ways it contributes to its usefulness. Readers will find a clear and unwavering presentation of Luther's theology.

The focus or center of Paulson's interpretation is "word" or proclamation. This is a volume driven by preaching and proclamation. How can the gospel be proclaimed? What message is to be proclaimed or preached to God's people? Time

and time again Paulson returns to this theme of the "word." He establishes this theme early in the first chapter (titled "In the Beginning...a Preacher: What Is Proclamation?"): "Martin Luther understood that God not only started and preserved the world's course by speaking but *interrupted* it by speaking a new word. God makes no apology for the abrupt interruption and speaks out of anger and determination in light of what humans have done to creation." Human words and the divine Word are contrasted throughout.

This contrast between the human and the divine points to the other motif of this symphony: anthropology. Paulson suggests that Luther is about God's Word but to do this often requires that he contrast the divine with the human, hence the attention to anthropology. Paulson's presentation of Luther's theology emphasizes "the complete change of the whole person. That [change] could only be accomplished by having the old Adam put to death and a new creature arise."

This volume has its merits and advantages. At the same time, it is somewhat perplexing that Paulson's discussion of vocation is not quite as full as it might be. Given that currently there is so much attention to Luther's teaching on vocation, one might have thought that Paulson might have addressed this more fully. In that same vein, there is little about church order and ministry. Indeed the reader of this volume might leave with the impression that Luther was all about the individual and God, with little sense that Luther saw a place for the community (the body of Christ) in this relationship.

Paulson's volume is a nice contrast to *True Faith in the True God* by Hans Schwarz which has a similar audience in mind. Either of these volumes will serve as useful preparation to Luther's writings (although curiously Paulson does not list the anthology by Timothy Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* in his suggestions for further reading) or a more demanding exposition like *Martin Luther's Theology* by Bernhard Lohse.

David C. Ratke
Lenoir-Rhyne College



Briefly Noted

Ancient Israel. What Do We Know and How Do We Know It? By Lester L. Grabbe (T & T Clark, \$150; hardcover; \$29.95 paperback). This book is not a history as such but an attempt to discuss the issues relating to writing a history of Israel. G. guides the reader through this thicket of questions, giving the pros and cons on each question, but tending toward the so-called minimalist position although he avoids the *ad hominem* arguments that are common in this field today. For each period G. surveys the archeological and textual sources (biblical and inscriptional), identifies the issues under discussion, and then draws a balance in a section called analysis. A few gleanings: Jerusalem was unwalled and unfortified between the 16th to 8th centuries; the Albright thesis of a unified conquest has been abandoned by mainstream scholarship; the spread of alphabetic writing did not antedate the mid-8th century; monotheism was a late development; no one's idea of the united monarchy bears much resemblance to the biblical description; and the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Egypt are contradicted by what we know of Egyptian history. The bibliography is first rate, with forty items by the author himself. RWK

Judges. By Susan Niditch (Westminster John Knox, \$44.95). In this very fresh commentary in the Old Testament Library series, N. detects three voices. The epic-bardic voice tells the stories of heroes supported by Yahweh who battled enemies, sometimes on their own (the rogue Samson) and sometimes with a band of warriors comparable to that of Robin Hood. The Deuteronomistic theological voice attributes successes or failures in war to faithfulness to the covenant, or lack of it, rather than to number of troops, their experience, and their weapons. She thinks this voice is less dominant than is often asserted, and it is critical and suspicious of kings. A third, humanist voice is found in Judges 1 and 17-21,

and it is non-critical of the ancient protagonists. This voice is attuned to the vagaries of power and the transience of military and political control. This voice is nationalistic and interested in showing that Israelites can reconcile even after the worst civil war. The creative translation in this commentary is set up in lines resembling poetry in an attempt to catch its oral-traditional style. RWK

Oxford Bible Atlas. By Adrian Curtis (Oxford, \$35). This is the fourth edition of this atlas that was first published in 1962 and has sold more than 150,000 copies. The color photography throughout this edition is outstanding, and the maps are authoritative. A comparative chronology at the end of the volume enables the reader to correlate the story told in the Bible with events happening in neighboring countries. RWK

Jerusalem's Temple Mount. By Hershel Shanks (Continuum, \$39.95). This lavishly illustrated book by the editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review* covers the period from Solomon to the Dome of the Rock (the latter unfortunately cannot be visited today by non-Muslims). The temple mount has been called the most volatile 35 acres on earth because of Jewish and Muslim claims (some Palestinians even deny the existence of Solomon's or Herod's temple, or allege that the latter was located in Nablus, thirty miles north of Jerusalem). S. begins at the top, so to speak, and discusses first the Dome of the Rock, built five and a half centuries after the Roman destruction of Herod's temple and works down, working through the "interregnum" after the Roman destruction, Herod's temple, the second temple in the late sixth century BCE, Solomon's temple in the tenth century BCE and its archaeological look-alikes at Tell Tainat and Ain Dara, and winding up with a look of Jewish and Muslim traditions about Abraham and the temple mount. Along the way S. deals in his inimitable way with controversies, such as what happened in the tenth century BCE according to archaeologists and recently found inscriptions, some of which may be forgeries. RWK

Preaching Helps

Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday—Pentecost

Preaching John

These “Preaching Helps” take us from Passion Sunday through Pentecost. A friend once agreed to provide commentary on these texts for year B, because he really loves Mark’s Gospel. Settling down to work, he opened the lectionary and found all the readings from John. My friend was somewhat chagrined since, like so many preachers (including me), he finds John challenging to preach.

When my friend Barbara Rossing and I teach our award-winning¹ senior interdisciplinary course, “Preaching John,” I begin my first lecture with this bold statement: Traditionally, in the lectionaries of the Church, the Gospel of John is given the final word. While the synoptic gospels may provide the “history,” the Gospel of John provides the theology. These Preaching Helps illustrate the point. During the Triduum—the Great Three Days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil—John interprets the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection² both in lectionary and liturgy. Maundy Thursday is observed with footwashing (John 13:1-17, 31-35b); on Good Friday we adore the cross as Christ’s glory (John 18:1-19:32). Turning to Easter, while the synoptic gospels are appointed for the Vigil, John 20:1-18 is appointed for Easter Day in all three cycles John receives the final word. Throughout the Easter Season, John is used to proclaim the glory of Jesus Christ.

John regards the resurrection through a particular angle of vision. Rather than treating the resurrection as an episode in the gospel narrative that reveals something new about Jesus, John sees the risen Jesus in the man Jesus. Throughout John’s Gospel, Jesus is understood as both temporal and eternal, human and divine, fully revealing God amidst the realities and confines of history. The first three Sundays of the Easter season concern the resurrection and the risen Lord; we are called to see and believe (like the Beloved Disciple) and not doubt (like Thomas). The last four Sundays concern our life in Christ. Belief entails relationship with both members of the Church and members of the Godhead.

Teaching with Barb Rossing has made John my favorite Gospel. It’s also taught me a couple of cautions when preaching from this book. First, somewhere in all my reading for the course, I found the poignant reminder that there is undeniably an anti-Semitism built into the gospel telling of the events of Jesus’ last days, especially at the hands of John the Evangelist. It is not “the crowd” or “some of the people” or “those who collaborated with

1. In 2007, Barb and I received a Theological Education Renewal Award for “Preaching the Gospel of John: Abundant Life as a Vision of Christian Community” from the Yale Center for Faith and Culture.

2. I am delighted that the services for the Triduum are included in the pew edition of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 258-275.

the Roman occupation” who are the villains; it is “the “Jews.” This has meant, over time, that Holy Week has been the season most productive of hate crimes against Jews. Christian anti-Semitism is part of our tradition, surely a part of which we can only be ashamed, but one that risks perpetuation through the passing on of words (and ritual actions) that escape critique. To remember must include remembering the dark side as well, with an eye to its vigorous amelioration. The kind of remembering that is to shape and form us must be truth-telling. As a start, Barb has taught me to use *Judeans* instead of “Jews” when I read from and preach out of John’s Gospel.

Even as I write that we must “remember the dark side,” I cringe uncomfortably over John’s use of *darkness* and *light*.³ Scholars say that everyone in the ancient world agreed that God is light. But this premise plays differently to people for whom the light of day does not automatically bring safety and the darkness of night does not automatically signal danger. I shudder when I’m reminded that it is painful for someone with dark skin to hear that “God is light, and in God there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Being legally blind, I know firsthand that to walk in the light often hurts. I wear sunglasses both to darken my world so that I can function and to protect my eyes from the light. Left unaddressed, all John’s talk of darkness and light may confuse us instead of proclaiming new life.

These “Preaching Helps” are authored by **Samuel D Giere**, who is ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament and serves as Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. Originally from far northwestern Minnesota (9 miles from the Manitoba border), Sam is a graduate of Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, Wartburg Theological Seminary, and the University of St Andrews, Scotland. He’s had the pleasure of serving as pastor in eastern North Dakota. With a Ph.D. in Old Testament and a deep interest in hermeneutics and the history of interpretation of biblical texts, Sam is committed to dynamic engagement with Scripture and Scripture’s dynamic engagement of the world. He and his wife, the Rev. Amy Current, and their two children live in Dubuque.

I pray that struggling with the Gospel of John will lead you deeply into the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection, particularly during Holy Week when an economy of words must say so much. I also pray that you find joy in knowing how important your preaching is during these holy seasons, both to the world for which Christ died and the Church which is Christ’s resurrected presence in and for that world.

Craig A. Satterlee, Editor of Preaching Helps
<http://craigsatterlee.com>

3. Craig A. Satterlee, “Living by the Word: Groping in Darkness,” *The Christian Century*, Vol. 123 No. 8 (April 18, 2006): 20.

Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday April 5, 2009

Procession with Palms: Mark 11.1-11 or
John 12.12-16
Isaiah 50.4-9a
Psalm 31.9-16
Philippians 2.5-11
Mark 14.1-15.47 or
Mark 15.1-39 [40-47]

There is a stark contrast between how this service begins and how it concludes—a contrast that colors and shapes the lives of Christians over the next week. The contrast is evident in the movement from the crowd's triumphal cries of "Hosanna!" (Mk 11.9), to their shouts of "Crucify him!" (Mk 15:13-14), to the centurion's confession, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Mk 15:39). This contrast is borne upon a narrative, the story that provides the framework for this Sunday, the upcoming week, and our lives.

Great care should be given to the telling of the story on Palm/Passion Sunday. Whether it is by an individual voice or a choral reading, the reading of the story itself, while always important, is ever so significant on this Sunday. In short, preparation of reader(s) for this Sunday is of the utmost importance. The flip-side of this same suggestion is that preachers resist the temptation to *over-preach*. The narrative that encompasses the service can be allowed simply to be told. On a Sunday when the narrative of Jesus' movement to the cross rightly dominates worship, the preaching ought to weigh every word carefully. That said, what does one preach if one is to preach? Consider the second reading—the Christ Hymn of Philippians.

Textual Horizons

Within the context of Paul's Letter to the Philippians and from the beginning of chapter 2, Paul is making a case for unity. "...be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." (2:2b) Is Paul saying that doctrinal agreement is the benchmark for being part of the Christian community? No and yes.

As for the color of the carpet in the church's sanctuary, the kind of coffee brewed for fellowship time, the time of Sunday services, the kind of music used during worship...no.

Yes, insofar as Paul writes: "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." (2:4-5) Taking what may well have been a liturgical text, either a hymn or a creedal statement of sorts, Paul frames this text with the baseline of unity—unity with the mind of Christ.

The hymn then takes over and draws the singers into the particular and cosmic significance of Jesus Christ. This hymn lets us sing of this Jesus... "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." (2:6-7a) While not explicitly in line with John 1, the similarity is there. That the Word is born is integral to the cosmic significance of Jesus Christ.

From within the heart of this week's Palm/Passion narrative, we continue to sing... "And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." (v.7b-8) Who is the one at the heart of the story we walk this week? The crucified Christ, Lord of all.

As our singing continues... "Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him

the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (2.9-11)⁴

Such is the song of Christians amid the Palm/Passion narrative of this Sunday—a song that centers in the cosmic significance of the Jesus of this story—a song of Christ with whom Paul calls us to be like-minded (2.5).

Preaching Horizons

Focusing on this seedbed of early Christology⁵ may seem counter intuitive against the earlier suggestion not to *over-preach* on this Sunday. While there are Sundays open to doctrinal preaching, which in relation to this text could be especially good fun⁶ Palm/Passion Sunday may not be the best time.

Rather, consider the Philippians text as a hymn or a creedal statement used by Christians from the earliest days of the Church. Imagine with your hearers early Christians...first century Christians, Jews and Greeks, male and female, slave and free, singing this hymn of Christ. The words bounce off generations and echo throughout the Church's history. East and West, North and South, the hymn resonates the particular in-breaking of the Son and the cosmic significance of Christ Jesus. SDG

4. Cf. Isa 45.23.

5. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (5 vols.; Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1971-1989) 1.255-258.

6. These verses come up again in the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A, Proper 21/Lectionary 26.

Maundy Thursday April 9, 2009

Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14

Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday is the first movement of “the Three Days” (traditionally, the “Triduum”)—the single liturgy that includes Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter. While the practice of celebrating the Three Days in its fullness is not uniform in the West outside Roman Catholic and Anglican parishes, it seems to be celebrated more widely with each passing year, especially among Lutherans.⁷

Given the variation in local practices of celebrating the Three Days, what is clear is that Christians are not reenacting the crucifixion and resurrection. Throughout it all, Jesus Christ is risen. The horizon of our Christian perspective on liturgy and biblical texts necessarily includes Jesus' resurrection—the assumption that lies at the heart of every weekly gathering of the Christian assembly. Throughout the Three Days, then, Christians gather and recall within the narrative and liturgical forms the mystery of faith.

The liturgy of the Three Days begins with Confession at the outset of Maundy Thursday with no benediction until the close of the Vigil of Easter or Easter Morning. There are three moments of preach-

7. *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2006), the new worship resource of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, includes the specific liturgy for the Three Days. 258-270.

ing within this three-day liturgy. Maundy Thursday is the first.

The texts and liturgical traditions associated with Maundy Thursday are rich—Confession, Passover, Last Supper, foot washing, stripping the altar, etc. It behooves us to allow the liturgy to carry the girth of the symbols and to let the sermon focus on a single text.⁸

Textual Horizons

John's setting of the scene of the gospel pericope is loaded—from the temporal to the theological. As it does every year, the gospel reading tells of the Last Supper, which for John is clearly not a Passover meal, as it is in the Synoptics. Rather, it is a meal that comes "before the festival of the Passover" (13:1)—a setting that makes perfect sense given that John sees Jesus as the Passover lamb.⁹

During this meal scene there are three major foci: Jesus washing the disciples' feet (13:1-20), the narrative surfacing of Judas' betrayal of Jesus (13:21-30),¹⁰ and what is commonly called Jesus' Farewell Discourse (13:31-17:26). The Maundy Thursday reading pulls together portions of two of these—the footwashing and the opening lines of the Farewell Discourse, excising the major focus on Judas' betrayal.

All of what Jesus says and does comes with his (and our) knowledge that all things are converging toward the cross, the premier view of God's love for the world. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he

loved them to the end." With John's simple but masterful use of language, it is unlikely that the parallel between "to the end" (*eis télos*) and Jesus' final words on the cross, "it is finished" (*tetélestai* – 19:30) is an accident. Jesus' crucifixion, his glorification, is the point of convergence of the desires of God for the world and the world's deep need for deliverance.

Jesus' actions and words flow from his recognition "during the supper" that all things have come together—"...knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God..." (13:3). Within this knowledge and moving toward the cross, Jesus takes the role of the servant and washes the disciples' feet. Like Ezekiel,¹¹ Jesus uses actions to communicate. His actions, however, are *not* to take the place of words but to offer a flesh and blood reference to the words that he is about to speak.

From the interchange between Jesus and Peter (13:6-10), it is clear that the disciples do not get it, which in this case is no strike against them. When Jesus asks the question, "Do you know what I have done to you?" (13:12b), you can almost hear a muffled "no."

Jesus' action, his dialogue with Peter, and the explanation suggest a sacramental nature to the action. Jesus' action brings the disciples into his mission (13:8b); likewise, Jesus calls them to do likewise, washing the feet of others (13:14-15).

In the context of the pericope as a whole, this action—this footwashing—is placed in the context of the cross and resurrection and the continued mission of Jesus' followers. When he returns to the Father (13:1, 3, 33), the disciples are given a new

8. Editor's Note: An alternative approach to preaching on Maundy Thursday is to use the readings to provide a mystagogical exploration of the liturgical symbols and actions.

9. Cf. Jn 19:36.

10. Judas' betrayal had begun by the beginning of the Supper, cf. Jn 13:2.

11. E.g. Ezek 4-5.

commandment. “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (13:34b-35). Hence the name of the day. The Latin reads, *mandatum novum do vobis*—a new commandment or mandate I give to you all—a commandment that extends Jesus ministry from the cross and resurrection.

Preaching Horizons

When working with the Maundy Thursday gospel lection, it is beneficial to include footwashing in the service, taking care to walk the fine line—avoiding over-explanation of the liturgical act while at the same time inviting those gathered to enter into the uncomfortable space *and* mandate of this new commandment in this movement of the Three Days in the mystery of faith. SDG

Good Friday April 10, 2009

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalm 22

Hebrews 10:16-25 or Heb 4:14-16, 5:7-9

John 18:1-19:42

As the Three Days continue, the liturgical scene for Good Friday was set the day before. After the Eucharistic meal on Maundy Thursday, the altar is stripped, the worship space made bare, and the assembly takes its leave without benediction, under the pall of silence. The Good Friday gathering begins likewise.

Within the silence, the liturgy is sparse, the story substantial. Like Palm/Passion Sunday, the Gospel narrative, John’s proclamation of who Jesus is, stands largely on its own with little need for comment. A

practical necessity on Good Friday again is good reading and presentation of the texts, especially the Gospel. However the Good Friday Gospel is read, it ought to be done in a way that invites the hearers into the story with few distractions, which practice will help eliminate.

Walking together within the narrative of the mystery of faith, as Christians do during the Three Days, a central question that runs throughout is simply this: Who is this Jesus in the shadow of whose cross we gather?

Textual Horizons

As an arena within which to ponder this question, consider the Johannine conversation with a portion of today’s First Lesson, Isa 52:13-53:12, the Fourth Servant Song from Deutero-Isaiah. While many have helped to illuminate the deep connections between Early Christian understandings of Jesus and the text of Deutero-Isaiah (chs. 40-55), Prof. Richard Bauckham argues convincingly “...that in the early Christian reading of Deutero-Isaiah, the witness, the humiliation, the death and exaltation of the Servant of the Lord are the way in which God reveals his glory and demonstrates his deity to the world. The witness, the humiliation and the exaltation of the Servant are the eschatological salvation event, the new Exodus, by which the unique deity of God is now identified, such that the ends of the earth acknowledge that God is God and turn to him for salvation when they see the exaltation of his Servant.”¹² Broadly speaking and according to Bauckham, Deutero-Isaiah provides the framework for understanding Jesus’ death and resurrection

12. Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism & Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 49.

in relation to God's eschatological consummation of the cosmos revealed uniquely in Jesus'—the Servant's—humiliation and exaltation...his death and resurrection.

Specifically in relation to John's Gospel, Bauckham suggests that Isa 52:13, in particular the Greek version, provided a lens through which John understood... and proclaimed who Jesus was. Two words within the Greek of Isa 52:13 are essential: "Behold, my servant will understand, and he will be lifted up (*hupsōthēsetai*) and glorified (*doxasthēsetai*) greatly."¹³ Bauckham suggests that the "Servant [of Isa 52:13-53:12] is exalted and glorified in and through his humiliation and suffering. This is the exegetical source for John's theologically profound interpretation of the cross as Jesus' exaltation and glorification."¹⁴ Jesus' repeated references to his being lifted up (3:14-15, 8:28, 12:32-34) and his glorification (e.g. 12:23, 13:31-32) provide foundation for Bauckham's reading.

Within John's narrative and theological framework... "Jesus is king in humility (at the entry into Jerusalem), the king in humiliation (before Pilate and on the cross), and the king in death (his royal burial). Jesus is the lord who serves, who enacts the meaning of his death when he washes the disciples' feet, the menial task exclusive to slaves. His kingship consists in his humiliating service to the point of death. Just as he is exalted in his humiliation and glorified in his disgrace, so also he reigns in being the servant. In this way he reveals who God is."¹⁵

13. My translation.

14. Bauckham, 64.

15. *Ibid.*, 67-68.

Preaching Horizons

"Who is this Jesus in the shadow of whose cross we gather?" This is a question that seminary faculties hope new leaders in the Church will be able to address, no matter what portion of Church catholic they are. Will leaders in the Church, lay or ordained, be able to speak of who this Jesus is and tell the story of God's relation to the world as revealed in Jesus in ways that speak to people in their lives, in their contexts, in their minds and guts?

Certainly, the above comments are not intended to be passed on directly as sermon material. Rather, they are intended to provide homiletical fodder for those who preach in the shadow of the cross, especially on Good Friday...fodder for thinking about who this Jesus is...what the cross, the culmination of this day's gospel reading, reveals about who God is in relation to the world...for the whole world....

"Who is this Jesus in the shadow of whose cross we gather?" Again, without benediction, the Christian assembly departs in silence...SDG

The Resurrection of Our Lord

April 12, 2009

Acts 10:34-43 or Isa 25:6-9

Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43

Mark 16:1-8 or John 20:1-18

Around the world, Christians greet this day and one another: "Alleluia! Christ is risen!... He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!" In a world, in lives where sickness, pain, fear, and death are real and can overwhelm, the collective shout of Christians around the world and

throughout time rings out in the face of fear and death.

Textual Horizons

The lectionary offers two possibilities for the gospel reading: Mark or John—two very different narrative witnesses to the first Easter morning. Worth considering when choosing is that reading Mark provides a narrative continuity with Palm/Passion Sunday and John with Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

The Markan account begins as the Sabbath ends (Mk 16:1) at dusk on Saturday. Three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, purchased spices as they prepared to go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body in line with Jewish burial practice. At sunrise on Sunday, the first day of the week, they went to the tomb to perform their duty.

With a twist of drama, Mark says that, as the women are going, they are wondering together about who will move the stone from the entrance of the tomb. The stone, of course, is already moved. Undaunted at this point, the women go in, possibly relieved...one less thing to worry about. Until...

Upon entering, they see the angel, in Mark's language—a young man dressed in white. The word used to describe their reaction in the NRSV is "alarm" (16:5b). To suggest an edge to this word (*exthambethyāsan*), it is a cognate of an ancient Greek word for monster (*thambāma*). Needless to say, they were freaked out.

The angel tells them not to be freaked out and brings them up to speed with the story that they've been living. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth..." The angel fills them in *and* tells them to inform the disciples that "just as he told you,"¹⁶ Je-

sus would see them in Galilee (16:7). The unique and challenging element of Mark's gospel (without either of the later endings) is that the story ends with fear and silence.

The contrast with John's gospel, the other gospel option for Easter B, is stark at many points but in particular in relation to the fear and silence that concludes Mark. John has Peter and the beloved disciple respond to Mary Magdalene's news that the stone has been moved (20:1-2) by running to the tomb, finding it empty, and going home (20:10). Jesus appears to Mary in an intimate, touching encounter outside the tomb (20:11-18) and later that evening behind locked doors to the disciples (20:19-20). Given the contrast, what are we to make of the fear and silence at the end of Mark?

Preaching Horizons

"This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24).

Many preachers experience a particular pressure (sometimes verging on angst) about Easter sermons. Two common and not mutually exclusive causes of this are (1) the significant number of people present who are not in worship otherwise and (2) a worry about explaining the resurrection.

Though not a panacea to all woe and dread, here is a suggestion: Tell the story;

Consider the Second Reading as an example of sorts. Paul writes: "Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved..." (1 Cor 15:1-2a) From this point, albeit in an abbreviated form, Paul tells Jesus' story *in relation to the people in Corinth*. "...that

ference that the women were recipients of Jesus' words.

16. With the plural you, there is a clear in-

Christ died for *our* sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve... (1 Cor 15:3b-5).

Jesus' story is our story insofar as he has called us into it. We are baptized into it. Fundamental to telling the story is that the resurrection of the crucified God both shines a light on our human reality *and* transforms it.

As preachers we are called to tell the story, an act not to be underestimated, of the resurrection of the crucified Christ *as our story...the world's story*. This telling, rooted in the particulars of the text and set within the horizon of the people, community, and world in which we are called to serve, illuminates our darkness, takes away the sting of death, and transforms us in God's mission.

The ending of Mark's gospel, puzzling as it is, draws us into the story, confronts us with how we might respond to it, and leaves open the significance of this earth-shaking moment that resounds throughout time. Alleluia, Christ is risen! SDG

Second Sunday of Easter April 19, 2009

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1:1-2.2

John 20:19-31

While the crisp Alleluias of this year's celebration of Jesus' resurrection still reverberate throughout our sanctuaries, we Christians around the world continue to live in the "not yet," a time and place somewhere

short of full realization of the resurrection promise. Surrounding the clarity of our common cry, "Alleluia, Christ is Risen!" remains a haziness. Just who is this Jesus who rose from death? What does it matter to me, to the parish, to the world?

Textual Horizons

1 John is the source of the second readings throughout the Sundays of Easter...and not a bad place for preachers and their hearers to dwell together throughout these weeks between Easter and Pentecost. Throughout this brief text, more homily than epistle, there is an organic fusion of who Jesus is and the life of the world within the resurrection promise.

Echoing the Logos Hymn in John's gospel (Jn 1:1) borrowing rifts from the likes of LXX Gen 1:1 and LXX Prov 8:22-23, 1 John begins at the beginning. The object of the proclamation here, Jesus Christ, is "from the beginning" (*aparchās*) of the cosmos. What is to follow, then, frames the universe. From these cosmic horizons, the proclamation moves to the intimate. The collective apostolic "we" testifies that this cosmic Christ, the one through whom the world came into being, is the one that they "heard" and "have seen with our eyes" and "looked at and touched with our hands" (1 Jn 1:1). Using words most sparingly, the author of 1 John sings of who this Jesus is—divine and human, cosmic and touchable. The witness here contained is not a novelty or an oddity...a circus sideshow. Rather, this claim has everything to do with life. Life rooted in the Father, revealed in the Son, to be shared with the world.

A thread that runs through the whole of 1 John is the essential connection of the revelation of life in Christ Jesus and fellowship with God and with one another. *Koinonia*, from which the NRSV and NIV

translate “fellowship” also has a semantic edge of “participation” or “sharing.” While the word only appears in the first chapter,¹⁷ throughout the remainder of 1 John this idea of *koinonia* is articulated with the language of love. Jesus’ new commandment¹⁸ is reiterated in 1 John 2:7. This command to love carries the weight of *koinonia* throughout the remainder of the book.

What is unique about this *koinonia* is its rootedness in Christ. The intimate witness of the apostles to their encounter with the cosmic Christ is meant to invite us, John’s “little children” (*teknia mou*, 2:1), into fellowship with God. This fellowship or participation in Jesus Christ completes the joy of the church.

The basic challenge to *koinonia* is deceit of the self, the delusion that we are without sin (1 Jn 1:8), which crescendos at the conclusion of 1 John, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (5:21). While the light/darkness language here may well be an antidote to a Gnosticism,¹⁹ caution has been raised appropriately about overinterpreting light/dark images given how commonplace the image is across cultures and time.²⁰ What is clear in 1 John is that the author is using this common contrastive image to indicate the difference between God and that which is not God. Acknowl-

edging our darkness...acknowledging our sin is key, lest we make Christ a liar (1:10).

At the heart of all this push toward truthfulness, then, is Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice for our sins, which makes our human fellowship possible. Walking in the light... fellowship with one another comes because “the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1:7) and this ultimate act of Jesus is “not ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (2:2). The cosmic nature of Christ is not limited to the beginnings but continues to be for the whole cosmos.

Preaching Horizons

Early in this Eastertide, the movements of 1 John can help to shape our Alleluia chorus. The second lesson for this Sunday holds in tension the cosmic and the personal and the proclamation that in Christ’s atoning sacrifice there is invitation to live in the light... to live in fellowship with one another and with God in Christ.

There is always the danger of deceiving ourselves, of suggesting to ourselves that we do not walk in the hazy grayness of life somewhere between light and darkness. There is good reason that the church in its confessions has often included 1 John 1:8-9, as it calls us to honesty and truth about our human situation and about God’s desires for fellowship with us in Christ.

While the light/darkness images that are employed here can be read as a clear division, this may only be true from a divine perspective. That is, our human nature does not allow us to perceive the sharp distinctions between light and darkness. Martin Luther’s comment here is a humbling one: “Everything that [we] invent in the cause of salvation turns out to be evil.”²¹ Ultimately it is Christ alone who gives life, and from the haziness of human existence it is only to

17. 1 Jn 1:3, 6, 7

18. Jn 13:34, 15:12

19. E.g. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (K. Grobel, trans.; New York: Scriber’s Sons, 1951) 1.170.

20. Cf. R. Bauckham, “The Qumran Community and the Gospel of John,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years After Their Discovery. Proceedings of the Jerusalem Conference, July 20-25, 1997* (ed. L.H. Schiffman, et al.; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society with The Shrine of the Book, 2000) 111.

21. LW 30.226.

the Crucified and Risen Christ to whom we can look for the true light. Alleluia! SDG

Third Sunday of Easter April 26, 2009

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36b-48

“Have you anything here to eat?” (Lk 24:41b) In something as seemingly ordinary as someone eating a chunk of broiled fish, we are brought into Luke’s story of God’s resurrection renewal of all creation. As Jesus “opened” the minds of the disciples to understanding all of Scripture, we are given a glimpse of the presence of the Risen Christ in and around Scripture.

Textual Horizons

Along the lines of last Sunday’s gospel lesson (Jn 20:19-31), Jesus’ first words in this scene are, “Peace be with you” (Lk 24:36b). In contrast to these words themselves, Jesus’ sudden appearance has the effect of wiggling-out the disciples. The Risen Christ’s appearance throws them into individual and corporate turmoil. The turmoil comes against an interesting backdrop that calls for a bit of retrospection.

The omission of v.36a, as the lectionary suggests, may unnaturally disconnect this pericope from the Emmaus story. The two unnamed disciples with whom Jesus walked on the Emmaus Road, for whom Jesus interpreted the Scriptures, and with whom Jesus made himself known in the breaking of bread have returned with their news to Jerusalem. When they arrive into the company of the others, the others are discussing an appearance of Jesus to Simon

Peter (Lk 24:34). Layered upon this conversation comes this news by way of Emmaus of Jesus’ appearance “in the breaking of bread” (Lk 24:35).

Into the midst of this very conversation, Jesus shows up in the midst of them all. He stands among them and says, “Peace be with you.” The greeting appears to have the opposite of its intended effect. As Luke tells it, they thought they were seeing a ghost, literally a “spirit” (*pneuma*).²²

Responding to their fear and doubt, Jesus bids them to look at his hands and feet, presumably at the wounds. He invites them to touch and see. With deep commonality to John’s scene of Thomas’ encounter with the risen Lord,²³ in this portion of the story Luke wants the reader to be clear that Jesus was raised in body.

A poignant culmination of the first portion of the pericope comes as those gathered are internally discombobulated, somewhere between joy and disbelief (24:41a). Into this mix comes Jesus’ simple question, “Have you anything here to eat?” (24:41b) As if to seal the deal...to prove once and for all that he was not a spirit or ghost, Jesus eats a chunk of broiled (interesting specificity) fish among them.

After eating the fish, Jesus turns to the Scriptures and teaches them again that all that is written is fulfilled in him—in particular in his suffering, death, and resurrection. In light of this, “repentance and the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem” (24:46b-47). While still prior to Jesus’ as-

22. While the textual evidence overwhelmingly is that *πνεῦμα* is Luke’s word, Codex Vaticanus (D) has an interesting variation, “phantom” (*fantasma*), which seems to be a scribe’s clarification.

23. Jn 20:26-29.

cension, Jesus' opening of their minds to the meaning of Scripture and the charge to proclaim moves toward the continuation of the story in Acts and the mission of Christ in the Church.

The end of the pericope might be served well by including v.49. While it is just the third Sunday of Easter, Jesus' post-resurrection appearance, his teaching and commissioning his followers are intimately tied to the sending of the Spirit. Luke Timothy Johnson notes the typological parallel here with transfers of ministry from Moses to Joshua²⁴ and from Elijah to Elisha.²⁵ Joshua and Elisha each received the Spirit as they assumed their new role.²⁶ While Pentecost is still over a month off, there is a glimpse here of the significance of Jesus' resurrection appearance and the call of the Church.

Preaching Horizons

While there are many who have gone to great lengths throughout the history of the Church to prove the resurrection, it is in the telling of the story...in being invited into the story that our minds are opened. Whether it is logical proofs or "holy" relics, the story of Jesus is where Jesus encounters us...the breaking of bread is where Jesus encounters us.

Even after Jesus invites those present to look and touch his hands and feet, to experience firsthand the wounds of the cross... signs of his death and signs of his resurrection, they are in a space that includes both joy and fear. When we look around the world, whether the horizon is close to

home or across the globe, there are signs of death all about. The promise of life comes in hearing of Jesus' invitation to look and to touch, in Jesus' opening the minds of his followers to the Scriptures in light of himself, in Jesus commissioning them and, by extension, us to proclaim repentance and forgiveness throughout the whole world. A sign of life comes in the story of a chunk of broiled fish.²⁷ SDG

Fourth Sunday of Easter May 3, 2009

Acts 4:5-12

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

When scanning the news we do not have to look too far to see something that suggests that human history is not a linear progression of improvement. If we are introspective at all, evidence is all around us...and within us...from nation to neighbor, from congregation to community. There are likely glimpses here and there—bright spots. But all in all, humans are inclined toward forgetfulness, selfishness, and ultimately idolatry. During this Eastertide—a time of dwelling deliberately in the promise of the Resurrection—how can our proclamation of Christ crucified inform how we think

27. Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (NIBC 3; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1990) on the significance of Jesus' entrée of broiled fish: "Christian resurrection involves far more than the limited idea of a disembodied spirit surviving a physical death. The resurrection involves physical reconstitution and an undoing of the physical, as well as spiritual, negative effects of sin. Resurrection involves the rehabilitation of the physical order, both for human beings and for the cosmos itself." (355)

24. Deut 34:9.

25. 2 Kgs 2:1-25.

26. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991) 406.

about and live within our relationships, communities, congregations, etc?

Textual Horizons

On a Sunday when two of the readings (Ps 23 and Jn 10:11-18) are rife with familiar shepherd images, consider again working and playing with the lectionary's choice of 1 John for the second reading. As we move through 1 John, more proclamation than epistle, the pericope for this Sunday takes on a communal tone. In the midst of some conflict in which others are proposing opposing viewpoints about Christ and Christian community (2:18-27), 1 John builds up and encourages Christians with a message inextricably rooted in Jesus' command to love²⁸ —a love most visible in Christ's crucifixion (1 Jn 3:16).

Although the pericope starts in the midst of a larger section (2:28-3:24), the first verse (v.16) gets to the heart of the matter. Nevertheless, it may be advisable to alter the pericope boundaries to begin at v.11, as the framework for the reading is again reference to Christ's command to love. Also, the friction that is inherent in the text of 1 John is then retained, e.g. the linkage between hate and murder drawn clearly in v.15. At the heart of this friction section (vv.11-15) is the statement, "Whoever does not love abides in death" (v.14b).

With v.16 there is a pivot from hate-equals-death to death-equals-life both as gift and as example for the believer. What the NRSV translates "we know" in v.16 is a perfect verb (*ëginökamen*) which in this case suggests that 1 John is placing emphasis here "in this," namely in the love that is shown in Jesus' giving of himself on the cross. In stark contrast to the murderous effects of our hatred, in Jesus' death we come to know God's love.

The movement of 1 John here is between the gift of love in Jesus' death and the example of this love. There is a clarity within the logic of 1 John from God's love for the world expressed perfectly in the cross to the believers' response to that love by loving one another. "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses to help?" (v.17)²⁹ Love of brother or sister is intimately tied to God's love for the world...and not only in theory. The imperative in v.18 is clear that love is not only in words and in speech but in action and truth. Luther's point here is well heard, "... it is the duty of Christians to serve, not for their own advantage but for the advantage of the brethren."³⁰ When one acts toward another to receive something in return it is not action in love.

The pericope concludes with yet another commingling of belief and love, and with a linguistic antithesis with v.14b, "whoever does not love abides in death." The commandment is that we believe in the name of God's Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another, such belief and love are abiding not in death but in love and in Christ Jesus (v.24).

Preaching Horizons

Allowing the pericope boundaries some wiggle room (as the lectionary serves the church's proclamation of the Word as opposed to the church serving the lectionary), consider including vv. 11-15. It is difficult to talk with substance about this self-giving love of God in Christ Jesus within which believers are commanded to believe and live and move without having the alternative at hand. Within the integrity of 1 John itself

28. Cf. John 13:34, 15:12.

29. Cf. James 2:1-17.

30. LW 30:279.

there is clear articulation of the law.

“Whoever does not love abides in death” (v.14b). These few words cut like a knife to the heart of the human situation. It does not take long to allow this abstract idea to take on flesh as we scan the world, the community, the pews, the mirror... Death is not relegated to the graveyard.

In contrast to this horizon of death, Christ’s self-giving death *is* both gift and example. Christ has given himself on the cross for the sins of the world (2.2). In spite of our weak hearts (3.20), we are called to live in and out of this cruciform love for the world. To borrow from Bonhoeffer, “Christ’s priestly work becomes the basis for our own.”³¹

We stand in need of the proclamation of the Crucified and Risen Christ as gift first and also as example...as God’s love for the world...as God’s love which abides in us in faith...as God’s love which undergirds our memory and our action toward one another. SDG

Fifth Sunday of Easter May 10, 2009

Acts 8:26-40

Psalm 22:25-31

1 John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8

In addition to being good fun to read and ponder, the little story in Acts 8 is a glimpse into the work of the Spirit around Scripture and the proclamation of Christ...work of the Spirit that creates faith and renews community.

31. D. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church* (DBW 1; J. von Soosten, trans and ed; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 243.

Textual Horizon

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch comes shortly after Stephen has been martyred (7:58-60). With Stephan’s death, which had Saul’s seal of approval, a persecution began against the church in Jerusalem (8:1). A result of this persecution was that all but the apostles left Jerusalem.³²

Philip, one of the seven identified earlier as a deacon (6:1-6), was one of these who were dispersed—actually diaspora-ed from Jerusalem. The whole of Acts 8 is about Philip’s ministry first in Samaria and then in this Sunday’s First Reading somewhere along the road between Jerusalem and Gaza—as Luke clarifies, “a wilderness road” (8:26b).

The story is bookended with intriguing elements of divine intervention. At the outset, an angel of the Lord directs Philip to this wilderness road. What transpires is an action scene. Along the road and along with Philip, we encounter the Ethiopian eunuch³³ en route to his home, Ethiopia. A practitioner of Judaism from among the Diaspora, this treasurer for the Candace, queen of Ethiopia, has been worshipping in Jerusalem. While not entirely clear, the scene that Luke paints has the eunuch seated in his chariot reading aloud from Isaiah 53 as the chariot rolls along the wilderness road.

Philip, at the behest of the Spirit (8:29),

32. After the apostles heard that the Samaria “had accepted the word of God” (8:14), Peter and John leave Jerusalem to minister among the Samaritans.

33. That this fellow was called a “eunuch” likely indicates that his testicles had been removed. Eunuchs, literally men who are bed (*eune*) -able (*eco*), were entrusted with caring for women and were often court officials (e.g., Herodotus 1:117, 2 Kgs 23:11), as in this particular story. H.G. Lidell, R. Scott, and H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. (9th edition with revised supplement; Oxford, 1996) *s.v.*

runs up to the chariot. Jogging alongside, he inquires (with a little imagination, presumably Philip had to shout a bit to carry his voice over the road noise), “Do you understand what you are reading?” Presumably shouting back, “How can I, unless someone leads me?” comes the reply.

We are never told that the chariot stops, so it seems quite possible that Philip, at the Ethiopian’s invitation, hops in from behind while the chariot is moving and sits down beside him. As they bump along the desolate road in an irregular charioted-type of community, Scripture becomes the focal point. In particular, he is reading a portion commonly known as the fourth of Deutero-Isaiah’s Servant Songs.³⁴ Luke, our story-teller, uses the Greek version of Isa 53:8. This is of interest because the Greek version, which asserts that the servant was taken up (*airō*) from the earth, may draw clearer lines between the Servant Song and Jesus’ crucifixion and/or ascension. Whatever stake one wants to put in the use of the Septuagint in this instance, imagining this scene in Acts as Luke presents it, then, may well include the Ethiopian reading from the Greek text of Isaiah.

As if on cue, the question comes, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” (8:34) From the Ethiopian eunuch’s logical, faithful question about Scripture, Philip, beginning with this text, proclaims Jesus. While the NRSV translation is not incorrect, another rendering of the end of v.35 is that Philip is “proclaiming the good news, Jesus to him.”

Evidently, this proclamation of Jesus works faith in this man. As they are still bumping along the road, the eunuch sees water and desires to be baptized, to become

part of this proclamation of Jesus... this life in Christ. Concluding again with some work of the Spirit reminiscent of Ezekiel’s story,³⁵ Philip, upon baptizing the eunuch, is taken away by the Spirit of the Lord. The newly baptized Ethiopian eunuch goes away rejoicing, and Philip ends up to the west near the Mediterranean, where he continues to travel and proclaim.

Preaching Horizons

It is unlikely that this is a story about Gentiles. While it is within the realm of possibility that the Ethiopian eunuch was a Gentile interested in the worship of the Lord, it seems unlikely given the deliberate attention that the faith and reception of the Holy Spirit by Cornelius and his house receives later.³⁶ Assume for a moment, then, that the Ethiopian eunuch is a practitioner of Judaism. If this is the case, he represents the dynamic renewal of Israel at the edges of the Diaspora and at the edges of the Torah.³⁷

At the heart of this story is the proclamation of Jesus—proclamation which is at the heart of the Spirit’s activity. With this ethnically foreign yet religiously at home VIP, it is the work of the Spirit that brings faith from this encounter around Scripture. Open and seemingly honest conversation about and around Scripture is where the Spirit is at work—work that leads to baptism and rejoicing. SDG

35. E.g., Ezek 37:1.

36. Acts 10:44-48. Eusebius, writing in the early 4th c. CE, suggests otherwise commenting that tradition says that the Ethiopian eunuch is the first Gentile convert, cf. *Hist. Eccl.*, 2.2.13.

37. As he was a eunuch, it likely that he would have been excluded from the Temple, cf. Deut 23:1.

34. LXX Isa 52:13-53:12.

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 17, 2009

Acts 10.44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5.1-6

John 15.9-17

Consider a few words from the middle of the past century...words that still ring true today in many parts of North America: "I belong to a generation that finds very little that is meaningful in the teachings of the Church concerning Jesus Christ. It is a generation largely in revolt because of the general impression that Christianity is essentially an other-worldly religion, having as its motto: 'Take all the world, but give me Jesus.'"³⁸ The words were first published in 1949 by Dr. Howard Thurman, an African American grandson of slaves, theologian, and civil rights leader, in his work, *Jesus and the Disinherited*. While it may be that things have changed since Thurman first penned this book, things also remain the same. Thurman's words testify to a perception that the Church's teachings about Jesus had forgotten either how to articulate why Jesus matters to the world or simply that Jesus does matter. Central to Thurman's observations is the co-opting of Jesus and the distortion of his message by those with the power. He writes:

"For years it has been a part of my own quest so to understand the religion of Jesus that interest in his way of life could be developed and sustained by intelligent men and women who were at the same time deeply victimized by the Christian Church's betrayal of his faith."³⁹

38. Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon, 1976) 29.

39. *Ibid.*, 30.

A word or two from 1 John...

Textual Horizons

Faith and love are two inseparable foci of this portion of 1 John. Specifically, this faith is trust that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (5:1, 5). Faith, in the terms of this pericope, has birth qualities...dynamic, generative qualities. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" (5:1a, NRSV). The translation here "has been born," while not incorrect, can be unpacked a bit. The force of the perfect (*gegennātai*) in the NRSV translation focuses on the past-ness of the action. Consider the nuanced difference when thinking about this verb in terms of "is born," which focuses on the present impact of the perfect more along the lines of the formula so often used in the New Testament to introduce quotations from the Old Testament that have present significance, "it is written" (*gegraptai*). Such a shift, subtle though it is, indicates the present force of the generative nature of faith in Jesus.

This dynamic faith in Jesus is intimately tied with love, the main thread that runs throughout 1 John. The second half of 5:1 goes a bit cryptic and hence leaves doors open and questions unanswered. My rough translation is, "...and everyone who loves the begetter/father loves also the ones who are born of him." Calvin makes a suggestion that is worth recalling here, that the purpose of this text "was no other than to trace up brotherly love to faith as its fountain."⁴⁰ Then in a radical move, Calvin strongly suggests that the love spoken of in 5:1 is not to be directed only to those with faith but to all. 1 John "teaches us, as it were by this first exercise, to love all without ex-

40. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (J. Owen, trans. and ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948) 251.

ception, when he bids us to make a beginning with the godly.”⁴¹

From this point, 1 John reiterates this organic connection between faith and love. How do we know what we’re doing? By this text, we know that we love God’s children... all people by Calvin’ extension... whenever we love God and keep God’s commandments. This commandment, not to be mistaken (at least for those outside Israel) for the Mosaic Law, is to believe in the name of Jesus Christ and to love one another.⁴² This faith in the name of Jesus flows from God’s love for us. “We love because he first loved us” (4:19).

Of course, 1 John (like so many other biblical texts) resists too much systematizing. If one were to try to connect all the dots, the complexity of the picture would be easily dissected by Occam’s Razor. Rather, with images of baptism and crucifixion (5:6), it is more accurate to say that 1 John goes to great pains to hold together God’s love for the world as seen in Jesus’ crucifixion and the fundamental notion that faith in Jesus—faith which flows from God’s love for the world—anticipates love of one for another.

Preaching Horizons

Fear, hatred, the absence of real fellowship...these are things Howard Thurman identified as impediments to life, impediments all too often articulated in the language of religion. Despite change over the last nearly sixty years since the publication of *Jesus and the Disinherited*, many things remain the same. Many, whether within the Church or without, still associate the Church with oppression and/or complacency and quietism.

41. Ibid.

42.1 Jn 3:23, see also 4:21.

Jesus. Love. Faith. Contrary to perception, which the Church has far too often invited and perpetuated, Jesus matters. SDG

Seventh Sunday of Easter May 24, 2009

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

Psalms 1

1 John 5:9-13

John 17:6-19

Jesus’ followers and their witness in the world become the focus on this final Sunday of Eastertide. In the narrative framework of Luke-Acts, the Holy Spirit has not yet come. By way of this story at the outset of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke invites his readers, us, into the core of what it means to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. While the First Reading throughout Easter has come from the book of Acts, it is on this Sunday when the narrative sequence of Luke-Acts and that of the liturgical calendar converge in a movement toward Pentecost.

Textual Horizons

Luke, writing again to Theophilus,⁴³ picks up in Acts where the gospel story has left off—at the ascension. Trying to sort things out, the apostles are concerned about the restoration of Israel. After Jesus’ resurrection, they wonder if they can expect such a thing. Jesus pushes their question to the side and says, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (1:7-8)

43. Lk 1:3, Acts 1:1.

After Jesus' ascension, his followers return together to the upper room in Jerusalem to pray. Prior to the beginning of this Sunday's pericope, the disciples are again⁴⁴ named. This list indicates explicitly that there were "certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers" (1:14). It does not, of course, include Judas. Judas' absence provides the impetus for this Sunday's reading and gives Luke an opportunity, by way of story, to speak of the completeness of the Church's initial witness *and* the purpose of the witnesses.

In these in-between-days of prayer, Peter stood among them and spoke. Both NRSV and NIV render the Greek "brothers" (*en mesō tōn adelphōn*) as "believers" (1:15). Not to begrudge inclusivity at all, the picture that Luke paints here seems to suggest that Peter speaks in the midst of the eleven and, Luke adds, that there was a crowd of about 120 folks (literally, names). Reflecting the earlier list of those gathered (1:13-14), it seems certain that the whole of the crowd would have included both women and men.

The reason for Peter's speech is to deal with the legacy and absence of Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus.⁴⁵ Thoroughly rooted in Jewish traditions of the day, Peter interprets Judas' betrayal and ultimately his demise in light of scripture, in particular the psalms of David (1:16).

The lectionary boundaries should be understood as semi-permeable. That is, the bits and pieces that are left out (vv.18-20), while not absolutely essential, are important to Luke's narrative and, frankly, inter-

esting bits of the story. In addition to details of Judas' death (while a bit gory, imagine ears perking-up), the flesh of v.16 comes in v.20, where Peter quotes Ps 69:25 and Ps 109:8.⁴⁶ In short, Judas' story is written in the larger Scriptural story. Both the curse of where he dwelled and the need for him to be replaced are written in Scripture. And indeed, his replacement returns the number of apostles to match the number of the tribes of Israel.

Presumably, among the crowd there are some who have been with the group from Jesus' baptism through his ascension. In Peter's articulation of the qualifications for the one who would replace Judas comes a central key: "...one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection" (1:22b). Two are offered *to God* to replace Judas, Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. One might wonder at this point, if there were two qualified candidates to participate in the ministry of the gospel, why not take both? Joseph called Basabbas, the one not chosen, is heard from again in Acts, whereas Matthias, the chosen, does not appear again in Acts or elsewhere in Scripture. There is a symbolic importance here—a wholeness that is not reflected in the number thirteen. Rather, the wholeness is twelve reflecting the twelve tribes of Israel. While not militarily or politically, by the divine choice of Matthias and the return to the wholeness of twelve, the apostles' question to Jesus (1:6) is answered at least in part.⁴⁷

Preaching Horizons

With the commemoration of Jesus' Ascension (this cycle on Thursday, 21 May

44. Lk 6:14-16.

45. Note the distinction between Judas son of James and Judas Iscariot that Luke makes in Lk 6:16. The story of Judas' betrayal is told in Luke 22.

46. As a side note, Peter/Luke is not working directly with the Septuagint [LXX Ps 68:26, 108:8b] at this point but seems to be translating from either Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek.

47. Cf. Lk 22:28-30.

2009), Jesus has promised the Holy Spirit to his followers. (1:8) As with Palm/Passion Sunday, the story of Ascension, the replacement of Judas, and the Day of Pentecost (though not concentrated on one day) is a story that can draw the hearer in without much comment. This story of the earliest days of the Church as we know it is not well known and important to tell, as it is our story insofar as it is the Church's story. Central to the story is the completeness of the apostles' witness *and* that the apostles and by extension the Church is called to witness together to the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1:22b). SDG

Pentecost May 31, 2009

Acts 2:1-21 or Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Romans 8:22-27 or Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

In many sanctuaries, worshippers will notice a marked change in color from the whites of the past fifty days of Easter to the fiery reds of Pentecost. Amidst the obvious changes of color there is the story of the genesis of the Church—a story with multiple layers that are fertile soil for proclamation.

Textual Horizons

The coming of the Holy Spirit is set on the day of Pentecost. Working within the traditions of the Judaism of the day, the festival that this day marks is Shavuot, literally a festival of “weeks.”⁴⁸ One of three festivals that likely originated as harvest festivals, Shavuot took on the Greek name Pentecost,

48. Exod 34:22, Deut 16:10. Also known in the Old Testament as Festival of the Harvest (Exod 23:16) and the Day of First Fruits (Num 28:26).

derived from the clarification that Shavuot is seven weeks but that it continues one day past the seventh week.⁴⁹ The count of the weeks begins at Passover.

A shift takes place within Judaism from Shavuot being a particular harvest festival to a commemoration of the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It is not clear when exactly this takes place. While there are hints at such a shift by the mid-2nd century BCE,⁵⁰ there is no particular evidence of this within the Old Testament.

When thinking about Pentecost as the setting for the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts, it seems quite likely that this latter layer of meaning for the festival is at work both chronologically and theologically. Avoiding the way of the Quartodecimen controversy, the theological implication possibly intended by Luke could well be summarized: Passover/Shavuot equals Crucifixion/Pentecost. That is, the deliverance of God's freeing the Israelites from bondage in Egypt is analogous to Jesus' death on the cross; and the giving of the Torah to Moses is analogous to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Also in play here is relation of the Spirit and fire. Recall Luke's portrayal of John the Baptist. Prior to Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist says: “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk 3:16). While the tongues of fire resting upon each of those present (presumably the apostles and other women and men—Acts 1:14) may recall any number of analogous Old Testament

49. Septuagint Lev 23:15-16. Jewish use of the Greek “Pentecost” to refer to Shavuot is found beginning in the late 3rd – early 2nd century BCE, cf. Tobit 2:1.

50. Cf. *Jubilees* 6:17-19.

images, it does seem that within the narrative of Luke-Acts there is a symmetry between John's words at Jesus' baptism and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The fire imagery begins to get quite interesting in relation to the giving of the Torah/coming of the Spirit analogy when one considers the observations of Luke Timothy Johnson, who argues that Luke's portrayal of Jesus is as typology of Moses and the fact that fire can be a symbol for the Torah in early Judaism.⁵¹

The picture painted by Luke of the coming of the Holy Spirit...the birth of the Church is set against the background of this type, possibly an interpretive transformation of this type to include Jesus deliverance of the world and the Church's entrustment with God's words for the world in all its diverse languages and cultures. In explanation of this weird scene (cf. 2:13), Peter turns to the words of the prophet Joel (2:28-32) that speak of the world being turned upside-down.

Preaching Horizons

"What does this mean?" (2:12b) Not a bad question, in my estimation, from those who were observing this particular Pentecost in Jerusalem. For that matter, thinking

that these Spirit-ed folks were drunk probably wasn't all that bad a remark either. In addition to the richness of the text itself, the Church's annual marking of Pentecost begs the question, "What does this mean?"

Recalling the Acts text from last Sunday, the job description for Judas' replacement and presumably for all the apostles and possibly all the followers of Jesus is to "become a witness with us to [Christ's] resurrection." (1:22b) Does this change after the rush of wind, tongues of fire, and sudden multilinguality? It doesn't seem so. Shortly after the quote from Joel that concludes this Sunday's pericope, Peter states, "But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held by its power" (2:24).

The coming of the Holy Spirit calls human beings by means of faith "to freely and actively participate in the work of God," according to Karl Barth's explication of the Apostles' Creed.⁵² In light of Luke's story of this particular Pentecost, the Church proclaims that the news of Jesus' resurrection...this good news...the word of life is able to be communicated and heard in all languages and, by extension, all cultures of the world. SDG

51. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992) 46-47.

52. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959) 137.

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