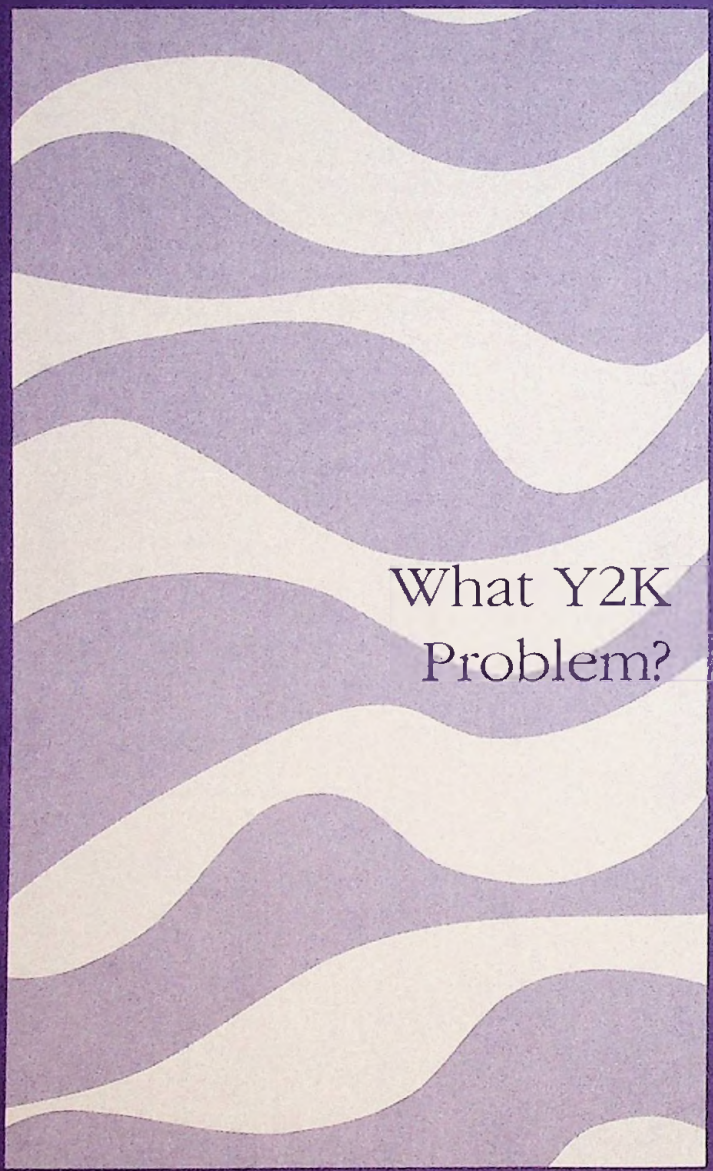
February 2000 Volume 27 Number 1



What Y2K Problem?

CURRENTS in Theology and Mission

Currents

in Theology and Mission

Published by
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

in cooperation with
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
rklein@lstc.edu
Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Assistant Editor: **Peggy B. Eldredge**
currents@lstc.edu
Editor of Preaching Helps: **Robert H. Smith**
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
duensmith@aol.com
Editors of Book Reviews:
Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0752)
ekrentz@lstc.edu
Kathleen Billman
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0721)
kbillman@lstc.edu
Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary (319/589-0212)
clnessan@aol.com
Circulation office: 773/256-0751
currents@lstc.edu

CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (ISSN: 0098-2113) is published bimonthly (every other month), February, April, June, August, October, December. Annual subscription rate: $15.00 in the U.S.A., $20.00 elsewhere. Two-year rate: $29.00 in the U.S.A., $39.00 elsewhere. Three-year rate: $42.00 in the U.S.A., $57.00 elsewhere. Published by Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a non-profit 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 *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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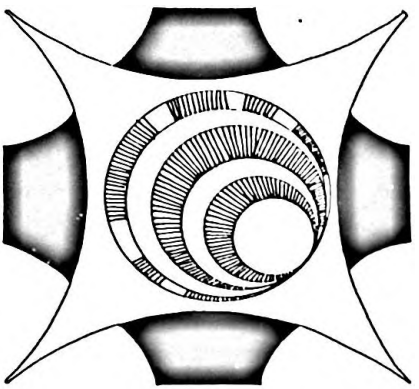

What Y2K Problem?

If you are reading this, Peggy Eldredge's computer did not blow up, the Paxton Printing Company is still solvent, and the Postal Service is still delivering the mail. After the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1999, and a second after that hour in January, 2000, the vast majority of computers throughout the world hummed merrily along, deciding between endless series of zeros and ones. You can now throw out all those jugs of water from the refrigerator and spend the extra money you had hidden in your sock drawer. Of course, if you aren't reading this until March, 2001, the worst of the Y2K bugs did its ugly thing.

"Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor yet the last to lay the old aside." So goes the old, wise couplet, reminding us that church leaders must negotiate between change for the sake of change and the church's seven last words: "We've never done it that way before." We proclaim the truth once delivered to the saints *and* the truth into which the Holy Spirit will lead us during the third Christian millennium. We will need all the wisdom of the past if we are to address in a new way the challenges of the present and the future.

Mark C. Mattes introduces us to the life and thought of that splendid Danish scholar and hymnwriter, N. F. S. Grundtvig. He started out as a Christian apologist, but then, thanks to reading Irenaeus, he recognized the importance of Christian oral tradition in establishing churchly identity and spiritual vision. His was a life-affirming response to the life-denying, super-spirituality of Scandinavian Lutheran Pietism. For Grundtvig one should be a human first and then a Christian. One must be able to become aware of one's natural, native, or created life-instinct before it is any good to tell someone about everlasting life. The distinctive Christian social ethic is to find ways to aid humanity in its quest for genuine self-affirmation and advancement. A social prophet and renewer of society, Grundtvig believed that the old humanity is not worthless. Rather, it is worthwhile and precious, and it can be transfigured by means of the Christian gospel.

Several years ago **Carolyn Riehl** interviewed thirty-five gay and lesbian Lutherans, who also happen to serve in rostered ministries in the ELCA. She explains carefully her methodology in identifying and conversing with these men and women, and then she lets them tell their own stories. Thus we hear of their background in the Lutheran Church, their call to ministry, their understanding of their own sexuality, how they "came out," their relationship to God and church policies, and how all this affects their ministries, their bishops, and their congrega-

tions. This essay makes clear that the current debate is not an abstract, hypothetical discussion about a situation that may emerge at some time in the future. Printing of this essay in *Currents* is at least in part a response to the recent invitation of the Division for Ministry of the ELCA for the seminaries to take the lead in helping the church address the theological and practical issues that are at stake. We welcome written responses from our readers regardless of where they stand on these issues.

Ronald Baesler asks what justification by grace through faith might mean in Puerto Rico and quotes a colleague's answer: "It means that we can really be Puerto Ricans." Two factors emerge in Latin America that challenge the doctrine of justification: hunger and insignificance. The first is not so much a problem in Puerto Rico, and the second results in efforts by many to prove the contrary. But search for power and greatness represents a negation of who Puerto Ricans really are as a people. In justification God has declared an end to the anxious search for significance. This doctrine offers a new vision of life: life measured not by greatness and power but by joyful, free service and self-giving love.

Jay C. Rochelle considers how we might honor the Jews in Christian preaching. After all, Judaism is the mothering ground from which we emerge as children in the faith. It's partly a language problem—"Old Testament" and "B.C / A.D.," for example. But it is also important that we not get caught up in the early church's polemic against the Pharisees or follow Marcion in seeing no use for the Prime Testament. Christianity may indeed be the most materialist of all religions, and this is especially true if we honor our Jewish origin. Preaching that can honor the dialogical voices in Scripture will explore the plurality of voices that emerge from that shared story and seek to tell a common story of life in God.

Kristin Johnston Sutton reflects on her and our vocations as she responds to a tragic story of a woman who starved herself and her children in the name of the Holy Spirit. A craving for satisfaction seduces us into the belief that what we so desperately want is also what God wants for us. We tend to value our own will over God's will, making our own voice the deciding one. Instead, we should pray for the courage to trust God's call for our own lives and not replace it with a calling of our own.

By the time you read this I hope the Y2K problem is up there on the shelf with my Pet Rock and my Nehru jacket. This year, this century, and this millennium will bring plenty of fears and sadness, and Christians will need to continue to rely on the Lord of gladness even if, and especially when, the storms may gather.

Yea, whate'er I here must bear,
Still in thee lies purest pleasure,
Jesus, priceless treasure!

—Ralph W. Klein, Editor

N. F. S. Grundtvig's Approach to Christian Community and Civic Responsibility

Mark C. Mattes
Grand View College
Des Moines, Iowa

A perennial concern of Christian social ethics is the attempt to discern the best paradigm for relating the Christian faith and life to wider culture. H. Richard Niebuhr's typology[1] of how Christ relates to culture, i.e., "Christ against culture" (sectarian), "Christ above culture" (Roman Catholic), "Christ transforming culture" (Reformed), "Christ of culture" (liberal Protestant), and "Christ and culture in paradox" (Lutheran) continues to provide a helpful framework in which to understand the role of the Christian ethos in public life. One important interpretation of this latter type (Christ and culture in paradox) is that of the nineteenth-century Danish church leader and scholar Nicolaj F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), who in a poem once expressed his mature perspective on the relationship between faith and culture as "Human first and then a Christian (*Menneske først og Kristen så*)."[2] For Grundtvig, this phrase encapsulates the proper relationship between the Christian life and social ethics. He believes that the development of one's humanity is a crucial prerequisite for the task of Christian discipleship and that due to this truth, Christians should strive to advance human self-awareness in the public realm. This thesis implies three important ramifications: (1) Grundtvig's Irenaeus-inspired perspective on the gospel as powerfully life-affirming is capable of unleashing potential for the development of human social welfare; (2) Grundtvig's emphasis on the person as an individual-in-community can offer a corrective to the excessive individualism that plagues contemporary American life; and (3)

[1] See *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

[2] See *Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Johannes Knudsen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 140–41. Not much of Grundtvig's prodigious corpus has been translated into English. In addition to the *Selected Writings* there is also available *Selected Educational Writings*, ed. Max Lawson (The International People's College and The Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark, 1991) and *What Constitutes Authentic Christianity?*, trans. Ernest D. Nielsen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). Some of Grundtvig's many hymns can be found in *A Heritage in Song*, ed. Johannes Knudsen (Askov, MN: The Danish Interest Conference, 1978). I am grateful to the Rev. Willard Garred for help with certain Danish terminology.

Grundtvig's perspective on civic responsibility might lead us to consider ethical issues as questions about the best stewardship of human life and not only as questions of justice. Grundtvig's mature reflection on civic responsibility is intertwined with his intellectual and churchly career,[3] his views on Christian authority, divine revelation, and community, and his view on how Christianity interrelates with his view of culture or, in his word, "folk life (*folkelighed*)."

Grundtvig's intellectual and churchly career

Several distinctive spiritual and intellectual movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries influenced the young Grundtvig, including Pietism, Rationalism, and Romanticism. Grundtvig's father, a dedicated Danish priest, was a pietistic, "penitential" Lutheran whose ministry in the village of Udby focused on preaching a message of repentance and conversion, godly living, and honoring God in public worship. While Grundtvig's father inculcated this form of piety in his children, he also allowed the child Nicolaj access to his library and with that the opportunity to investigate the wider world. Later, as a young intellectual, Grundtvig's childhood faith was shattered by Rationalism's criticism of biblical miracles and of the Bible as an inerrant, historically accurate text. More important, Romanticism's affirmation of national identity, the human spirit, the gamut of human emotions, the heritages of medieval and pre-Christian Europe, as Grundtvig learned it through his scholarly cousin, Henrik Steffens, helped Grundtvig chart his intellectual career as a linguist, poet, and historian. After passing his University examinations in theology in 1803 he began an extensive study of Old Norse and Icelandic that would serve as an intellectual focus for the rest of his life. The early results of this study appeared in 1808 with his book on Norse mythology, *Nordens Mytologi*.

The young Grundtvig was beginning to blossom intellectually; however, his aging father was unable to fulfill his pastoral duties at Udby, and both of Grundtvig's parents were urging him to assist his father in his need. With some hesitancy Grundtvig sought ordination. Grundtvig's trial sermon, preached in March of 1810 and which the university examiner passed with high marks, was published under the title "Why has the Lord's word disappeared from his house?" Grundtvig's sermon passionately denounced the clergy of Copenhagen for their inability to preach the gospel effectively. Leading churchmen were offended with Grundtvig's attack, and they successfully sought to marginalize his ministry for several years. The prospect of ordination forced the issue of where Grundtvig himself stood religiously. He was troubled by the rationalistic criticisms of orthodox Christian faith. The anticipation of returning to his childhood home, symbolizing the conservative pietistic faith in which he was

[3] For studies of Grundtvig's life see Hal Koch, *Grundtvig*, trans. Llewellyn Jones (Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Press, 1952); Johannes Knudsen, *Danish Rebel: A Study of N. F. S. Grundtvig* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1955); Ernest D. Nielsen, *N. F. S. Grundtvig: An American Study* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1955); Arthur M. Allchin, *N. F. S. Grundtvig: An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1997); Kaj Thaning, *N. F. S. Grundtvig*, trans. David Hohnen (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1972); Poul Dam, *N. F. S. Grundtvig*, trans. Reginald Spink (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press, 1983); and *N. F. S. Grundtvig: Tradition and Renewal*, ed. Christian Thodberg and Anders Pontoppidan Thyssen and trans. Edward Broadbridge (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1983).

The prospect of ordination forced the issue of where Grundtvig himself stood religiously.

raised, aggravated his need to define and to establish his own faith stance. By New Year 1811 Grundtvig was suffering what many today would call a nervous breakdown. His pietistic father would recognize his symptoms as that of *Anfægtelser*,[4] turmoil over one's sins and the recognition that one needs to receive salvation. The outcome of Grundtvig's inner struggle was conversion, the conviction that he could not live without Christ; thus the prodigal returned to the pietistic faith of his father.

After his father's death in 1813 Grundtvig returned to Copenhagen and pursued a literary career. Naturally, his return to conservative Christianity influenced his studies. As a Christian intellectual confronting an increasingly secular outlook among educated Northern Europeans, he took up the mantle of an apologist. As a historian he saw history as a field which testifies to God's work in the world. In 1812, 1814, and 1817 he published his *World Chronicles*, a unified, but not wholly objective, presentation of European history as the theater of God's activity. This attempt at an overt defense of Christianity on historical grounds barred him from University History appointments, which he sought. While not well received as a historian, the young Grundtvig succeeded as a linguist. He translated three major texts between 1815 and 1821: (1) *Beowulf*, (2) Saxo Grammaticus's *The Chronicles of Denmark*, and (3) Snorri Sturluson's *The Chronicles of the Kings of Norway*.

In 1822 he was appointed to the prestigious position of assistant pastor at the Church of Our Savior (*Vor Frelsers*) in Copenhagen. Here Grundtvig's work as a Christian apologist[5] fully emerged. Grundtvig wanted a Christianity that was grounded in apostolic faith and life. As much as Grundtvig treasured the Bible, he recognized that the Bible might not serve as the best basis for securing the apostolic faith of the church since historical critics were relentlessly challenging the Bible's historical accuracy. Grundtvig's study of the ancient church, particularly the thought of the early bishop Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130—c. 200),[6] suggested that apostolic faith could thrive in the church by means of the oral tradition independent of the Bible as we now understand it. The church existed and succeeded for several hundred years prior to the official canonization of writings known as the New Testament. Grundtvig's religious insight of the importance of the Christian oral tradition as establishing a sense of churchly identity and spiritual vision for early Christians was paralleled by his studies of Scandinavian myths, stories, and early history which likewise provided an identity for the ancient peoples of the North. Both his studies in Irenaeus and linguistics led Grundtvig to his "matchless discovery" (*Mageløse Opdagelse*) that the truth of the gospel is grounded in the oral tradition of the communal life of the Christian fellow-

[4] The cognate German word is *Anfechtung*.

[5] Grundtvig's style as an anti-rationalist apologist during this decade can quickly be discerned in his *What Constitutes Authentic Christianity?*

[6] Grundtvig was studying Irenaeus's *Adversus Haereses* at this time.

ship itself, as it has come from the instruction of the resurrected Jesus Christ himself, and not—as the apologist would have it—on the external discernment of God's work outside the church in secular history or in a defense of the Bible on purely historical or literary terms. For the mature Grundtvig, the truth of the Christian faith is expressed in the church by means of the apostolic confession of faith, which is itself a response to the resurrected, living Jesus Christ, who himself builds up his community of faith by means of the sacraments of baptism and communion.

In 1825 Grundtvig tested his new outlook on Scripture and the church in a polemic with the young theological professor H. N. Clausen, who as a disciple of Schleiermacher had written a book on the differences between Protestantism and Catholicism. Grundtvig discerned a rationalistic perspective on the Bible underlying Clausen's outlook on Protestantism. In his response "The Church's Rejoinder (*Kirkens Gienmæle*)"[7] Grundtvig harshly condemned Clausen's views by arguing that it is not the Bible but Christ who speaks "the living word (*det levende Ord*)" that establishes the faith and confession of the church. Clausen sought legal retaliation against Grundtvig because of the harshness of Grundtvig's polemic. The outcome was that Grundtvig was under censure until 1837. The emotional challenges of dealing with this conflict also led Grundtvig to resign his pastorate in 1826.

Although this conflict and Grundtvig's resignation from his pastorate was a tragic moment in his career, it opened an opportunity for him to do research that would fuel his future calling as a social prophet and renewer of society. Although Grundtvig consistently failed to bond with the Danish ecclesiastical hierarchy, he had the approval of the Danish royal family. The king offered Grundtvig a royal stipend to finance his study of ancient Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in 1829, 1830, and 1831. While this study was valuable in and of itself, Grundtvig's outlook on life was radically altered by exposure to the social, industrial, educational, and governmental changes which modern Britain was undergoing. It would lead Grundtvig to develop a perspective on the importance of general adult education for the Danish peasantry and a democratic outlook for both temporal and ecclesiastical government.[8] In 1832 Grundtvig was appointed to be an evening preacher at Christianshavn. However, it was his appointment as chaplain at an old people's home, Vartov, in Copenhagen in 1839, that would serve as the spiritual and literary base for his prophetic, reformist ideas.

In 1832 Grundtvig published a new edition of his *Nordens Mytologi* in which he argued for a renewal of civic life by establishing a folk high school which would provide general education for the masses, and thus raise their self-awareness of their responsibilities as a people.[9] Gone was the crusading and apologetic ideal of Grundtvig's youth. It was replaced with the proposal that Christians should work with non-Christians of good will when they are seeking a better world for all people. In 1833 Grundtvig began to rework his *Universal History* by deleting its apologetic stance and rationale. Instead, Grundtvig's historical work was now written, as he phrased it, for the school and not the church. Throughout the late 1830s and 1840s

[7] See *Selected Writings*, 11–19.

[8] Each of the essays in *Heritage and Prophecy: Grundtvig and the English-Speaking World*, ed. A. M. Allchin, D. Jasper, J. H. Schøjorring, and K. Stevenson (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1994) deals with this theme.

[9] See "Introduction to Nordic Mythology" in *Selected Writings*, 26–27.

Grundtvig promoted the concept of folk high schools to awaken the common people to their humanity, community identity and responsibility, and overall physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Disciples of Grundtvig, such as Christen Kold (1816–1870),[10] helped organize these schools, which continue to invigorate Danish social life as well as the social life of other countries.[11] On the anniversary of his fiftieth year of ordination he was made an honorary bishop by the Danish king, and in 1848 he was honored by his nation, whose government was in the process of becoming a constitutional monarchy, by being elected to government office. Grundtvig worked and ministered to the day before his death at 89.

Grundtvig's views on authority, revelation, and community

As is clear, Grundtvig was not a professional theologian; however, he was a scholar and churchman who was deeply committed to the renewal of the Christian faith in Denmark. His quest to help renew Danish church life focuses on the question of theological authority, divine revelation, and the nature of the Christian congregation itself. While throughout his career Grundtvig was concerned to theorize about revelation, authority, and the church with an eye to Luther, it is clear that, other than the Bible itself, Irenaeus—particularly his anti-gnostic stance—had the most important impact on Grundtvig's religious thinking.[12] For Irenaeus, Christ experiences or recapitulates each stage of human life and thereby transfigures or sanctifies each stage in the human life cycle. Irenaeus also, like the author(s) of Ephesians and Colossians, offers a cosmic, earthly, communal, and churchly scope to God the Father's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The upshot of Irenaeus' down-to-earth and corporate spirituality for Grundtvig, according to Arthur Allchin, is that eternity transfigures time and that time gives feeling to eternity—eternity is not empty of time.[13] For Grundtvig, eternity and time can be seen to interrelate in the liturgy. Hence, Allchin also notes the importance of "liturgical realism"[14] for Grundtvig. Jesus Christ is present to his congregation in the living words embodied in baptism and board (the Lord's Supper), the apostolic confession of faith,[15] hymns, and the sermon. The church as a congregation, then, is not an imper-

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[10] For a popular presentation of Christen Kold's educational work, see Nanna Goodhope's *Christen Kold: The Little Schoolmaster Who Helped Revive a Nation* (Blair, NB: Lutheran Publishing House, 1956).

[11] For a study of the Folk School movement among the Danes in North America see Enok Mortensen's *Schools for Life: A Danish-American Experiment in Adult Education* (Askov, MN: The Danish-American Heritage Society, 1977).

[12] See Allchin, *Grundtvig: An Introduction*, 55, 141, and Thaning, *Grundtvig*, 42–43. While the Gnostic cults of the ancient world are long dead, several cultural critics, notably Harold Bloom and Philip J. Lee, argue persuasively that Gnostic motifs dominate modern American religion, which tends to see the divine as the staying power at the very heart of the self, somehow one with the self, that is able to help secure the fragile self as an individual. See Bloom's *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1992), 26–27, and Lee's *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford, 1987).

[13] Allchin, *Grundtvig: An Introduction*, 179, 285.

[14] Allchin, 17.

[15] While Grundtvig is well known for developing a "glad Christianity," he was not blind to the public and private face of evil. Indeed, he was ever mindful of the importance of rejecting evil. Hence, he always retained the Renunciation in corporate worship; see Nielsen, *Grundtvig: An American Study*, 108.

sonal collectivity but a communion of persons made free in the Holy Spirit. Salvation, for Grundtvig, is unquestionably a communal experience,[16] personal but not private. Our Christian identities are marked by the baptismal cross of Christ and are relationally joined to the destinies of one another. Unlike the current North American ideology of individualism, particularly in its utilitarian form (you can lift yourself up by your own boot straps) and expressivist form (nothing is ever as important as your own individual self-expression, provided you do not hurt anyone else),[17] Grundtvig's view of ecclesial humanity is such that one's identity as a Christian is defined in relation to the Holy Trinity and the assembled fellowship of those baptized in the Triune Name.

The anti-gnostic dimension of Grundtvig's approach to the gospel provides a life-affirming response to the life-denying, super-spirituality of penitential Scandinavian Lutheran Pietism. Due to his work on Irenaeus, Grundtvig was no longer the pietist of his youth. While the young Grundtvig was sympathetic with the pietists in their quest to live frugal, pure, and zealous lives of holiness and prayer, his mature, Irenaean approach to the gospel was inclined to view this form of Christian discipleship as a flight from the world, a rejection of much that God has made in the creation, including our bodies and our familial and social bonds. Grundtvig's affirmation "Human first and then a Christian" is a reaction against all earth-denying, world-rejecting approaches to the Christian faith. Grundtvig, following Irenaeus, sees the gospel of the Incarnation, in which Christ sanctifies all the stages of human life, as the best medicine for a misguided, super-spiritual approach to the gospel.

More seriously, the implication of Grundtvig's adoption of Irenaeus's perspective leads one to conclude that Grundtvig disagrees with a stance that would claim that original sin eradicates the inherent goodness of human nature. Here his thought parallels that of Luther, for whom the human will as bound by sin expresses itself as the *refusal* to be in harmony with God's *good* creation. As a result, one can pretend to be one's own god for oneself.[18] Grundtvig, not a professional theologian, does not document his similarities and differences from Luther. His tendency, usually, is to see himself as advancing Luther's theology; in many respects his perspectives do not so much seem to contradict the Lutheran tradition as to lead it into new areas of theological and social reflection.[19] Clearly, Luther's view of the gospel as a living voice (*viva vox evangelii*) and Grundtvig's view of the Christian oral tradition as a "living word" presuppose language as dynamic and life-framing. However, for Grundtvig, particularly in his youth, God is evident in history. Unlike Luther, he has no notion of a *Deus absconditus*. Furthermore, unlike Luther, for whom redeemed humanity is

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[16] See Thaning, *Grundtvig*, 15.

[17] See Robert Bellah's extensive typology of individualism in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 142.

[18] See Gerhard O. Forde's *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-Earth Approach to the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 56–58. For more extensive discussion of Luther's view of the bound will see his *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1957) and Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 141–60.

[19] For a discussion of the similarities and differences between Grundtvig and Luther see Johannes Knudsen, "Grundtvig and Mythology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 54 (November 1955): 299–309.

For Grundtvig, the church's authority is grounded in the oral tradition of faith in Jesus Christ.

recreated from the nothingness of sin and death, Grundtvig thinks that it is the fall that is repeated for humanity over and over again, and not creation. The creation is a secure foundation for the affirmation of humanity's primordial and abiding goodness, because for Grundtvig the image of God (*imago Dei*) abides in humanity. The fall by no means can annihilate it.

For Grundtvig, the point of contact between God and humanity is not a shared reason, but a human word, a "living word" (*det levende Ord*) which is capable of corresponding to the divine word.[20] For both Luther and Grundtvig only Christ can save humanity from sin and death and proffer new life. Grundtvig is no Pelagian. However, there is a sense for Grundtvig that what Luther calls God's "left hand," God's work in the world apart from the church, is not merely to restrain sin but to encourage the instinct for life, as present in various cultural manifestations, as valid in its own right. Indeed, for Grundtvig, it is not merely humanity that reflects God's image, but also the entire earth.[21] Hence, Grundtvig's view of God's action in the creation is cosmic in scope and not merely limited to the human realm. When Grundtvig affirms "Human first and then a Christian," he means that one must be able to become aware of one's natural, native, or created life-instinct[22] before it is any good to tell someone about eternal life. Grundtvig is not suggesting that human life on its own is self-sufficient and not in need of eternal life. Rather, he is simply unpacking his supposition that humanity is a "divine experiment"[23] (*Guddommeligt Experiment*), a combination of spirit and matter, and that one must become conscious of this truth before one can benefit from the eternal life of the gospel. For Grundtvig, then, those who belong to God by means of a new relationship with God constitute the church by faith. The human, by contrast, is constituted by the fellowship of those who are created in God's image, whether they acknowledge this truth or not. In Ernest D. Nielsen's words, Grundtvig believes that humans must find themselves before they can find God.[24]

For Grundtvig, the church's authority is grounded in the oral tradition of faith in Jesus Christ, itself received from the "mouth of the Lord" (*Herrens Mund*). Originally, Grundtvig conceived this oral tradition as best codified in the Apostles' Creed, and he even toyed with the theory that the resurrected Jesus himself produced this Creed and taught it to the disciples prior to his Ascension. Later he was to affirm that even if the Apostles' Creed did not come directly

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[20] Knudsen, "Grundtvig and Mythology," 304.

[21] See Allchin, *Grundtvig: An Introduction*, chapter 9, and Thaning, *Grundtvig*, 26.

[22] See Koch, *Grundtvig*, 158.

[23] "Introduction to Nordic Mythology" in *Selected Writings*, 26. There is a striking parallel between Grundtvig's metaphor of "divine experiment" for human nature and Luther's metaphor of humanity as the creature on whom God is "doing construction." See Eberhard Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 46.

[24] See Nielsen, *Grundtvig: An American Study*, 9.

from Jesus himself, its importance is that it genuinely expresses the apostolic confession of faith as based on the experience of the first disciples' fellowship with the risen Lord. The Lord continues to develop his body of disciples by means of this "living word" as it is embodied in the church's confession of faith and her sacraments. By means of this oral tradition, the church is anamnetic—the past is alive and speaks in the present as the sacramental means of grace connects it to the present. The Spirit's agency in the church is to continue this diachronic dimension of the oral tradition, which, as Ernest Nielsen sees it, is a "linear" (through time), not a "punctiliar" (all at once)[25] experience that allows eternity to transfigure time in the liturgical life of the congregation. Ecclesial experience for Grundtvig is decidedly embodied, dynamic, corporate, and simultaneously traditioned by the past and transformed in light of the future. Most importantly, for the mature Grundtvig, ecclesial experience does not exorcise common human experience but instead builds on it, affirms it, and furthers it.

Grundtvig's view of culture and civic responsibility

Based in his anti-gnostic, pro-human spirituality, his sense of the person's identity as grounded in community, and his profound respect for the indigenous cultural identity of a people as it is expressed in what he terms its "folk life (*folkelighed*)," the mature Grundtvig (after 1832) was prepared to argue that the distinctive Christian social ethic is to find ways to aid humanity in its quest for genuine self-affirmation and advancement. Undoubtedly, contemporary anthropology would question whether or not Grundtvig's notion of folk life has an adequate empirical basis as understood by current scientific standards. For our purposes, it can serve as an important notion by which to decipher Grundtvig's notion of civic responsibility. By "folk life" Grundtvig means the heritage of a people, that which gives substance to a common identity, or a living bond, which defines a people.[26] With his work in ancient and medieval Scandinavian linguistics, mythology, and history, Grundtvig had been studying the folk life of the Danish people since his early twenties. Grundtvig's notion of folk life, however, as influenced by the German Idealist philosopher Friederich W. J. von Schelling,[27] carries powerful Romantic overtones of nationalism, which was and is widespread among nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europeans. Grundtvig's notion of folk life entails a theory of "spirit" (*Ånd*), not to be confused with the Holy Spirit (*Helligånd*), as the life force immanent and emergent in one's cultural identity, a "universal-historical"[28] development of a people. In a sense, folk life is the medium that clothes and embodies this spirit. In Grundtvig's theory, language is the means by which spirit expresses itself in folk life. Ideally, an individual ought to be able to specify an awareness of himself or herself in spirit. This is not so that one can then control the fortunes of spirit, but so that one might be able to align oneself with the directions of spirit and thus fulfill one's personal destiny.[29]

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[25] Nielsen, 51.

[26] See Thorvald Hansen, *Church Divided: Lutheranism Among the Danish Immigrants* (Des Moines, IA: Grand View College Press, 1992), 64.

[27] See Johannes Knudsen's "Introduction" to *Selected Writings*, 2.

[28] "Introduction to Nordic Mythology" in *Selected Writings*, 20.

[29] "Introduction to Nordic Mythology" in *Selected Writings*, 32-36; Nielsen, 2; and Koch, 122–23.

The fact that Grundtvig favored oral over written communication perhaps can be understood in light of this theory of spirit.[30] Oral communication is immediately one with spirit, while a text seeks to mediate a truth of spirit, and is thus one step removed from spirit's immediacy. We can see how this theory would coalesce with Grundtvig's preference of the gospel's truth as found in the *oral* tradition of the church and not the written text of the Scriptures. Spirit is expressed in and through individuals who are corporately bound in a common identity not by consent, as the Anglo-American tradition of political liberalism suggests, but by destiny. Hence, for Grundtvig, the peoples of the North have a vital role to play in world history, and their awakening by means of a folk high school education should ensure this calling. Grundtvig sees each specific folk life as expressing a certain outlook on life or *Anskuelse*.[31] Grundtvig's anthropology thus identifies humanity as a "divine experiment," an expression of spirit which for any given people is mediated by a folk life whose language and mythology offer a specific *Anskuelse*.

While we might appraise Grundtvig's notion of spirit as excessively vitalistic and perhaps empirically unwarranted, it can serve as a bridge by which to understand how the Christian outlook on life (*Anskuelse*) ought to relate to one's cultural identity. The mature Grundtvig, with typical nineteenth-century optimism, affirmed that when the North awakens to its distinctive, spiritual role in world history it would hearken to the "Mosaic-Christian" *Anskuelse*.[32] Indeed, in his first public call for a folk high school in 1832, he acknowledges that the purpose of such a "civic and noble academy"[33] would be to enable the common people to relate to the nation's cultural heritage by addressing the pressing needs for literacy, good communication skills, and social identity and responsibility. Grundtvig envisioned the folk school as a place primarily geared for self-awareness or cultural perspective, "consciousness-raising" as we might express it, and not for academic or even vocational training.

When criticized that he conflated the goals of a distinctively Christian mission with that of developing folk identity, Grundtvig responded that, given the fact that human nature is inescapably packaged in a cultural identity of folk life, Christians must either presuppose folk life, and thus build on it, or in fact create it, by awakening it within the common people, stirring its power for social transformation and responsibility.[34] Indeed, one could not hope for the maturation of Christians apart from seeking to build up mature human beings. At heart, Grundtvig's notion of folk life as the common identity that individuals share suggests a reciprocal ethic of responsibility: I am not free if you are not free.[35] One's identity in Christ rules out individualism. Indeed, there is an ontological and ethical reciprocity between human beings. For Grundtvig, then, there can be no dichotomy between Christian living and human living. I suspect that Grundtvig would agree that biological humanity is a presupposition of spiritually self-aware, "enlightened" humanity in which one recognizes one's calling in the light of one's given folk life. Conversely,

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[30] "Introduction to Nordic Mythology" in *Selected Writings*, 26.

[31] The German cognate word is *Anschauung*.

[32] "Introduction to Nordic Mythology" in *Selected Writings*, 21, 23.

[33] "Introduction to Nordic Mythology" in *Selected Writings*, 26–27.

[34] See "About Folk Life and Dr. Rudelbach" in *Selected Writings*, 44–48.

[35] See Allchin, *Grundtvig: An Introduction*, 161.

this latter state is the presupposition of Christian identity. The Christian's social responsibility, then, is to further human self-awareness in the context of one's social, cultural, and linguistic setting.

Conclusion

After Grundtvig's conversion in early 1811 his spirituality would always be anti-rationalistic and be influenced at least to some degree or other by Pietism, particularly in his sermons. It was, however, his study of Irenaeus as anti-gnostic and profoundly pro-human that would expand his view of "Bible Christianity" and evolve his mature religious outlook into a powerful life-affirming spirituality. When combined with his linguistic and historical research and his new-found quest in the early 1830s for the amelioration of the Danish peasantry and working class, this spirituality would lead him to affirm the Christian's civic responsibility as promoting human well-being as it is grounded in folk life. Early in his intellectual career, Grundtvig was an apologist, seeking to defend Christian truth in the face of the threat of secularism. By 1832 Grundtvig was convinced that the primary Christian duty is not to aim to convert secularists but to work with them when their goals are focused on social welfare, as the Christian's goals should likewise be.

In light of H. Richard Niebuhr's categories, Grundtvig moved from a "Christ transforming culture" position (as an apologist) to that of a "Christ and culture in paradox" position. The early Grundtvig sought to Christianize culture in service of the gospel. The later Grundtvig accepted culture as a structure of God's created order for humans, a form of life that can complement the Christian message, despite the fact that sometimes tensions exist between culture and faith. From his own perspective, Grundtvig never turns away from apostolic Christianity. Rather, he expands apostolic Christianity's potential, as based on Irenaeus, to affirm human life for its own sake. The Christian should honor the world for its own sake, and work to make it better where it can be improved. Grundtvig would see this task as one of endeavoring to establish and further good stewardship of the resources, both human and natural, that are given us. His work antedates the Hegelian-Marxist tendency to translate issues of social inequities into justice issues, struggles between "haves" and "have nots," a position which has so markedly influenced the liberation ethics of much of contemporary Christian social ethics. Of course, this does not mean that Grundtvigians would or must reject the Marxist outlook. However, it does mean that the Grundtvigian perspective on the goal of civic responsibility as maximizing effective stewardship of human resources might somehow be able to serve as a less polarizing, and more inclusive and contextual, way of addressing some issues of social inequity.

Grundtvig's spirituality suggests that the distinctively Christian promise of a new humanity does not mean that the old humanity is worthless but is instead worthwhile and precious and that it can be transfigured by means of the Christian gospel. The Christian's civic responsibility, in light of this truth, is to advance the good structures that further human life in society and creation and to cooperate with those non-Christian social forces that likewise seek to empower people.

Pulpit Fiction: Lives and Perspectives of Gay and Lesbian Persons Serving in the ELCA's Ordained Ministry

Carolyn Riehl
University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Almost since its inception, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has faced questions related to homosexuality and the rostered ministries. The issue of the ordination of gay and lesbian persons was raised in a concrete and personal way in 1988, when three persons who had been approved for ordination by predecessor Lutheran church bodies openly declared their homosexuality and their intention to seek ordination in the ELCA. Partly in response to requests from the candidates' local bishops for advice and counsel, on March 12, 1988, the ELCA Conference of Bishops adopted a statement that "persons of homosexual orientation who seek to be ordained or who are already ordained will be expected to refrain from homosexual practice." This policy, which was based on the practices of the predecessor church bodies, was incorporated into "Definition and Guidelines for Discipline of Ordained Ministers," a juridical document adopted by the ELCA Church Council on November 19, 1989, and into "Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," an informational document adopted by the Church Council in October, 1990.

Nevertheless, in 1990, two congregations in the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA called and ordained these three persons. An ELCA disciplinary panel suspended the two congregations in July of that year, with the intent of removing the congregations from the ELCA roll on December 31, 1995, if they continued in noncompliance with church policies by virtue of having non-rostered persons serving in the ministry. The disciplinary panel did, however, strongly urge the ELCA to engage in further study of the issue of the ordination of homosexual persons. Five years later, the congregations were expelled from the ELCA.

Since that time, prayer, study, dialogue, and deliberation about homosexuality have taken place in many venues of the church — in congregations, churchwide divisions and commissions, and seminaries, and among pastors, bishops, and lay persons. In these varied contexts, one voice has been largely absent from the conversations. That is the

voice of gay and lesbian persons who are already serving in the ordained ministry, including persons who were ordained before the ELCA or its predecessor churches adopted prohibitions on the ordination of noncelibate homosexual persons, as well as persons ordained since the ELCA implemented its policy. Such persons are in a position to be directly affected by church actions and policies regarding homosexuality and ordination. Moreover, their perceptions and experiences could add important information and a valuable perspective to the church's deliberations. Yet it is nearly impossible for gay and lesbian pastors to speak out. Their ministry, their livelihoods, perhaps even their safety and well-being, would be jeopardized. The research reported in this article was an attempt to address this situation and to give voice to persons who otherwise have remained voiceless—and faceless—within the church.

The research process

This research was originally commissioned for a conference on the vocation and ministry of gay and lesbian persons in church and society. The goal of the project was simple: to interview and then tell the stories of gay and lesbian pastors who could not stand before the church to talk for themselves.

We sought pastors to participate in the study through self-nomination and a "snowball" sampling approach. A flyer describing the study and asking for volunteers was distributed at a national assembly of Lutherans Concerned/North America, an organization pursuing ministry, education, and advocacy regarding homosexuality and the church. The flyer was also sent to members of other advocacy groups and to individuals in the ELCA who we thought might personally know gay or lesbian pastors and could tell them about the study. Pastors had to volunteer themselves for the study; we did not accept nominations from others. We originally planned to interview not only ordained pastors, but also persons who have been commissioned or consecrated to serve in the ELCA's other rostered ministries, as Associates in Ministry, Deaconesses, and Diaconal Ministers, along with seminarians preparing for church service. We also intended to interview persons who dropped out of the candidacy process prior to ordination, along with those who were denied ordination because they were open about their sexual orientation. The stories of these individuals would be important to tell. However, most of the volunteers for the study were ordained pastors, and we concluded that we did not have representative samples from the other groups of interest. Hence, we limited the study to persons who have been ordained as ministers of Word and Sacrament, and selected thirty-five persons from the volunteer list.

The sample is restricted in three other ways. First, we focused on persons who identified themselves as gay men or lesbians, thus excluding persons of other sexual orientations, such as those who understand themselves to be bisexual. Second, we have the strong sense that this sample is most representative of pastors whose comfort with their own sexuality and discomfort with their position in the church make them eager to share their stories. The study does not reflect the experiences of homosexual pastors who have not yet come out to themselves or to others, who may still be in heterosexual marriages, who are in conflict, turmoil, or denial over either their sexuality or their ministry, or who were not willing to trust a research team of strangers with their well-guarded secrets. And third, the sample is entirely white. We know there are persons of color who are gay or lesbian pastors, but we suspect that having two margin-

alized identities probably makes these persons feel doubly vulnerable and therefore makes a study like this one seem especially risky to participate in.

The pastors we interviewed included nine females and twenty-six males, ranging in age from 29 to 73. They were trained in seven of the eight ELCA seminaries; only Gettysburg Seminary is not represented in this sample. Only one person neither attended nor graduated from a Lutheran seminary. All thirty-five have served in parish ministry at least once, and at the time of the interviews, twenty-four were currently doing so. Of the other eleven, two were retired, four had non-parish calls, and five were working in other occupations. Some of the pastors have served in small two-point parishes, but others were called to some of the largest and most prominent congregations across the country, with memberships exceeding two thousand. They live and work in sixteen states across the United States, in large urban areas and remote rural towns.

The research team (myself and two assistants) developed a list of questions for the interviews, but these questions were largely meant to prompt the pastors to tell us their stories and reflect on their lives. We did try to ask all persons most or all of the questions, in order to ensure comparability of information across cases. In essence, we used a modified narrative research strategy. Most interviews were conducted in person in the pastors' homes, although some were conducted over the telephone. The interviews usually lasted about three hours.

While some analysis is inevitable when selecting and organizing material from a copious body of interview transcriptions and notes, in this article I have sought to keep analysis to a minimum and to present, as clearly as possible, the pastors' own accounts and reflections. The article is organized around broad themes. For each theme, I offer minimal commentary about the range of pastors' responses and then include a variety of illustrative interview excerpts. These passages are either direct quotations or are closely based on the pastors' own words. In editing some of the excerpts for brevity and clarity, I have tried not to violate the speakers' meanings and intentions as I understood them to be. Passages marked with asterisks are from women. All names are pseudonyms, and certain other facts are obscured, to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity. All study participants received a copy of the original conference paper on which this article is based and had the opportunity to make sure that their own identities were adequately protected.

The pastors' stories

1. *A rich Lutheran heritage.* One of the questions frequently asked about gay and lesbian persons who seek to serve in the ordained ministry is why they want to pursue a path that is rather clearly closed to them. Part of the answer to this question derives from persons' own religious backgrounds and the role the church has played in their lives. Of the pastors interviewed, all but three are lifelong Lutherans, and many come from families with a strong tradition of service to the church. Two of the women and ten of the men have Lutheran pastors among their relatives. One of the pastors described his father as an unhappy Lutheran clergyman who was physically abusive to his children; that pastor grew up feeling conflicted about the church. But almost all of the other pastors had very positive early experiences in the church.

I was always really engaged in church. I loved church. I spent a lot of time with my Dad around church; I would go with him to

work. I liked spending time in the sanctuary by myself, and I always felt this, this sort of quest, to meet God at church. It wasn't so much a social thing for me. It was an individual experience of being there that was important to me.

I was not baptized until after my brother was born. But I was active in church and went to Sunday school very early, and I loved it. I loved the ritual; it seemed very warm to me, and since so many of the family members participated . . . you know, it's the thing to do.

2. *The call to ministry.* More than half of the divinity students now enrolled in Lutheran seminaries have sought the ordained ministry after pursuing careers in other fields. That pattern is not true for this group of gay and lesbian pastors. Only three are what we would call second career pastors. For some, an interest in the ministry came at an early age; for others, it developed more gradually.

My first idea of wanting to be a pastor was when I was about 3. I used to play church all the time. We had this cedar chest that became an altar. I'd make crosses out of Tinker Toys. I'd wrap a towel around my neck and do services for my animals.

**** When I realized that women could be pastors, it was amazing and wonderful to me. It was always in my plan, from the end of high school or so. I was very active in campus ministry; I did a lot to test the waters.*

I was so interested in religion, always had been, and the work was just pouring out of me, I loved the liturgy and the hymns, directing the choir, it was a real creative outlet for me, fascinating stuff, so I thought the only thing for me to do was go to seminary. It wasn't that I particularly wanted to be a pastor, but I knew I wanted to go to seminary. . . . It was where I was in my path, it was not so much a call to be a pastor at that point, it emerged when I put one foot in front of the other. . . .

For some of the pastors, the call to ministry seemed to come from within. But for others, the recognition and affirmation they received from others for their committee work, their youth leadership, or their contributions to worship became a strong external calling. And for a few, the deciding factor was something as simple as a grandmother's dreams, a father's unwavering expectations, or an unsolicited letter of pre-admission to a Lutheran seminary.

**** It came to me all my life, from everything that was in my experience. It came to me all those days at my childhood church, from watching my family work in the church. I wanted to do something to connect my life in a very specific way with God's calling. I've thought of this as something that wouldn't let me go rather than as something that grabbed me up at a certain time. It was so tied up in my family and culture. I don't want it to seem like there was this voice that came to me apart from what went on around me. That sense of call was very much from these people around me. God comes to you through mediators, and there have been some strong mediators in my life.*

My grandfather was a minister, and I think my father always regretted that he did not go into the ministry. He always put subtle pressure on me, and I'd think, no way I'll become a minister! But I guess it was talked about enough that I really didn't consider much else.

**** I was a mess in college. The only person I could turn to was the campus pastor, who sent me a card about how God uses broken things, like broken bread . . . and on the inside it said God will even use me with my brokenness. This was like my anchor. I didn't think God wanted people like me to be pastors. But a seminary admissions officer had literally been chasing me for four years to enter seminary. I kept thinking, you don't know this secret about me. I finally filled out the application, but I was very honest that I wasn't sure it was the right decision. So here I was with no excuses. . . . I had a degree, I had been accepted to seminary. I felt like I couldn't win in this battle with God.*

As this last account shows, some of the pastors were ambivalent about the call to ministry. This was usually closely connected to struggles with sexuality.

**** When I really started articulating that I had a sense of call, it was the same time I realized I was "gay," so I started drinking —to drink it away.*

I had to hear from the clergy that it was more than okay to be gay and be a pastor. When all that stuff happened in San Francisco, I realized you could do both. But after I had my first gay experience, that's when I decided that I wasn't ready to go to seminary. The real issue was that I could not reconcile it.

The closer I got to ordination, the more I tended to engage in anonymous sexual behaviors. They were different in character from my early 20s when I was exploring the world, there was more of a drivenness in this area. As I look back, it was a way to soothe my anxiety about my upcoming ordination. I also know other seminarians who used sexuality as a soothing tool. I understand that; I also felt guilty about it.

3. *Sexuality under construction.* Most of the pastors reported that from an early age they were not like other boys and girls. Some were aware of it at the time; for others, it has become clear only in retrospect. For almost all, coming to understand themselves as gay or lesbian was a gradual process, fraught with guilt, shame, confusion, danger, loneliness, and loss.

I realized [I was gay] when I was 13; it didn't seem surprising to me. I was just attracted to boys rather than girls. I thought it was sinful to engage in any sexual activity. Since I wasn't ever going to have sex, it didn't really matter who it would be with.

I didn't have any idea about homosexuality in high school. When I looked it up and figured out what it meant, I was grossed out. What characterizes my story is emotional attraction. . . . I had a relationship in my freshman year with a senior. It became physical after several months. We went to the pastor in town because we were troubled by this and didn't know where to turn. He told me, "You just need to give yourself permission to be aggressive with girls." This was very harmful and led to two years of deep confusion. I thought I'd never have a relationship with a man again. . . . I wasn't dealing with sexual attraction and sexual needs, but deep emotional needs that weren't being expressed. It was very painful.

I have known I was gay even before I knew about sex. My first encounter was in Boy Scouts. This was very definitely sinful behavior. I really hated it, every time I did it I thought, never again. I knew I was heading straight for hell, and for the insane asylum first on my way. Every, every, every

time you just felt dirty and awful afterwards, and the vow never to do it again, the prayer—God change me from this, I don't want to be like this. And yet, an hour later I was ready to go again.

I graduated from high school having had no sex. I knew in my heart of hearts that I was homosexual, but I prayed that God would take these feelings from me, and prayed that at least I would be able to get married and have kids. I couldn't imagine life being lived other than in the suburbs with a couple of kids. My life today would have been impossible for me to image as a kid.

**** It was scary to think of the word "homosexual" as naming myself, because of all the negative connotations.*

In the ELCA, women and men who are in the candidacy process are given the church's document titled "Vision and Expectations: Ordained Ministers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," which contains the statement that "ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships." Candidates are asked if they have read this document and intend to live and serve in accordance with it. This process seems to assume that persons are sure of their sexual identity before they discern a call to the ministry. But according to the pastors we interviewed, that is not always the case. For them, the tug toward the ministry often began at a very early age, while their early intimations of gay or lesbian sexual identity were feared and resisted. Of the thirty-five pastors, seventeen did not come to identify themselves as gay men or lesbians until *after* they had finished their seminary education. Only ten clearly felt that they were lesbian or gay before entering seminary. Eight figured it out during seminary, often during their clinical pastoral education experience, which deepened their understandings of self and others.

It was scary to think of the word "homosexual" as naming myself, because of all the negative connotations.

Given their reluctance to admit and accept their homosexuality, it is not surprising that three of the women pastors and seven of the men have been married, for periods lasting from about four years to over twenty-five years. Some spoke of marriage as "taking the cure," but the cure did not last. All of these marriages unraveled sadly for at least one spouse, and four ended quite badly, with ripples of trouble spreading throughout families and congregations.

The marriage was good. We were looking forward to being in the parish, we had our kids all planned. . . . We were going to have a nice charmed experience and in a sense we did that. My one life was charmed and the other one wasn't. All through the marriage I thought I would never come out, but in the end I did. I honestly thought she knew anyway. My wife prided herself on being very liberal, but she didn't handle this well.

**** We had been having trouble for a while. We made it through another wedding anniversary, and I felt that things were on the*

upswing. Then I met a woman and all hell broke loose in my life. Every notion about my being straight, every notion that I would get over my feelings toward women, all those feelings were just negated, and I knew that I could not hold back anymore. It was affecting who I was as a person and how I was in the church. That began a whole new journey for me. . . .

We had a very good marriage, and the sex was good, but I just felt that I wasn't growing closer to her the way she was growing closer to me. Every once in a while there would be a slip in the armor and a sexual experience with an unknown guy. I would flog myself with guilt. Then one time, I made the mistake of talking to the guy after, and all of a sudden he wasn't an object, he was a real live human being. The next morning, when I went in the bathroom to shave, I looked in the mirror and there was a gay man looking back at me. My balancing act began to crumble and I knew this couldn't continue. After about a year, I decided to get some counseling and decided to tell my wife. That was very difficult. I couldn't even say the word; she had to supply it.

4. *Coming out.* As the pastors came to understand their sexual identity, they came out not only to spouses, but also to parents, siblings, friends, congregations, and bishops. Coming out never seems to be easy, but for most of the pastors it was an essential, affirming step, one that must be taken again and again.

**** Coming out to my family was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. I went home and told my parents at the kitchen table . . . it's where the family does all their business. They were devastated. My mom cried all night. My dad just pushed back from the table and put his head in his hands. The next morning, my dad walked in from doing the farm chores and said, "I've thought about it. It's not what I would want for you, but I'm okay with it." It took my mom years to learn to cope with the situation, and it's still hard for her, but she's loyal to me and she loves my partner.*

Coming out is an ongoing process until you die. I kissed a man when I was 22 years old, but it took three years until I could say I was gay. I just couldn't say it out loud. I finally told a 73-year-old friend. I was telling her and myself at the same time.

I'm not particularly courageous about the coming out process. It's so draining. There's always a little sadness that I didn't tell them before. I have profound fear each time I come out to someone, even with people I know are "safe," including my best friend from college. It just took everything within me to come out to him.

**** I was married while in college and sometime after that I realized I was a lesbian. The marriage was just so unnatural for me, in all sorts of ways. But I couldn't even think about coming out. I didn't feel it was wrong to be gay, but I really did feel it was wrong to be divorced. All of my energy went to thinking about divorce . . . it was unthinkable.*

5. *God's acceptance.* While the pastors were often anxious about coming out to other persons, they generally had no such problems with God. Most were steeped in the theology of justification by grace through faith. They sensed their goodness and worth, not because of a culture that was growing more accepting of homosexuality, and not because of a gay political agenda, but because they knew a loving, accepting God.

I never had a sense of having to come out to God because God always knew. Knowing God's unconditional acceptance kept me from self-destructive behavior, from having sex when it was dangerous. I learned about grace, about the power of powerlessness. I learned to expect God's faithfulness.

**** I've been able to find a lot of grace in my life towards myself. There are still twinges and moments when a "What if . . ." comes to mind, or an "If only this . . ." or "How would life be different if I weren't a lesbian?" And when I look at my kids sometimes, I feel really bad, wondering if they'd have been better off if I had stayed with their Dad. But ultimately, my personal worth is only grounded in whether I think God accepts me as I am.*

6. *Ecclesiastical policies.* The ELCA, like many other church bodies, distinguishes between homosexual self-understanding and homosexual behavior; it is the latter that is prohibited for ordained ministers. However, for the gay and lesbian pastors we interviewed, this distinction was not viable, since sexuality is, at its deepest level, an expression of the human self. As they came to understand themselves as gay or lesbian, not one of the pastors believed for long that they could or would be celibate. They wanted to be responsible and to meet the church's expectations with integrity. But for them, celibacy was simply not an option.

**** My rationale at ordination time was, "Okay, this is kind of new for me to realize that I'm a lesbian, but I've wanted to be a pastor for a long time. So, I don't know how it's going to work, but I'm going to go with what I've known the longest. I'm going to have to figure this out as I go."*

My decision to not be celibate was less of a conscious choice, it was more about the relationship I was in and what a powerful presence it was in my life. The relationship just was, and I simply faced the question of how to operate with both it and the ordination. I felt sure the relationship was good, and I chose not to break it off.

My internship was so uplifting, so validating. I didn't need anything else, not sex, not intimacy. But I discovered that celibacy is a burn; there's nothing to keep you from working all the time. I did make a conscious choice for celibacy. But loneliness was a hard thing for me. I couldn't do that. I wanted a relationship. . . . I knew that anonymous sex wasn't what I wanted.

7. *Persons in relationship.* The pastors we interviewed have worked to understand and accept their sexual identities, a process they cannot take for granted the way many heterosexual persons might. Claiming an identity as a gay or lesbian person is important for them. But our interviews revealed that for these pastors, what is even more important is to build an identity and a life as *a person in relationship.* This is a dimension of personal identity that officially has been denied to gay and lesbian ELCA pastors, but it is a critical dimension to how the pastors see themselves. For them, it is not so much that they are lesbian or gay, but that they are in love with someone. At the time of the interviews, twenty-one of the pastors were in committed, long-term relationships. All of them were actually living with their partners, and six were doing so in their church parsonages, with or without the tacit knowledge of their congregations. Four couples had had or were planning to have commitment ceremonies. Most of those pastors who were not in a relationship wished they were. The pastors want these relationships; they want them known to others; they

suffer in many ways by having to hide them. They claim to want to be intimately connected to someone else, and they want that connection to be within a "mutual, chaste, and faithful relationship," as is the vision the ELCA has for its heterosexual ordained ministers.

**** People have a fundamental right to be in a circle of caring, to be in families. I'm still learning a new language, I don't have the words to describe our family, and I don't have any role models for it. But I have come to understand that I should work hard at this family. When you die, you want someone there to hold your hand.*

**** I had a lot of dread about admitting I was a lesbian. There was a fear of not being normal, never having children, being a disappointment for my parents. Now I feel no dread. What took the dread away? Being in a wonderful relationship with a person I love.*

I'd like to have a boyfriend—I think. I'd like to have someone who would make up a nickname for me. I wouldn't be out in the pulpit, I wouldn't make it an issue, but I'd want my partner to worship with me, to come to potlucks with me. My life would be ordinary, which would be a good thing. I wouldn't have to think about my sex; it would just be who I am. It's as simple as the church potluck and the sharing of the peace. That's not too much to ask for, to put your arm around someone during the sermon.

I feel like my depression has a lot to do with my loneliness. A single pastor who's straight could share that with his congregation and maybe even someone would try to fix him up. I'm almost out professionally, and the congregation is okay about that, they don't try to fix me up with females. But it's coming down to this one thing: I think I'd feel better if I could have a partner to share with. I'm used to it now, but the thing that hurts is that I have to hide my partner, because he's a part of my life. We have a house together, but I also have a parsonage. Jason likes the parsonage better, the cat likes it better, the plant likes it better. Jason can't make hotdish, he can't participate in the normal life of the congregation. They'd love him there but he can't participate as my partner. That's very costly and I'm angry about that.

My greatest joys in ministry have been the total involvement with people, from baptisms to funerals. The most painful aspect of my ministry was the inability to share when Joe and I celebrated our 25th anniversary. That wasn't very easy. That was so important to me, and the congregation is important to me. I would have liked to share it with them.

**** A few years ago, I was at a meeting with a lot of prominent national church people, and we were asked to share who we are when we're not at this meeting. I remember agonizing about this, and I knew I simply could not say much about my life. So I talked about my house. It really felt pretty terrible, and it really felt like I was talking about a shell of a person. This is hardly the most important thing in my life, that I have this house. The one important thing about it is that it is our* family *home.*

As lesbian and gay pastors develop intimate relationships with partners, they also stretch the notion of "family" to include children. The thirty-five pastors in this study are the parents of nineteen children—their own biological offspring, adopted children, and the sons and daughters of their partners. Most of the pastors see having children as a remarkable blessing, but it also

creates tensions and dangers. It is difficult to maintain a secretive personal life when children are involved, and there is the additional concern that the children themselves will be harmed, either by those who object to their parents' lives, or by their parents' own anxiety and dissimulation.

Parenting has been one of those real gifts in my life. When I had to come to terms with being gay, I had to let go of some things that I had always dreamed of. I had a real strong sense of life as an adult — getting married, having a family. I was real dreamy about all of that. I am amazed and touched now, I really feel that God has placed some things in my life to fill a lot of that. Matthew's kids are a real important part of my life. I'm blessed being recognized by them as important in their lives. But dealing with the church's stand and explaining that to the kids is uncomfortable. Church is important in their lives and it's difficult to integrate the church's stance with our family values and the children's experiences.

8. *Service to the church.* The pastors we interviewed have developed many different talents in their work. Their ministry is colored by their identities and experiences. Sometimes their ministry is enhanced *because* they come to it as lesbian and gay persons, as outsiders, from the margins. But the pastors acknowledge that having to be closeted also may reduce their effectiveness.

**** I'm a better preacher since I came out to myself. I know who I am. My mentor, who's a gay man, used to say that everybody is in the closet about something. Gay and lesbian people have dealt with those issues, they have faced themselves, so they can preach from who they are. It doesn't matter if the people know who you are, what matters is that you know who you are. A lot of pastors are afraid to say things, but I know who I am, so I'm not so afraid.*
Preaching is always an exercise in revealing the gospel and to some degree revealing myself. If you're really doing what you're supposed to in preaching, it's always an exercise in truthtelling and revealing the life of the community, and you can't dissemble. It's very hard to proclaim to the people of God that they are unconditionally loved and at the same time carry around any doubt that that's true for yourself.

I think the greatest problem in not being out is that people can't really know me. I don't need to tell everything, I believe in professional boundaries. But I feel I become kind of boring to people. Our lives deal with our sexuality a lot, and if I can't talk about those issues, then what do I talk about? I talk about work, or maybe friends. I kind of bore myself, and they must think of me as this eunuch who doesn't have a life.

**** I hold back with my congregational members. To be more present with them, I would have to tell them more about myself. So I hold back, and I'm not sure how they really think about me. I feel like I've pulled back into a smaller space to stay protected. I don't like that. I'm more paranoid than I used to be.*

When I was closeted, I didn't know any gay or lesbian persons who were out. I would have been a very bad pastor with them— afraid to be too near them or talk to them. I would have given them bad advice.

**** I'm always a little anxious when I'm doing counseling with gay persons. I'm afraid that they will ask me if I'm a lesbian. I'm not so afraid with straight persons. I know what the lives of straight people are like, I was raised to be straight, in a straight*

culture, so I don't have to reach very far to have much in common with them.

Before coming out to myself, career-wise I was very successful, the things I did for the church were creative, I became a leader for synods. But on the other hand I was lonely, I was repressed, I went through depressions. Since being out, I still feel a sense of accomplishment and leadership, but now I have much more of a sense of satisfaction with myself as a person. There's the anger with the church for not accepting how great that is.

I'm very interested in children. I want very young children to feel comfortable in church, with their pastor, I always touch children in public, never ever in private. In church I hug kids, I pick them up, I'm right in their face with the communion blessing. Who knows, those kids may someday need me.

9. *Support from congregations and bishops.* The pastors reported being demoralized by nasty phone calls, rumors spread about them, or remarks about homosexuality that they perceived to be inaccurate or insensitive. They are well acquainted with the inhospitable side of church life. But many of the pastors also have found strong affirmation for their work and their personhood in their congregations and synods.

**** At my first parish, when I came out to my senior pastor, he just felt that if it became known and was a problem for some people, then we'd deal with it as a congregation, as a staff, as a church council. What we had going for us there was that I was dearly loved by the congregation. It wouldn't have happened that way if it were my first year there, but over several years the congregation became very appreciative of the ministry I brought them.*

I don't think I could say I'm out. I'm not with my congregation, not with my bishop, not with my family. But they know it. I don't get invited anywhere that my partner doesn't get invited. My congregation knows him. The president of the congregation invited him to the council party. They just assume. That's fine with me.

I am not out to [my congregation]. I am sure many of them surmise, but again, like with the bishop, the verbalization of the word makes all of the difference in the world. For many of them, if the word is not said, they can look the other way, but if it were said aloud, I'd be gone right away. I'm really loved here, I have a good relationship with the congregation, it's a neat group of people, they think highly of me, but many of them would turn on me in a minute and I know that. How does that make you feel? Well, I've lived with that for so long, I know it could all change overnight, it's something you take in your stride. It doesn't make you feel real good, but it's not something I lose sleep over.

Before I came out to any clergy colleagues, I felt that all the affirmation I received for my ministerial gifts was overshadowed by my gay identity, and that if that identity were known, it would take away all of the affirmation in a second. But many ministerial colleagues have been supportive.

**** My partner had been in the hospital, and for a week after she came home, parishioners brought us food each dinnertime. The next Sunday, the lesson of the day was Acts 8, a story of the church widening to include the outcast. An Ethiopian eunuch meets the Apostle Philip, who proclaims to him the good news about Jesus. As they travel along, the eunuch says, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being*

baptized?" In that sermon, I thanked the congregation. I said, "During these last days, when you brought us this wonderful food and I opened up the containers and said, 'Look, Lisa, it's chicken!' Or, 'It's stew!', I could have as easily said, 'See, here is water.'" I found out later that after the church service ended, a young boy who had helped deliver the food said to his older sister, "You know, we just thought we were bringing the food to be nice, but we were really helping them to be a family."

**** When I came out, I sat down with the bishop, who told me that he was afraid they couldn't help me anymore unless I was willing to sign "the document." I said I wouldn't sign it. Just like that, I became a detriment. I lost my whole community, my spiritual community. I lost all contact with that support system. Those who had been my source of pastoral care were no longer available to me, because of fear of repercussions from others in the church.*

One of the most outspoken conservative bishops has been a friend of mine for several decades. His wife and he and I are close friends. Over the past few years, I've wondered if it would be helpful to go and tell him my story. Would it make a difference to him?

**** My bishop's wife has been unconditionally supportive. She even called my partner to talk during a sad time for our family. But when I meet with the bishop, we both acknowledge that if he didn't know the whole story, then if he were asked he could say, I don't know, you'd have to ask her. So I have never said I'm a lesbian.*

I would say that ours is a synod where sexuality is not an issue. There is great trust in the bishop's office. Our synod has learned,

One of the older women said, "I don't care if you show up tomorrow and you're purple, I'll still love you."

the bishop has learned, the staff has learned that good pastors are valuable commodities. A lot of people in the parishes have also changed.

After I came out to myself, I knew that my choice was either to leave the ministry or come out professionally. My style of ministry was so personal, I didn't feel I could hide major pieces of me and still be able to preach. I made the decision to come out to the congregation. I went to every member's house and told them I was gay, told them my story, and asked them if they had any questions. I had a team of follow-up people who would then call the people, ask them how they were doing, try to find out what they needed in terms of information about homosexuality, and then provide pastoral care for them because people couldn't do that with me. Overall, these visits went really well, and some were absolutely wonderful. There were these three older women who always sat in the front row who had kind of mothered me while I was there. I went to see them all together at one of their houses; we had cookies and coffee and they thought it was thrilling that I was there. Then I told them. One of them said, "I don't care if you show up tomorrow and you're purple, I'll still love you." Another one, who was 82 at

the time, said, "Well, I'm not going to ask you what you're doing in your bedroom because I don't want you asking me what I'm doing in mine." And the third woman said, "Well, I just saw a show on Oprah about this." And then I tried to talk to them about the Bible and the issue, but they were much more interested in how everyone else was responding. From then on, the three of them were just overwhelmingly supportive.

My coming out turned out to be one of the best things that ever happened to that congregation. It focused the ministry into an emphasis on welcome and diversity. We passed this statement of inclusion and welcome, and spent one year talking about how to be more racially inclusive, and the next year how to be more inclusive toward persons with disabilities. The thinking about the gay issue led them to think about being very open and inclusive.

Some pastors felt that it is only possible to be truly open with a congregation who has already learned to love you and value your ministry before they know you to be lesbian or gay. But for at least one pastor, affirmation came even before he joined the congregational community:

When I was ready for a new call, my bishop asked me to consider a call to a very prominent church in our synod. Frankly, at first I wasn't interested. I went through an initial interview with the church council and wasn't moved; there was nothing I felt particularly called to do. Then I heard that someone on the call committee questioned why I was not married and somebody else said, "He's gay." So I figured this decision was going to be made for me. But the council met after that, they had this wonderful discussion, and the vote they took was overwhelmingly in favor of calling me. When I heard that, I had to think about this in another way. If they were going to be open and courageous enough to take a chance on me, I'd be open and courageous enough to take a chance on them.

10. *Hopes and fears, frustrations and joys.* What do these lesbian and gay pastors want? From their own accounts, they are most concerned with doing ministry, wanting to serve the church fully, honestly, and with integrity. They want to understand sexuality—theirs and others'—as one piece of a larger whole, one part of God's created humanity. Many locate sexuality as one of the primary places that God meets us. Others find their sexuality irrelevant to the immediate tasks at hand. Some are political, others are not. Some want to help eradicate stereotypes about homosexuality or advocate for change in the ELCA. Others are hesitant to be considered activists. All, however, yearn for the day when the rules will change.

It's liberating to own being gay because it's been such a part of my identity for seven years. But it seems to rub the wrong way if it denotes that the tenor of my ministry is different in any way. I dread answering the phone if it's someone who wants to offer me support or who has a new strategy for dealing with my being out, if at the same time I'm doing the Sunday bulletin. My jobs are the same. I'm writing the sermon or I need to do hospital visits, so please let's not talk about being gay; leave me alone to get on with my life and my job!

My sexuality is part of who I am, but it's become a much bigger part of who I am because it cannot be known. If I say the most important part about me is that I am a gay man, that sounds really stupid. I think sexuality is just a part, and yet from the time I was little, I haven't been able to say that,

and I'd like to scream it to the world sometimes.

I long for the day that I can be known—even if it's in retrospect, in parishes I've served earlier, so they can reinterpret their experience with me. So they can know that my gifts came out of being gay and out of my relationship with Tim.

11. *Personal integrity.* The lesbian and gay pastors want to live with a sense of personal integrity. This is important for all adults, of course, but especially difficult for pastors who have had to suppress information about themselves or even do what some might consider lying. How do the pastors maintain their integrity?

I really don't know. I struggle with that all the time. I'm not sure I've maintained it. There are times that I feel like I've compromised so much in things that I've implied or that I've said. It hasn't been resolved. It's part of the tension I live under.

**** For me, some things by Carter Heyward have been very helpful. She can't imagine how in this culture there isn't a gay or lesbian person who doesn't lead a life of great confusion, and it's just impossible to lead a clear life of integrity. She really honors the value of confusion. If I had been put in a position of having to directly lie out loud, then I think it would be almost untenable to live in this calling in the church. At the same time, I have surely known what it's like to be duplicitous.*

**** I tolerate an intolerable situation and try to maintain as much integrity as possible, by being out when I can be, by refusing to sit by and let homophobia go by unchecked, by using my pulpit and my writing. I recall Audre Lourde's quote, that your silence will not protect you.*

As I struggled with my sexuality, I have endeavored to be as honest as I could with the people around me. I haven't covered it up or been dishonest. When I was married, I wasn't out to myself, and when it changed, I took steps to communicate. It still isn't easy, but now it's more in the realm of, well, life is never easy. Also, as I have worked it through, I've had tremendous grace experiences. Scripture has spoken to me, I've been forgiven if there was something wrong. There's no hiding from God, who knew I was gay and saw fit to give me the gifts for ministry. And if God sees fit to put fruit on my pastoral tree, then who am I to beat myself up for it?

You just keep on going, keep a stiff upper lip, you don't show the pain. In spite of all these problems, Christ is there for me, and most importantly the hope of the resurrection. So I suppose if you go deeper, it's the theology of the cross.

I value integrity, and I know I have to sacrifice a lot of my integrity cells . . . I'm a flat character without the fullness of my story, and I think that's pitiful. . . .

So how do I maintain my integrity? Inadequately. I have high blood pressure, I have been prone at periods in my ministry to seeking solace in sexual encounters. That's not a part of my present experience, but it was part of my early experience. I live with a lot of stress. It's also very difficult to be a single pastor, not to have that pastor's wife to come home to, to absorb some of your pain, to give you feedback on how you're doing, to tell you how the sermon was, to hold you, to give you a buffer; it's very difficult to function as a pastor without that kind of relationship in your life.

In pondering these issues, some of the pastors are rethinking whether the ministry, and indeed the Lutheran church itself, is in fact where they should be. This is a torturous question for many of them, a question that goes to the core of their lives.

I couldn't be anything else than a minister. My sense of call is extreme. I spent a lot of time in high school and college running away from a sense of call. Not preaching, not regularly celebrating the Eucharist, not participating in the life of a congregation would be to me the definition of a life in hell.

**** I'm really staying in the ministry until I can leave, at this point. We want to have kids before it's too late, we want to buy a house, and have a covenant relationship. I've spent a lot of time thinking how to do this in the current position, and I just can't figure out a way to publicly affirm our relationship, raise a family, and stay in the ministry. I don't know how you do that.*

**** Being closeted grinds on a daily basis, and keeps me angry on some level all the time. It's not a bed of roses. But I love my ministry. I love my people; even the ones I don't like I'm able to love.*

I'm much more baptized than I am pastor. Like it or not, I'm going to remain part of the people of God. I find great security in that. Being a pastor is great, I love it, but it's only part of my identity. If it was a question of my relationship or my work, I'd pick the relationship. I would not give up my relationship.

**** I have briefly considered switching denominations. But that flies in the face of my whole Lutheran identity. I'm Lutheran! It's an identity thing. It's a theological thing. I'd rather be a layperson in the Lutheran church and have a job, than be a pastor in another denomination.*

On and off, I have considered more accepting denominations, but what I always come back to is that being Lutheran is so much a part of who I am, how the worship speaks to me, and the theology. When it comes right down to it, I have a hard time imagining how I would develop in another denomination. It would be kind of contrived for me to be anything else. I would be out of one closet and into another.

I could martyr myself to this cause any time that I wanted to. But the reason that I lied about it in the first place is in order to do the ministry. I can answer for the lie before the throne of God, but the job is to get the ministry done, and the bishops know that; they're looking to do the ministry, and we're pretty good at it. When it all comes out in the wash, it will come out that some of the most effective pastors in the church have been gay men and lesbian women.

12. *Hope for the church.* Finally, our lesbian and gay pastors speak a strong word of hope and vision for the church. Their vision seems to animate their ministry as well as their personal lives.

**** My mother had an alcohol problem and so the family knew what it was like to keep a secret. Even though the pastors were involved, we definitely had the sense that you couldn't let the congregation know. But then, when my mother was dying of cancer, I learned about the compassion and support that the church can give. That's now my vision of the church. My ideal is the radical hospitality, the radical inclusiveness that I think the gospel points to. That's what I'm most passionate about and what drives me in ministry.*

*** *For me, liturgy is a chance to rehearse what the world could be, and that means so much more when you don't have it elsewhere as extensively. The sacraments become very important. This is a table where we are welcome.*

Conclusion

In their deliberations and their discernment about doctrines and policies, churches seek wisdom from many sources, including ecclesiastical history and traditions, theological studies, scholarship in other disciplines, and the Bible itself. Where issues related to particular groups of persons are concerned, the church has gradually learned not to talk *about* persons without talking *with* them, whenever possible. Direct encounters with those about whom one is deliberating can be uncomfortable and even threatening, and can run the risk of privileging personal experience over other sources of insight. More importantly, however, they protect the church from objectifying others, from relying on ill-informed assumptions and misconceptions, and from making harmful "we-they" dichotomies. It is also a visceral reminder that we are all one in the body of Christ.

In lieu of face-to-face encounters, the pastors who participated in this study have provided, through their reflections and narratives, a small glimpse into their lives and the lives of others like them. As the ELCA continues to ponder the matter of the ordination of noncelibate gay and lesbian persons, it may be helpful to acknowledge that this is not simply an abstract, hypothetical discussion about a situation that may emerge at some time in the future. As this study shows, there already are Lutheran pastors who are lesbian or gay, who are noncelibate, and who are known as such, to one degree or another, in one way or another, to others in the church. To some readers, these accounts may be alarming, signaling that the ELCA needs to maintain tighter reins on who enters the ordained ministry. Other readers may see these pastors as creating what Larry Rasmussen calls anticipatory communities—"leading us through a jangled, precarious, extended time of transition" and "showing that what might someday be undertaken on a larger scale has already taken recognizable shape among us."[1] Regarding homosexuality, there are many questions and few clear-cut answers. Perhaps the strongest conclusion to be drawn from these accounts is that the church is doing well to continue the conversation, in the bold confidence of the gospel.[2]

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[1] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A Proposal for Church and Society* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993), 143–44.

[2] An earlier version of this paper, prepared by Carolyn Riehl, Martha L. Ice, and Bradley E. Schmeling, was presented at the Knutson Conference, March 9, 1997, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The conference theme was "The Gifts We Offer, The Burdens We Bear: The Vocation and Ministry of Gay and Lesbian Persons in Church and Society." The research reported in this paper was funded by the conference sponsors: the Philip N. Knutson Endowment Fund, Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of Michigan, the Gay and Lesbian Task Force of the Southeast Michigan Synod of the ELCA, and the Great Lakes Chapter of Lutherans Concerned. Any opinions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the conference sponsors or of this journal's institutional sponsors. The author expresses gratitude to the men and women who were interviewed, to all others who volunteered to participate in this study, and to the original research team.

Address all correspondence to Carolyn Riehl, Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations, 242 Curry Hall, P.O. Box 26171, UNCG, Greensboro, NC 27402; cjriehl@uncg.edu.

Justification: Another Side to the Story

Ronald Baesler
Messiah Lutheran Church
Yorba Linda, California

A group of Puerto Rican Lutheran pastors was discussing the contextualization of theology. One pastor asked, "What might justification by grace through faith mean for us here in Puerto Rico?" His colleague's response was quick and passionate: "It means that we can really *be* Puerto Ricans."

1998 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the U.S. invasion and takeover of Puerto Rico. From time to time there is talk of proposing another plebiscite among Puerto Ricans concerning their future relationship to the U.S. A small but growing number of Puerto Ricans have officially and publicly renounced U.S. citizenship and proclaimed their Puerto Rican citizenship. Political parties and political opinions on most issues continue to be divided by the three status options currently available: statehood, independence, and commonwealth. The painful question of personal, cultural, and national identity is never absent on this island. All of the retrospection and introspection stimulated by the centennial of the U.S. invasion certainly provoked a spate of questioning and pondering and discussing during 1998.

Given this reality, it is not so surprising that our colleague connected the deepest concern of his culture and of his people with the central doctrine of his Lutheran tradition. While such a connection may not be surprising within this context, it is not immediately obvious what exactly such a connection might mean, what implications it might have for the church's proclamation and discipleship, or what directions it might suggest for the church's relationship to the Puerto Rican reality.

In the paragraphs that follow we shall examine that connection and its implications for ministry. Let it be clearly stated at the outset: The thoughts which follow are those of an outsider. While they do ring true to my personal experience with the Puerto Rican reality and have been shared in dialogue both with my former Puerto Rican colleagues and with students at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, they are nevertheless the words of a *gringo*, albeit one with a decade and a half spent in Latin America.

Connection of justification by grace through faith with the identity of the Puerto Rican people implies a process of contextualization.[1] There are many different

[1] Various noteworthy efforts have been made at contextualizing the doctrine of justification in and for Latin America. From the Lutheran perspective see Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress

contextualization processes, each with unique strengths and weaknesses.[2] The most common contextualization process can be compared to the work of translating from one language to another. Such a process presupposes that a doctrine has a supra cultural meaning, some generic "essence" which can be introduced into any culture and connected with the appropriate symbols. If that were the process used here, then my colleague's assertion would appear to merely equate justification by grace with nationalism: To be justified by grace through faith is to be Puerto Rican, or Canadian, or Peruvian. Connecting God's benevolent grace with one's national identity is hardly a new insight, and certainly, from a historical and a theological perspective, not a very fruitful one.

But let us suppose that my colleague's impassioned response does not imply a translation model of contextualization. What if one were to begin not with a supra cultural definition of a doctrine but instead with the lived experience of this people? What if one were to begin with their perception of their own reality and its challenges, with their understanding of how God is active in, or absent from, their lives, of how God is suffering with them or struggling with them, with their understanding of value and worth and meaning? What if, with that experience as a lens, one were to examine the doctrine of justification by grace through faith?[3] It is then possible that one might see more clearly how this doctrine relates to this particular historical moment in Puerto Rican culture.

Elza Tamez in her book *Contra Toda Condena*[4] appeals to such an approach in order to contextualize this doctrine from the perspective of "los excluídos" of Latin America. She argues that, as a result of the economic and cultural marginalization and exclusion experienced in Latin America, two factors emerge that challenge the doctrine of justification: hunger and insignificance.[5]

Puerto Ricans find themselves in a particular bind as they react to Tamez's argument. Given Puerto Rico's economic status and relationship to the U.S., most other Latin Americans would not see Puerto Ricans as part of this hemisphere's "excluded ones." Yet over against the nation that dominates so much of their life, they certainly are not among its "included ones" either. The influx of U. S. money into Puerto Rico has helped to reduce the specter of starvation that still plagues other parts of Latin America. U. S. investments, along with local investments and labor, have created a relatively prosperous, though financially stretched and often uneasy, Puerto Rican middle class.

As one listens to this people and its culture, the challenge to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith does not primarily come from the presence of hunger. It comes from the threat of insignificance. This threat Puerto Ricans experience in a particular and painful way. Their struggle can illuminate the menacing sense of insignificance felt by many before those whom the world considers to be strong and significant.

Press, 1992), and José David Rodríguez, *Introducción a la Teología* (San José: Editorial DEI, 1993), 31–34, 51–59. *Word & World* 7 (Winter 1987) contains essays prepared for a consultation on Justification and Justice that took place in Mexico City in 1985.

[2] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis,1992) outlines five major contextualization processes.

[3] Bevans calls this process the "transcendental model."

[4] Elza Tamez, *Contra Toda Condena: La justificación por la fe desde los excluídos* (San José: Editorial DEI, 1991).

[5] Tamez, *Contra Toda Condena*, 47.

In Puerto Rico, the struggle against insignificance is a daily battle.

In Puerto Rico, the struggle against insignificance is a daily battle, carried out on many fronts. How does one do battle against insignificance? By proving the contrary. The demeaning demon of insignificance gives rise to the desire to be big, to be important, to be significant. On a personal level this translates into a feverish consumerism. On a national level, Puerto Rico's greatness and grandness is constantly touted. The project to bring water to the capital is not simply the aqueduct, but the SUPER aqueduct. The government's tourism brochure invites you to the "continent" of Puerto Rico. One is continually reminded that Puerto Rico has the biggest radio telescope in the world, the largest commercial center in the Caribbean, and the largest J. C. Penney store in the whole chain. One of the most heated arguments concerning Puerto Rico's future status is related to whether or not it will be able to keep its Olympic Team, one of the world's largest in relation to the population it represents. In order to conquer insignificance, one tries to prove the contrary.

We all live in a world whose norms for success and significance are determined by those who are politically and economically large and powerful. Size and power become the criteria used to measure our importance, the criteria used to justify our existence. The race and culture of those in power become the norms for determining importance. In the midst of such a reality, persons and institutions far from the centers of power are considered insignificant, second class, even irrelevant. They are condemned to a vain search for power and greatness.

In light of this painful reality one can appreciate my colleague's impassioned response to that initial question. Behind his reply I heard these thoughts: In worldly terms, Puerto Rico is not large, important, or powerful. Our search for power and greatness represents a negation of who Puerto Ricans really are as a people. In other words, when we try to conquer our insignificance using the rules of the game established by those in control, we are bound to lose not only the game but also our identity. If we want to justify ourselves by our works, we cannot be Puerto Ricans.

My colleague insists upon connecting the doctrine of justification to the social and political identity of his people. In doing this he reacts against the ahistorical individualism that limits the doctrine's significance to the subjective dimension. At the same time he steps away from liberation theology's usual reflection upon the doctrine which has often centered upon its relationship to ethics. The question often has been: how can one stimulate human activity in pursuit of justice while at the same time proclaiming human passivity with respect to justification?[6] Connecting the doctrine with the identity of a people in search of significance opens up the possibility of recognizing the doctrine's subjective and objective implications, as well as its personal and communal implications. At the same time it makes an implicit connection between the "works of the law" which cannot justify us before God and the

[6]Tamez, 31. See also Juan Luis Segundo, *Grace and the Human Condition* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973), 46f.

"works of the world" which can never justify our existence as a people in the global context.

Scriptural interpretation of God's action in Christ supports such a multidimensional understanding of the doctrine. Paul's letter to the Galatians is one of the primary biblical resources out of which the doctrine of justification is forged. We have here a clear declaration of God's justifying action through Christ (3:13). Yet we note that Paul emphatically announces that message not to a people characterized by their personal sense of guilt, but to those who were troubled by their status as second-class Christians.[7] In their search for status, in their search for favor and significance, these early Christians allowed their lives to be determined by the laws and customs of the dominant group (4:8–11). It is in the midst of such a situation that Paul proclaims that we are justified by the merciful action of Christ, an action which completely eliminates any notion of "second-class" status. To be justified by Christ includes being crucified with him. To be crucified with Christ is to die to this present age with all of its deathly definitions of significance.

The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in the Puerto Rican context declares that God has come and has declared that this people too is loved, granted dignity, and justified. God has decreed an end to the anxious search for significance. God has freed this people from the necessity to prove that they are big and important like everyone else, and freed them in order to celebrate because they are small and unique, like no one else.

My colleague has not reduced the doctrine of justification to its communal dimension. That is obvious to all those who hear his Sunday sermons. It is also obvious to all, as it is to my colleague, that being a Christian is not equal to being a Puerto Rican. Nonetheless, his remark implies that the struggle to be a Puerto Rican must include a rejection of criteria imposed from outside of Puerto Rico.[8] For the Christian, the strength to carry out that critical act flows out of his or her identity founded in God's act in Christ.

Finally, it is also obvious that Puerto Rico's unique dilemma of national identity and political status cannot be resolved by religious discourse or evangelical proclamation, no matter how contextualized they might be. Hard political work is called for: serious dialogue will be needed both within the U.S. and in Puerto Rico. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms reminds us that political and social processes can also be tools employed by the Triune God.

Nevertheless, if this doctrine has absolutely no insight to shed upon this crucial issue, then perhaps it is not as important as we have always insisted. But at this historical moment, within this context, this doctrine *can* help people and congregations. It can help them enter into the socio-political process with a different perspective, and it can perhaps help them redefine the process and its goals. The guiding question need not be: How can we best preserve our benefits and guarantee our status before the world? Instead, freed by the gospel which grows out of this doctrine, one can enter the process asking: How can we—church, government, people—promote life? The doctrine of justification by grace through faith offers to us all a new vision of life: life not measured by greatness and power but by joyful free service and self-giving love.

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[7] For a fuller treatment of this doctrine in the Galatians context see Nils Dahl, *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis:Augsburg, 1977), 111–12.

[8] Thus this position implies (as do all positions) a particular political choice for the future of Puerto Rico.

Honoring the Jews in Christian Preaching

Jay C. Rochelle
St. Timothy's Lutheran Church
Allentown, Pennsylvania

To begin at the beginning

The personal is the political. I grew to adulthood in a section of Northeast Philadelphia that consisted of a predominantly Jewish population. This location shaped me in ways unlike that of many other Christians whom I know. I remember vividly Israeli Independence Day which was celebrated in my neighborhood by people riding through the streets waving flags, blowing horns, shouting praises, and the like. There were more synagogues in my neighborhood than churches, and the street corners were dotted with wine and book shops, mom and pop groceries with *kosher basar* in neon in the windows.

Subsequently, following college and while in seminary, almost everyone in my generation of pastors was influenced by Martin Buber and/or Abraham Joshua Heschel; they were the rabbis to the Christian community, and especially to that generation of pastors and leaders who came of age in the middle of the 60s.

We also must pay special homage to Markus Barth, who was one of the earliest Christian scholars to address such thorny issues as the support of the churches for Israel. Markus was one of the first people in this era to write about the Jewishness of Jesus as a Christian theologian of the Greek Testament, and we Christians owe much to him as a forerunner and pioneer. My own history includes three years of study with Markus in graduate school, and this also shaped my concerns for preaching that honors the Jews.

Leo Baeck and Joseph Soloveitchik, esteemed rabbis in the mid to late twentieth century, each warned us about what Baeck calls the difference between romantic and classic religion, the latter being what Soloveitchik refers to as halakhic religion. Baeck in particular warned Christians of the danger of cutting our ties to our parent religion, that in so doing we could lose our groundedness and begin to drift in lofty regions where we lose touch with the ordinariness of God's presence and call to justice and righteousness.

The local is the global. The world has grown too small through communication systems for us to disregard spiritual paths other than our own, and for Christians the most obvious path to be studied and engaged is Judaism, so even in smaller communities than Allentown or Philadelphia or New York City, Christian pastors need to

prepare the ground for a renewed relationship with our Jewish matrix ("a situation or surrounding substance in which something originates, develops, or is contained"—American Heritage Dictionary). Judaism is the mothering ground from which we emerge as children in the faith.

Initial enemies: adjectives and prepositions

New and old. One of the greatest difficulties we face in preaching comes at the most basic level in terms of what names we use for our primary texts. We speak of New and Old Testaments. The problem facing us when we use these terms is that, in our contemporary American view, new = better, that is to say, the word *new* is a metaphor which carries overtones of exciting, innovative, creative, and relevant. *Old* is a word which means not only prior in time, but metaphorically carries the weight of "outdated," "used," "irrelevant," and "passe," to touch the tip of an iceberg. This truth of our connotative language wreaks havoc because our assumption is that antecedents are automatically superseded by that which follows them.

So from the start we have troubles because our Christian Bibles are divided into two unequal halves, one of which is called the Old Testament and one the New.

Old Testaments are thus "obviously" read and/or kept by those who are themselves old in the metaphorical sense of outdated. New Testaments are, in a sense, always new in quality as well as in time, and thus *supersede*—note that word—the Old.

The new lectionary systems no longer project that distinction of New and Old, which is to their credit; they refer to first and second lessons and then to gospel, terms which bear no surface demeaning.

But in preaching, one is sometimes careless; we have so long used these terms in Christian parlance that it will take time to find a change that is facile enough to make and that does not seem awkward to the speaker.

But we must change the terms. The most logical suggestion is to use terms that designate the texts in an obvious way; use "Hebrew Bible" or Andre Lacocque's judicious term, "Prime Testament," for the Hebrew Scriptures that we used to call the Old Testament. Consider the use of "Greek Testament" for what we used to call the New Testament. One might experiment with the term "Greek Supplement," which honors the church's history since, after all, the Hebrew Scriptures were our first texts and the Greek writings supplemented them in order to tell the Gospel of Jesus.

Remember not to refer to Jews as "Old Testament people," because that's not only metaphorically careless, it is also historically inaccurate since it omits the richness of rabbinic development of Judaism through Mishnah, Targums, and Talmud as the living record of the tradition—the "handing over"—of Scripture.

Before and after. Designations for time are important, as well. We use, glibly, the terms B.C. and A.D. to distinguish the centuries until the time of the Messiah. We speak of "before Christ," and of "Anno Domini," meaning "in the year of the Lord." But these designations are not worldwide. Technically, these designations make sense only for those who are prepared to maintain that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah or Christ. Muslims date their calendar from the year of Muhammad's pilgrimage, Jews from an imagined date for the creation of the world at 3760/61 before the common era. Hence it makes more sense to refer to dating B.C.E. "before the common era," and C.E., "common era."

Rendering symbols and figures without prejudice

Pharisees: what's in a name? The Pharisees have taken a bum rap for so long it seems an uphill battle to try to redeem them from the pit of historical consignment. "Pharisee" has entered common speech with meanings of "narrow-minded," "legalistic," and "hypocritical." Yet, as we learned in the latter twentieth century, the Pharisees are better understood as the early manifestation of those who have become known throughout history simply as Rabbis, teachers of Judaism. In fact, the Rabbis and their "pharisaic" ancestors were the ones whose faithfulness and creativity enabled Judaism to survive following the destruction of the second temple. Jesus may very well have to be counted among their number, and the diatribes against them in the Gospels may be seen as arguments within the family rather than as condemnations of the lost. We should not lose the opportunity to point this out as occasions arise where "Pharisee" seems to be used only in a pejorative way in the Gospels. The term occurs only in the Gospels in this way. In its few other uses, it is a self-designation by Paul or it describes Jewish leaders in a nonpejorative manner.

Declaring the background to Christian festivals. In our preaching, we might also point out the connection of our festivals with their Jewish background. This is primarily true, of course, of the connection between Easter and Passover and the connection between Pentecost and Shavuot. The close connection of Jesus' death to the Passover is the grist of Christian midrash on Jesus as sacrificial lamb, "himself the victim and himself the priest," as the hymn verse has it. The connection between Passover and Shavuot, both of which are festivals of revelation, ought not be overlooked but rather exploited.

We have no strict corollary to Yom Kippur, but the season of Lent bears the motif of repentance, of that constant note that we may "return to the Lord your God, for God is gracious and merciful." Some churches have retained or begun again to offer individual confession, which also correlates to the motif of Yom Kippur.

It is beyond the scope of this article to do more than offer suggestions, but those interested may consult the bibliography and works on the history of liturgy.

Being honest about textual unity. Earlier we talked about new vs. old. A second problem is this: "New Testament" and "Old Testament" are terms which, again metaphorically, propose a textual unity to both documents which is not true to the data. When you say "according to the New Testament," it sounds as if the Greek Supplement were a monolithic unified voice saying the same thing with minor variations due to authorial intent or vocabulary.

The concomitant is that we also propose the "Old Testament" as a unity. This proposal is easier to foist upon Christians than is New Testament unity because, despite the minimal Christian engagement with the text of the Greek Testament, most Christians now are even less familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures—though this was not true in most Protestant churches only two generations ago. Many of us grew up with some knowledge of the stories of the Hebrew Bible, but this is not true any longer.

In addition, most Christians now, as always, are unfamiliar with *TaNaK*, the Jewish division of the Hebrew Bible as *Torah*, *Nebiim*, and *Ketubhim*, "Instruction," "Prophets," and "Writings," and with the implications of that division for inter-

pretation. It makes a difference that Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings are listed as the former *prophets* in the Jewish order of the Bible and not as historical books as in Christian Bibles. Ruth is among the *writings*, as are also Daniel and Esther. Daniel is thus not considered one of the prophets. All of these changes in order make for differences when we interpret the Bible.

To return now to the Greek Testament, and particularly to the Gospels and Paul: we need to see them as individuated books with literary themes and characteristics of their own, not as shadings of distinction in telling the same facts. Specifically, with regard to the figure of Jesus, each of these writings bears its own stamp.

David Rhoads, in his book *The Challenge of Diversity*, points out that each book of the Greek Testament takes a different view of Jesus because each also has a different presenting problem and solution to that problem. At the risk of doing damage to Rhoads' careful analysis, we can summarize as follows.

For the Gospel of Matthew, the presenting problem is that above all else hypocrisy defeats community. The solution to the problem is authentic righteous living, which creates community. Therefore, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is presented as the teacher who can enable such righteous living.

For the Gospel of Mark, the presenting problem is that people try to save their lives because they are living in fear, perhaps of demons. The solution to the problem is the announcement that we can only overcome fear and "save" our lives by losing our lives by turning to others in compassion and love. Therefore, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is presented as God's special messenger to enable us to become available to others in mercy.

For the Gospel of Luke, the problem is that the world is sick without mercy. The solution to the problem is to enact God's vision for a world which is healed by compassion. Therefore, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is portrayed as the one who demonstrates this healing power of God in his ministry and empowers his followers to ministries of compassion.

For the Gospel of John, the problem is that we are out of touch with God. The solution, which is to live in wholeness with God, can only come when we know (Hebrew *yadha*) God intimately in a mystical identification. Jesus is the one who enables that relationship and thus brings us into wholeness.

For Paul, especially the Paul who wrote Romans and Galatians, the problem is that we suffer under the intolerable burden of our sinfulness, which blocks us from full and authentic humanity; we experience this sinfulness as alienation and separation from God. The solution to the problem is that God must declare us to be righteous before we are able to enact righteousness in the world. For Paul, this declaration of righteousness occurs in the cross of Jesus of Nazareth.

All of this information is of use to preachers. We must be careful to present neither the Hebrew Bible nor the Greek Testament as monolithic structures. When we open the way to see the different stories which are told by the various parts of the Bible, we open a path to explore a unity that would flourish in the midst of diversity, a unity which emerges from the diversity which is already evident in Scripture itself.

Overcoming the trauma of theological history

Marcion and his legacy. According to the customary understanding, Marcion (d. ca. 154 C.E.) pitted the "Old Testament" God against the "New Testament" God, which brings us more bad news about the distinction between old and new. Marcion was condemned as a heretic by the early church, and his heresy results from an intemperate reading of some of Paul's letters, which led him to propose a radical dichotomy between law and gospel. In Marcion's reading, the God of the Old Testament is seen as an inferior demiurge, characterized by wrath and vengeance; we must turn to the New Testament in order to find revealed a God of love and compassion. Because of the failure of humanity under the guidance of the demiurge, this "Old Testament" God becomes a preliminary to the revelation of the true and only God, whom we know in Jesus. The Law of the Old Testament pertained only until the time of Christ. Marcion's messiah Jesus Christ was universal, and not to be identified with the messiah of the prophets, who was for the Jews, who would be saved under their own rubrics. Marcion was excommunicated by the Roman church in July, 144 C.E.

When we approach the Greek Testament as if it would render a unitary theology, we run the risk of becoming Marcionites by virtue of our approach. We must begin with the presupposition of *diversity*. Although condemned by the church, the Marcionite approach to Scripture has often sneaked back into preaching where the contrast between law and gospel is drawn in such a way as to suggest that the Hebrew Scriptures are mainly concerned with law and the Greek Testament is mainly concerned with gospel.

Plato and his legacy. Christianity has been plagued by the ongoing need to deal with creeping dualism, particularly with regard to the body and the spirit. We pay lip-service to our rootage in a Jewish view of humanity that is unitary in nature. We understand that we are an "animated body," that the *nephesh* (the whole person) is a composite of *adam* (earth) and the *ruach Adonai* (God's animating Spirit), but our legacy has often been foregone in favor of a flight of the soul from the body. We have succumbed to the view that the body is but the seed, from whose carcass the soul is released to spring back to the One who made it. But we continue to preach the resurrection of the body and not the immortality of the soul, and insofar as we do so we must remember that we are paying attention to our Jewish roots. Flesh and spirit may war against each other, as Paul says, but this is not to be understood as if body and soul were at war with one another. This is neither the Hebrew nor the Pauline view. Paul's dialectic has to do with the whole person (*nephesh*) turned against God, for which he uses the term "flesh," and the whole person turned toward God, for which he uses the term "spirit." As Christians, our preaching honors the Jewish reality when we consistently speak against disinterest in the body and overconcern with "spiritual" stuff. As Archbishop William Temple of Canterbury reminded us early in this cen-

tury, Christianity is the most materialist of all religions. We might wish to emend that text to say that this is true insofar as we honor our Jewish origin.

Translating terms: The downward ascent from heaven to earth. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pastor in Nazi Germany, has been one of my conversation partners for life. In his last years, while in prison, he contemplated a future in which church would consist of two elements, prayer and righteous action. At the same time he experimented with ways of speaking of faith that would use a nonreligious terminology. Bonhoeffer meant by "religion" a piety removed from the world which took refuge in some imagined realm of the spirit that was no longer tainted by the physical, and yet which was rooted in a sense of dependence upon God. He thought we were moving toward an era in which we would learn how to be interdependent with God, who has entered fully into the creation. In this new faithfulness, ordinary life would be the location for our spirituality. The following thoughts for preaching begin from Bonhoeffer and move out from there.

The mandate of the church is to enter into prayer on behalf of the world, blessing God for all things and seeking to become the instruments for the implementation of our own prayer in justice and compassion. We would recognize that salvation is not removed from this world, but involves a wholeness, a fullness of life, a gusto with which we live now and not later. The blessing moves naturally into the search for righteous action.

We would understand that sin means to be turned in upon oneself (Luther), or perhaps it is a callousness that blocks us from identification with others in a spirit of compassion (Heschel). The opposite of sin is faith, which expresses a relationship with God rather than a system of belief. We respond to God's grace in our behavior toward others.

The opposite of sin is faith, which expresses a relationship with God rather than a system of belief.

Jesus of Nazareth calls us into relationship with the One God, the Holy One of Israel. There are, as we have said, many images of Jesus in the Greek Testament, not all of which depend upon calling him "Messiah" or "Christ." We affirm his freedom, his openness, his centeredness and his courage. His message centers on the Presence of a loving God whom he knew intimately as *Abba*, Father. He taught his followers to know God in such an intimate way. He is "the man for others," the one who empties himself in service to the world and by so doing demonstrates the presence of God.

We will continue to "preach Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), but our understanding of Jesus will be formed more in continuity than in contrast with the Jewish background to the Gospel. We see Jesus as Rabbi, teacher of righteousness, in line with Matthew's Gospel. We will not seek to extract Jesus from his Jewish setting, but rather to understand and proclaim him from within that setting.

On style and grace

The epic and the novel. The Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin drew a useful

distinction between two primary voices in literature. One voice, which he termed the epic, is a voice from on high that cannot be challenged. It is the voice of the omniscient narrator. The other voice, which he termed the novel, is in fact a plurality of voices engaging in a dialogue and issuing forth in a narrative that takes a variety of viewpoints into consideration.

Preaching as invitation into common story. Much that passes for preaching has this epic quality to it. The preacher places himself or herself in an unassailable position, hurls down Olympian thoughts, and lets the chips fall where they may. Dialogue is not part of the proclamation. But is this preaching that can honor the dialogical voices in Scripture, or that will take into consideration our Jewish conversation partners?

In continuity with the thought of Bakhtin, we might say that preaching that honors the Jewish people would be dialogical in nature, exploring the plurality of voices that emerge from shared story and seeking to tell a common story of life in God. Such preaching invites people into the reality and the experience of God rather than pontificating about God. This preaching speaks in the novel and not in the epic voice.

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Discerning God's Voice in the Wake of Tragedy

Kristin Johnston Sutton
Graduate Theological Union
Berkeley, California

When I was a student at Wartburg Seminary, we spent a fair amount of time talking about our "call." We discussed what it meant to have a call to ministry, and how we came to the realization that we were called to seminary. Not only that, but what I believe is even more important, we considered what Luther meant when he wrote about the priesthood of *all* believers, emphasizing that every person has a calling to serve God faithfully, whatever her or his occupation. These conversations were not always easy. Sometimes our feelings were difficult to articulate, or the memories personal and uncomfortable to reveal. However, on the whole, I found the whole process helpful and uplifting: it reminded me of why I was there, and encouraged me in my work. This same faith in my calling continues to empower me today. Now that I am working on my Ph.D., I do not talk about my call with others as often, but the idea is still there, beneath the surface, unspoken, but not forgotten, and I am reminded of it from time to time. The morning of September 2, 1998, was one of those times.

The headline of the *San Francisco Examiner* for that day read as follows: "Family Starves for 'Holy Spirit.'" It was a tragic tale. After neighbors had alerted the police that the family hadn't been seen in some time, the police entered the apartment and found a mother and her two daughters, ages 9 and 7, "lying weak and emaciated on their beds." The mother told the police that they had eaten almost no food for a month. "They ate some peanut butter and crackers about three weeks ago, she reportedly said, and since then have had only water." By all accounts, she was a devoted mother who loved her daughters deeply, and the neighbors were scrambling to find an explanation for her seemingly inexplicable behavior.

"Apparent mental collapse" was the general opinion—but with a religious twist. The police said that the mother was "waiting for the Holy Spirit to come take her family away." Taking instruction from the ringing of her phone, she moved her family upstairs, to be closer to the Spirit, and waited for deliverance. "Mental illness, combined with religious fervor" was the final diagnosis of the article itself: no drugs, no alcohol, no cult associations, just a devoted Christian woman who didn't know where else to turn.

You might know someone in a similar situation. She was poor, and her husband had died of a heart attack a few years before. In short, she was struggling; and in the words of a neighbor, the stress of her lifestyle

just overwhelmed her. This same neighbor speculated further that "in the absence of the help she needed from her community, [she] was appealing to her God in desperation." For me, it is this last idea that lifts the whole event out of the realm of the grotesque and into that of the tragic.

By all accounts, she was in desperate circumstances, literally dying for help, with nowhere to go. In her anguish she turned to the One she trusted above all others, hoping against hope she would be delivered. I don't know the kind of prayers she prayed, and I would not dare guess at their intensity, but I firmly believe that the answer she heard came from her own mouth, and not the mouth of God. Yes, this woman believed that she had received a special "call" from God, and her incongruous use of the telephone only heightened the irony of the situation. However, I am convinced that the call she heard, the call to starve herself and her children to death, was not in any way a call from the Lord of Life, the Giver of Peace, the Compassionate Shepherd, the God who became incarnate in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross that we might live, calls us into new life, not into death, into creation, not into destruction. This woman, pushed to the edge by the trials and tribulations of her life, created a call for herself that she believed would bring her salvation, and only the intervention of the police saved her from complete self-destruction. Even after reading the article through a half dozen times, I can still hardly believe it.

There are many lessons to be learned from this sad incident, one of which is the importance of truly being "church" to one another, and living with eyes and ears open to the needs of our brothers and sisters. That, however, is a topic for another article. What strikes me most deeply is how seductive the temptation is to "play God," to manipulate our faith and put a divine stamp on our purely personal agenda. Now, I am not suggesting that this horrifying action is typical, or that it represents a usual or normal way of living out our relationship to God in trying times. I am well aware that this story is extraordinary, and mostly likely very far from the situation of most of the readers of this journal. Nonetheless, underneath this woman's strikingly poor judgment lies the basic fact of an ungratified desire, a longing for relief, an insatiable hunger for deliverance. These feelings, I would argue, are not quite so foreign to us, and perhaps not as unrelated to our own lives as we might like to admit. This mother had lost all hope and all faith, and so she took matters into her own hands. For most of us, the consequences of her actions are unthinkable and impossible to imagine, but we should not be too smug. We live with the same demons, and we all occasionally succumb to the same temptation.

We all have experienced deep desires that have gone unfulfilled—the desire for a child, or for love, or simply for a new job or a new house. We all have experienced weariness, restlessness, and fatigue, and we all have cried out for help in one form or another. We all have felt hunger's dull ache and sharp pains, waking up to despair each morning and going to bed each night desolate. It is this craving for satisfaction that seduces us into the belief that what we so desperately want is also what God wants for us, and that this justifies satisfying our desires by any means necessary. However, this is a sin. It is called pride; and what it involves is valuing our own will over God's, making our own voice the deciding one.

We have all done it at some point. It happens when there is some gain we badly crave, or some evil we long to avoid. It is a natural reaction, because we live in a society that encourages us to put ourselves first, assert our freedom of choice and go after

God calls us onto paths much more challenging and fulfilling than we would ever choose for ourselves.

what we want, regardless of the cost. The having becomes worth the cost of the getting, no matter what the price. We are myopic people, people with short-range vision who often focus only on today with little or no regard for tomorrow. It is hard to wait, hard to accept a deferment of something we badly desire, and so we convince ourselves that the siren's song of our own desire is actually God's holy call.

But that call, the call that is authentic and true, comes from deep within God's heart and has the incomparable advantage of being influenced by God's infinite wisdom and love. Don't forget that last word: God is not only wise but unconditionally loving, caring for us not only collectively but individually, loving us each with particular care. God truly wants the best for us, in spite of the mayhem and chaos that often seem to overwhelm us, and God calls us onto paths much more challenging and fulfilling than we would ever choose for ourselves. God's call is not always an easy one. We know that following Christ involves taking up our cross and denying ourselves, but God's call is one that we can trust unequivocally, and that is something that we cannot say with any confidence about our own fickle desires.

I pray for this woman and her daughters. I pray for a society in which such tragedies occur. But also in my prayers, I add one for myself. I pray that I do not succumb to the temptation my own will puts before me every day. I pray for the courage and patience to trust God's call for my life, instead of replacing it with one of my own that is more comfortable, more familiar. Finally, I pray that I might look to the future and see, at least dimly, a vision of the life God intends for me, and trust that it is better, far better, than anything I could dream for myself.

Book Reviews

Uneasy Neighbors: Church and State in the New Testament. By Walter E. Pilgrim. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. xiv and 225 pages. Paper. $20.00.

What does the New Testament teach about the relation between church and state? Is it Paul's teaching in his Letter to the Romans about being "subject to the governing authorities," which exist because they "have been instituted by God"? That is one major approach to the relation between church and state present in the New Testament, what Walter E. Pilgrim calls the "ethic of subordination." It is present not just in Romans, but in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Peter, and Hebrews.

But, Pilgrim tells us in *Uneasy Neighbors*, there are two very different attitudes toward "governing authorities" in the New Testament. One is the "ethic of resistance" so dramatically evident in the Book of Revelation, in which the state is pictured under the images of beast, whore, and Babylon as the prime historical representative of evil on earth. Instead of subordination, the proper Christian response to the state is faithful witness, patient endurance, and active resistance.

The other major attitude toward the state Pilgrim calls the "ethic of critical distancing," an approach he finds in Jesus and the Gospels. The strength of his book is his careful analysis of this middle way between subordination and resistance. In fact, the bulk of the book is devoted to a description of "critical distancing" evident in Jesus' words and deeds presented by the Synoptic Gospels and by John and in the tradition of the suffering and death of Jesus in all four Gospels. As Pilgrim summarizes his view, "While Jesus accepts the necessary role of those who govern, he stands as a constant critic of the political and religious establishment, even daring ultimately to provoke it to change, at the risk of his own life" (p. 124).

In a concluding chapter Pilgrim asks whether there is a "normative" view of the relation between church and state in the New Testament. He says there is New Testament agreement on only one thing: the ultimacy of obedience to God. On the basis of the New Testament material he proposes a threefold paradigm for church-state relations: (1) a critical-constructive stance is appropriate when the powers that be are attempting to achieve justice; (2) a critical-transformative stance should be employed when authority errs but can be realistically moved to salutary change; (3) a critically resistive stance is necessary when the powers are responsible for demonic injustice or idolatry and refuse to be responsible to change.

The author is Professor of New Testament at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington, and was for many years director of the Lutheran Institute of Theological Education in the Pacific Northwest. This study is one in the series of "Overtures to Biblical Theology," edited by Walter Brueggemann.

John H. Tietjen
Trinity Lutheran Church
Fort Worth, Texas

Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus. By Beverly Roberts Gaventa. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. xii and 145 pages. Paper. $18.00.

Writing as a Protestant and a mother, Gaventa presents a literary analysis of glimpses of Mary in the Gospels and the Protoevangelium of James. Distinguishing her method from theological or historical approaches, she seeks to discern what can be gleaned about the figure of Mary from these texts in their final literary forms.

Gaventa's analysis focuses on the different roles Mary plays in each of the Gospels. Matthew introduces her within the theme of the threat to Jesus. Luke focuses on Mary as disciple, mother, and prophet. In John, her presence reinforces the prologue's claim that in Jesus the Word indeed became flesh. Gaventa sees all these glimpses as part of the theme of the scandal

of the Gospel, of the offensiveness of Jesus' person and teaching. As part of this scandal, Gaventa suggests that the glimpses of Mary reveal important aspects of discipleship for all of us: living with vulnerability, reflecting with care on the advent of Jesus Christ, and witnessing God's actions in the world.

In contrast to the Gospels, the Protoevangelium of James attempts to remove any hint of scandal from Mary. Gaventa's literary analysis of this book highlights ways in which second century Christianity duplicated some of the biblical concerns regarding Mary and also began developing new lines significant in the development of later traditions about Mary.

This book is part of the series Personalities in the New Testament. Gaventa writes in a style easily accessible to a variety of audiences. Readers unfamiliar with the method of literary analysis will see clearly how the method works and enriches biblical study. The results of her analysis clarify the kinds of roles played by Mary in the biblical accounts and the variety of ways in which the biblical figure of Mary can be a model for Christians today.

Gwen Sayler
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology. By Susan A. Ross. New York: Continuum, 1998. 240 pages. Cloth. $24.95.

Sacramental theology as theological reflection on the sacraments finds creative and thorough explication in this study. Susan Ross's presentation of the issues involved in speaking theologically about the sacraments of the Christian church crosses denominational boundaries as her proposal for a feminist sacramental theology addresses some fundamental issues regarding the role of the sacraments in the life of the church.

Ross develops four criteria for a feminist sacramental theology that assist us in focusing the issues facing contemporary theology and present reflection on the sacraments. First, she calls for "tolerance and appreciation for ambiguity" (p. 54). By this she means to avoid the dualistic tendencies of valid or invalid expressions of the sacraments, real or symbolic versions of God's presence, and the boundaries between clergy and lay persons in the community.

The second suggestion is for "a critical consideration of theories of body and gender" (p. 57). It is in this realm where we are enabled to ask the question of what difference feminist considerations can make for sacramental theology. Embodiment is a critical issue when speaking about the sacraments, and Ross brings particular attention to this through her use of feminist theology.

The third criterion Ross proposes is that sacramental theology "include a critical understanding of theories of symbolic representation" (p. 59). This is not to move toward understanding a symbolic presence in the Eucharist, but to look at the sacraments and their theological significance, to see what they symbolically represent with regard to the human being and her relationship with God.

Finally, Ross suggests that "an adequate sacramental theology is ultimately judged by its struggle to overcome oppression and work for justice" (p. 62). For Roman Catholic women such as Ross, the justice issue necessarily includes the question of women's ordination. For others, the affirmation of God's presence in the world and God's alliance with the human being must say something about what it means to be a human, *being* and *doing* in the world.

This book can be a help to those reflecting on the importance of the sacraments within the life of the church, and can push us to examine our practices and beliefs as they reflect what we assume about God, human life, and our relationship with God in the world. Although Ross's Roman Catholic roots lead her to some theological discussion that does not directly pertain to the concerns of the Lutheran church, her analysis is nevertheless enlightening as to its presentation of the themes and concerns when embarking upon sacramental reflection. She shows how feminist theological concerns make a difference, and can transform the way in which we understand the relationship between God and the human being manifest here.

Caryn Riswold
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity. By James D. G. Dunn. London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991. xvi and 368 pages. Paper. $29.95.

Disinheriting the Jews. Abraham in Early Christian Controversy. By Jeffrey S. Siker. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991. 296 pages. Paper. $18.95.

This brief review calls attention to two significant books published some time ago. Prof. Dunn of Durham University in England examines historically and theologically a topic important for every member of the Christian church: the reasons for and significance of the separation of Christianity from its Jewish matrix. The discussion of these issues from the F. C. Baur–J. B. Lightfoot divergence in the nineteenth century to the reappraisal of Judaism by E. P. Sanders in recent years demonstrates a paradigm shift in research into Christian origins. Add the Christian reaction to the Holocaust, and there is need for a reexamination. Dunn discusses four fundamental characteristics of early Judaism—monotheism, election, covenant focused in Torah, land focused in Temple—and then discusses them in Jesus, the earliest church, Paul, and other New Testament texts. Each of the four Jewish characteristics became an issue between Christians and Judaism. The decisive period for the "parting of the ways" was between 70 and 135 C.E., though it happened at differing times in differing areas of the church.

Siker casts a narrower net as he examines how Abraham shaped the identity of both early Judaism (a brief discussion, pp. 17–27) and early Christianity. He discusses Paul's use of Abraham to argue for inclusion of Gentiles, and then Abraham in Matthew, Hebrews, James, Luke-Acts, John, and second-century Christianity (there is a full chapter on Justin Martyr). His concluding chapter, "From Gentile Inclusion to Jewish Exclusion," summarizes the outcome. The interpretation of Abraham documents the growing distance of Christianity from Judaism.

These two significant books provide a major contribution to the understanding of Judaism as the matrix of Christianity and to the ongoing conversation between Judaism and Christianity. Dunn speaks of the "enduring Jewish character" of Christianity as a possible basis for building bridges between the two faiths, while Siker comments, "There is no Jewish problem, but there is a Christian problem." The careful study of both might make a good seminar in seminary or a study project for a group of clergy concerned about the relation of Christianity and Judaism.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity. Edited by James C. VanderKam and William Adler. Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. xii and 286 pages. Cloth. $48.00.

This work consists of five chapters by four authors: an introductory chapter by W. Adler, "1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs, and Enoch in Early Christian Literature" by J. C. VanderKam, "Christian Influence on the Transmission History of 4, 5, and 6 Ezra" by T. A. Bergren, "The Legacy of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity: Regional Trajectories" by D. Frankfurter, and "The Apocalyptic Survey of History Adapted by Christians: Daniel's Prophecy of 70 Weeks" by Adler again.

The stated hope of this volume is to "enhance the appreciation of the debt the Christian Church owes to its mother religion" and to "stimulate added reflection on the complex cultural relationships in the early history of both religions" (p. xii). This is not an introductory work but a technical one, written for specialists. Chapter 4 (by Frankfurter), for example, expects its audience to be familiar with terms such as "*chôra*" and "anchorite." The specialist will be impressed by the remarkable body of research into lesser-known writings such as 5 and 6 Ezra. Nevertheless, the nonspecialist, too, is benefited by taking in the discussion. Most Hebrew, Greek, and Latin expressions are accompanied by English translations, but some are not (e.g. pp. 9, 11, 36, 37, 47, 106, 136, 238 [Greek], and pp. 137 n. 40, 223 [Hebrew]).

A general tendency of the studies in this volume is to be fairly tentative on issues relating to the history of the New Testament writings, as seen, for example, in the caution VanderKam exercises by offering the wide window of 60-100 C.E. for dating 1 Peter (p. 62). Still, the writers accomplish their stated hope. One cannot come away from this volume without concluding that to declare earliest Christianity to be non-apocalyptic Christianity or to be apocalyptic Christianity may be sloganeering that obscures the fruitful cross-fertilization of ideas that took place as elements of apocalyptic writing were taken up into "non-apocalyptic" writings well into the first four centuries of Christianity.

S. John Roth
Faith Lutheran Church
Jacksonville, Illinois

Jeremiah: The World, the Wound of God. By Daniel Berrigan. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. 195 pages. $18.00.

Daniel Berrigan has focused of late on the prophets. This should not surprise us who know him as long-time pacifist, anti-war activist, poet, theologian, relentless social critic, and, of course, modern prophet. Through the prophets, Berrigan argues, Yahweh strives mightily to break into human history, to speak the truth of who we are and who we are intended to become: friends, sisters, brothers of one another (p. xii).

The prophet is bound to Yahweh, is the "other" of Yahweh, so that Jeremiah becomes, in the unity of his life and message, Yahweh's revelation of what it means to be truly human.

Though Berrigan comments carefully on each section of Jeremiah, he has not written a run-of-the-mill commentary. He presupposes the work of the scholarly academy and occasionally even pokes fun at its stiffness and stuffiness, but his fascination is with the total message of Jeremiah: Yahweh's indispensable "no" of judgment and "yes" of renewal. With a poet's precision and insight Berrigan unleashes the power of Jeremiah's images and metaphors and uncovers Jeremiah's continuing and contemporary relevance.

At the heart of this commentary, the Hebrew prophet and the U.S. poet/dissident walk hand in hand, their existential situations eerily similar: as Jeremiah deals with the paradox of Babylon's power, Berrigan stares down the super power that rains death on Hiroshima, Hanoi, Baghdad; as Jeremiah squares off with Hananiah, the false prophet, Berrigan challenges what he calls the coldhearted officialdom of the church. Both know imprisonment and almost universal public disfavor. Both confront the powers with symbolic, nonviolent acts of resistance and suffer for it.

Berrigan echoes Jeremiah's crackling fury and searing irony but never evidences bitterness. The God who mourns over God's people has taught Jeremiah (and Berrigan!) to mourn as well.

Concrete historical context is decisive for Berrigan. If Jeremiah was scathing and unrelenting in his appraisal of king, priest, and false prophet, Berrigan is equally merciless in applying these standards of truth and justice to our society. For a pacifist Berrigan pulls few punches. The call for "family values" in our day is actually "the sanctified code for a newer brand of fascism" (p. 26); official religion tends to be "mute as to large issues and cumbering as to small" (p. 51); Berrigan's own experience has brought him into contact with "ethically bankrupt judges and persecutors and jailers" (p. 86); the just-war theory of the theologians is nothing but a "hoary Trojan horse" (p. 120).

Finally, Berrigan's is a Christian reading of Jeremiah. What Jeremiah hints at, Jesus speaks clearly. What Jeremiah's profound revelation of Yahweh leaves unfinished, Jesus completes: the God of Jeremiah never once counsels forgiveness; Jesus prays for his persecutors (p. 84).

This is not a commentary for chauvinists, super patriots, the orthodox, or the fainthearted. Nor will it supply easy sermon outlines. But it will help its readers face the "all-but-unbearable realism of the Bible" (p. 173) and strengthen what Berrigan sees in Jeremiah as the God-given "inability to conform to the injustice and pain of those who suffer" (p. 21).

Peter Kjeseth
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus. By Ben Witherington III. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998. 347 pages. Cloth. $22.99.

Paul, the Man and the Myth. By Calvin Roetzel. Studies on Personalities of the New Testament. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998. xii and 269 pages. Cloth, $34.95; paper, $22.00.

What's going on in the study of Paul? Who is this Paul, and where and how does he fit into the first century social and religious world? These two volumes, both interesting and well-written, give divergent answers. Ben Witherington gives answers from a conservative theological and historical perspective. That is, he accepts all thirteen letters as authentically Pauline (including the Pastoral Epistles) and recognizes a fundamental theological unity in these letters, for all their variety of expression, while describing and evaluating the newer methods and approaches used in Pauline studies. He knows modern English-language scholarship; his extensive bibliography lists only four books and four articles in German.

Witherington does not write a biography but rather examines "what sort of person Paul was" (p. 13). He first discusses ancient theories of personality and the honor code as the background for understanding Paul as Jew, Roman citizen, and Christian (chapter 2). In this context he examines Paul's autobiographical passages, concluding that Paul remained a messianic Jew who no longer held to the mandatory, stressing the decisive change brought by Paul's conversion. He argues that Paul may well have had a Roman name (p. 72), Paulus being his *cognomen*, family name. The chapter "Paul the Writer and Rhetor" argues the authenticity of the so-called deutero-Paulines by stressing the use of scribes. Witherington underlines the influence of rhetorical education on Paul; here, in my opinion, he identifies rhetorical influence too much with the structure of orations (I find his analyses of Philippians and 2 Corinthians unpersuasive) and too little with the use of rhetorical modes of persuasion.

Witherington pays attention to Paul's theology by considering his role as prophet and authoritative apostle (Paul does make predictions, without having an expectation of an imminent return, p. 137), by examining his attitude toward government, social structures, and anthropology (respect, with critical reservations: no absolute silence of women in worship), by using intertextuality to understand Paul as narrative theologian (indebted to Richard Hays's reconstruction of the Old Testament substratum to Paul's thought), and by examining the christological center of Paul's ethical theology.

Some small points of critique. Is "Roman citizen" really the proper category? Paul wrote in Greek and, if Acts is correct, came from a Greek city, Tarsus. There is no indication that he could read Latin; hence Plutarch's essay "On Inoffensive Self-Praise" is more relevant than Cicero's *De Inventione* (p. 61). In short, there is too easy a running together of Greek culture of the eastern Mediterranean with that of Rome's in the west. The title of the *CIL* is *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (not *Latinae*, an impossible Latin construction, p. 72).

Roetzel's work, by contrast, might be said to represent the outcome of the consensus of the critical study of Paul. He bases his work on the seven universally accepted authentic Pauline letters. He is critical of Acts as a historical resource, using it on occasion when it coheres well with the letters. He too structures his presentation thematically. But the outcome is quite different. He places Paul into the world of Hellenistic Judaism. Paul is not, for Roetzel, a Roman citizen (that is Luke's apologetic construction). While Witherington tends to locate Paul in the mainstream, Roetzel regards him as marginalized. He is not influenced by Palestinian Judaism but by Diaspora Judaism. He thus spiritualizes both the OT (Septuagint) text and Jewish tradition. As apostle to the Gentiles, he does not first go to Jews (as Acts presents him); Paul remains attached to Judaism after the confrontation with Christ. Roetzel agrees with Witherington that Paul's proclamation "was rooted in the sacred story of God's dealings with Israel" (p. 65). Roetzel lists nine foci of his proclamation to Gentiles. His presentation of Paul as letter-writer locates him within the letter writing tradition of philosophic teachers but is

much more reserved in its evaluation of rhetorical theory as a formative influence (pp. 79-80). "The Theologian" chapter stresses Paul's indebtedness to Judaism and earlier Christian tradition and the situation-related thinking of Paul (1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians). Paul stresses participation in Christ (baptism's significance) and its social implications for Christian community. An unusual and significant chapter discusses Paul as "The Model Ascetic," stressing how a focus on the cross of Christ leads to self-denial for others. The last chapter, "The Mythic Apostle," shows how Acts and the later Apocryphal Acts of Paul develop and extend the picture of Paul.

Roetzel's book is marred by numerous mistakes in printing Greek: missing accents, misspelling, false syllabification, or running words together. The transliterated Greek is much better. (Why some transliteration, some in Greek font?) And I am not persuaded that a racing metaphor underlies Romans 9:30–33; 11:11–12 and 26–27, as Roetzel suggests on p. 127.

These books in a very real sense complement one another. Their agreements in many respects demonstrate the power of Paul's thought. Their differences are useful, since they raise significant questions of history and interpretation. Read together, they form a rich repast in interpreting and understanding Paul.

Edgar Krentz

Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church. Edited by Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997. vii and 121 pages. Paper. $12.95.

This book brings together valuable ecumenical documents with background and interpretation. In the introduction the editors argue that an ecumenical bridge needs to be built between the study's participants, Faith and Order, and Life and Work. However, building this bridge will require a costly obedience to serve all creation and humankind as the body of Christ.

Part 1 is composed of the documents, the outgrowth of the study of the World Council of Churches on ecclesiology and ethics from 1992 to 1996. They include "Costly Unity" (Ronde, Denmark, February 1993), "Costly Commitment" (Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Israel, November 1994), and "Costly Obedience" (Johannesburg, South Africa, June 1996). Their presence in this work makes them more accessible to the general reader.

Part 2 is an interpretation of the WCC study by theologians of four different confessional and cultural perspectives. Duncan B. Forrester, the Scottish co-moderator of the second and third meetings, writes concerning "Living in Truth and Unity: The Church as a Hermeneutic of Law and Gospel." He believes that *koinonia* can be found in the church when faith and action are each seen as necessary elements as unity, discipleship, and obedience are sought. In "The Right Direction but a Longer Journey," Larry Rasmussen, an American participant in the first two discussions, recommends that the whole diverse people of God should participate inductively in the sharing of faith and the facing of ethical issues. Elizabeth S. Topia, a Filipino participant in the last two consultations, believes that a greater diversity of people should be involved in the discussion, including more women, indigenous people, and older people. She agrees with Rasmussen that there is a need to reflect and critique each other's stances on a small scale, at the grassroots level, not only with those academically trained and ecumenically exposed. Vionel Ionita, secretary for Studies with the Conference of European Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, argues for a concentration on the distinctiveness of the church, ecclesiology, and unity. An ecclesiological vision should be developed on the basis of our common baptism.

Although the essays represent a great diversity, they are limited in depth (only twenty-nine pages). The overall work is more valuable as a study of the process of ecumenical relations than a study of eschatology or ethics, or their relationship. The book is most useful for seminarians, pastors, and theologians who want to stay current on ecumenical conversation.

Roger H. Black
English Lutheran Church
La Crosse, Wisconsin

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Christian Faith. Faith and Scholarship Colloquies. Edited by James H. Charlesworth and Walter P. Weaver. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998. xiii and 76 pages. Paper. $12.00.

This volume of four essays by recognized scholars in the fields of Qumran and Biblical studies not only brings up to date information concerning the manuscripts found from 1947 onwards in the caves along the Northwestern edge of the Dead Sea. It also seeks to "lead many to read the Dead Sea Scrolls, reread the New Testament, and reflect on what life was like back then," and reflects on the significance of these matters for Christianity, in its origins and as it challenges Christians today.

In the Preface Charlesworth reviews briefly the different aspects of scholarly investigations and judgments being made concerning the Scrolls and their significance.

The first essay, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, summarizes and evaluates a large body of material from "eight or nine different locations," dated at different times, which have at times been designated as "Dead Sea Scrolls" or considered to have some direct relation to those Scrolls found near Qumran and to that community. He concludes that it is best to restrict the term and concentrate "on the texts of Qumran, and some texts from Masada and the Cairo Geniza." Two further points may be noted: First, the Scrolls reflect pre-Christian Judaism; no texts are of the NT. Yet the Scrolls are the most contemporaneous writings extant for the background of Jesus, Paul, and the earliest Christian community. Second, the community is more closely related to the Essenes than to any other pre-Christian group and seems to have had some influence on the earliest Jerusalem Christian community, and, to some degree—indirectly probably—on Jesus himself.

John Collins in the second essay discusses Messianism in the Scrolls. While noting the great variety in Jewish expectations concerning the Messiah, Collins specifically and quite expertly discusses five aspects: the dual Messiahship, the King Messiah, the Dying Messiah, the Son of God text (4Q246), and the Messiah of Heaven and Earth (4Q521).

The final two essays, "Prophecy in the Dead Sea Scrolls" by David Noel Friedman and "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Faith" by James Charlesworth, both discuss the manner in which these entities impact on the New Testament and on how Christians relate them to their faith and theology today. Whether or not the reader finds their suggested solutions satisfactory, both essays offer valuable challenges to one's own thinking.

Ray Martin
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Earlier Letters of Paul—And Other Studies. By John C. Hurd. Arbeiten zur Religion und Geschichte des Urchristentums; Studies in the Religion and History of Early Christianity 8, ed. Gerd Lüdemann. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998. 212 pages. Paper. DM 59.00.

This volume contains five unpublished and five previously published articles by John Hurd of Toronto. They are concerned primarily with the sequence and dating of Paul's letters, with the structure, integrity, and authorship of the Thessalonian letters, and with 1 Corinthians. (There is one redaction critical study of the influence of Isaiah 6:9–10 on Mark 4–8.)

Hurd dates the Thessalonian Letters and 1 Corinthians early (the Thessalonian letters before the Jerusalem Council!), under the influence of John Knox. He holds that Paul's initial stay in Thessalonica was longer than the "three Sabbaths" of Acts—in general holding that one should disregard Acts in reconstructing both sequence and the dating of Paul's letters. He argues that 1 Thess 2:14–16 is authored by Paul, not a later interpolation. His article "Concerning the Authenticity of 2 Thessalonians," originally read to the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar on the Thessalonian Letters (1983), is in my opinion the strongest defense that can be made. (I presented a paper on the non-authenticity of 2 Thessalonians to the same session.) While I still am not persuaded by Hurd, he deserves careful attention by all interested in the Thessalonians letters.

Hurd's defense of the integrity of 1 Corinthians (1994) is a valuable supplement to *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (1965). These well-written articles are worth careful perusal, even if one finally disagrees with some of the conclusions. He has an original, inquiring mind, captive to no school. I commend them to you.

Edgar Krentz

Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts. By Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993. xii and 148 pages. Paper. $13.00.

In his magisterial work *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), Henry J. Cadbury argued that Luke-Acts was a single work, divided into two scrolls, a view that has been common in New Testament scholarship ever since. In this volume, Mikeal Parsons (Baylor University) and Richard Pervo (Seabury-Western Theological Seminary) put that received axiom in question.

They do not argue that the works are by two different authors but that they are distinct works in genre, narrative style, and theological outlook. There are many incisive insights to be gained from this book, even for readers (such as I) who are not persuaded by the overall argument. Pervo argues that Luke is only half a work, "if generic unity is pressed vigorously"—and that makes the discussion of Matthew, Mark, and John problematic (pp. 43-44). That is not at all persuasive. Why must Luke conform to the other three (to say nothing of the disparity in genre and narrative style between John and the other two)? No one suggests that the last book of Thucydides is not part of the history, even though it is stylistically quite different from the eight earlier books.

In the chapter on narrative unity Parsons argues that unity between Luke and Acts is at best problematic. He stresses disparity in style and differences in the implied author and in the narratives related by Jesus in the Gospel and by Paul in Acts. Jesus does not figure in the parables, while Paul speaks autobiographically.

In the chapter on theological unity Pervo argues that Luke and Acts differ in tone and interest, an argument against unity. The major problem is the continuity between the preacher Jesus in Luke and the proclaimed Jesus in Acts. The resurrection thus marks a great divide. Acts does not stress the death of Jesus as a saving event and downplays eschatology—differing emphases from Luke. (I wish this case had been argued at much greater length.) Luke pays attention to "harlots and publicans," not mentioned in Acts, which pays more attention to people of wealth and status. The speeches in Acts reflect contemporary rhetoric; the sermons of Jesus in Luke do not.

This book's provocative argument questions the unity of Luke-Acts not to propose a new theory but to stimulate continued discussion of the old. "At this point, it is more important for us to frame the questions than to attempt to settle these issues once and for all" (p. vi). Readers are invited to carry the discussion on—and that means the authors have achieved their goal well.

Edgar Krentz

Literary Studies In Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson. Edited by Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998. xviii and 372 pages. Paper. $25.00.

This Festschrift honoring Prof. Tyson focuses on three of his scholarly interests, identified by Victor Furnish in the Foreword: (1) using the New Testament, along with other ancient texts, to write the history of early Christianity; (2) the interpretation of Luke-Acts; and (3) the difficult yet critical issue of the relation of Christianity and Judaism in early Christianity.

Eight essayists treat aspects of Luke-Acts as historical document: the synoptic problem (William Farmer, David Peabody), the Jerusalem conference (William O. Walker), Paul's conversion in Acts 9:1–29 (John Townsend), the Jewish interpretation of the crucifixion (Darrell L. Bock), and Luke in the second century (Arthur Bellinzoni).

Nine essays discuss themes, characters, and the rhetoric of Luke-Acts: Mark in Acts (C. Clifton Black), Gamaliel in Acts 5:33–42 (John Darr), Conversion in Acts (Charles H. Talbert),

Jerusalem' significance (Mikeal Parsons), Rhetoric of Luke 1–2 (Philip L. Schuler), From Enthymeme to Theology in Luke 11:1–3 (Vernon K. Robbins), Acts 2:14–36, intertextuality of the Psalms (David P. Moesner).

The third section contains six essays on "Jews, Judaism and Anti-Judaism in the Lukan Writings and Scholarship." I learned the most, by far, from Susannah Heschel's "Redemptive Anti-Semitism: The De-Judaization of the New Testament in the Third Reich" (pp. 235–64); she tells the chilling story of the captivity of some New Testament scholars to Nazi Anti-Semitism in the Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life, founded in 1939. Walter Grundmann (especially), Georg Bertram, Karl Georg Kuhn, Gerhard Delling, and Johannes Leipoldt are names that figure in the account. This essay alone is enough to make this a distinguished volume. Scholars who discuss aspects of Judaism in Luke's writings are Robert Tannehill, Robert Brawley, Jack T. Sanders, Thomas Phillips, and Richard Townsend.

This volume is an apt appreciation of a significant teacher and scholar by people influenced by his person and work. It deserves attention by every student of Luke-Acts.

Edgar Krentz

The Devil, Disease and Deliverance: Origins of Illness in New Testament Thought. By John Christopher Thomas. Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 13. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998. 360 pages. Paper. $21.95.

John Christopher Thomas is professor of New Testament at Church of God Theological Seminary, Cleveland, Tennessee. The title of his work delimits quite narrowly the scope of his study. It is not a book about illness (no discussion of the woman with the hemorrhage), nor is it about demonic possession (no discussion of the Gerasene demoniac), and it is not strictly a study of exorcism. Thomas only wants to investigate the relationship of "supernatural power" to illness, infirmity, or even death.

The bulk of the work consists of verse-by-verse analysis of each pertinent passage. After he has completed a study of each New Testament book or collection, he summarizes the position of that section. While the exegesis basically summarizes the data of the many commentaries utilized, the summaries can be quite instructive. For example, illness can be caused by sin in Paul, John, and James, but there is no reference to demon possession or exorcism. In contrast, Matthew and Mark do describe illnesses caused by demonic possession and can speak of God as a causative factor in both illness and healing. Luke, on the other hand, utilizes an eclectic approach to the cause of illness and its cure.

Thomas furnishes an extensive, useful bibliography, though I wonder why standard authors like Kee, Stephen Davies, Remus, and Hollenbach are missing. Perhaps it is because Thomas makes no attempt to clarify the phenomenology of demon possession. His interest is to relate more accurately a Pentecostal practice of healing to the biblical material.

Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago Theological Seminary

The Epistles to the Colosslans and to Philemon. A Commentary on the Greek Text. By James D. G. Dunn. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996. xviii and 388 pages. Cloth. $32.00.

Dunn, a well known and highly respected British New Testament scholar, emphasizes the Jewish background to Colossians, downplaying the possible role of Gnosticism and similar religious systems. Dunn, a master of philological analysis, analyses words and phrases in detail, citing numerous parallels from the LXX, intertestamental literature, classical and Hellenistic authors, and the papyri to argue that Colossians counteracts opponents in the diaspora synagogues of Colossae. He cautiously adopts the middle ground about the Pauline authorship, deciding that the letter, written close to Philemon chronologically, was actually not written by Paul himself.

Unfortunately, Dunn so emphasizes the Jewish background of Colossians that he neglects

the influence of the larger Hellenistic environment upon Diaspora Judaism. He all but ignores the larger cultural overtones involved in the writer's mention of crucifixion and triumphal procession in Col 2:14–15. First, he connects halakhic rulings to τὰ δόγματα by citing Third Maccabees, Philo, and Josephus. Then he discusses the triumphal procession, θριαμβεύω, of the τὰ δόγματα by citing only lexica and secondary literature. Surely diaspora Colossian Jews must have grasped the political and cultural significance of triumphal processions and crucifixions in a Roman-controlled world!

For Philemon, Dunn's detailed commentary (51 pages for 25 verses!) makes a good case for the theory that Onesimus was not a fugitive, runaway slave. Instead Onesimus was appealing to Paul, a friendly third party, to help him back into good graces with his master Philemon after somehow offending Philemon. Unfortunately, Dunn's arguments about Roman slavery are largely based on secondary exegetical literature. He cites only six or so specialists in Greco-Roman slavery, all but one earlier than 1971, and, more frustrating, only one primary text (Pliny the Younger, *Epistles* 9.21, 24), ignoring the vast corpus of relevant literary and epigraphic texts.

The physical layout of the commentary is frustrating. Each section begins with an English translation accompanied by brief text-critical notes. In the commentary per se, Dunn cites the Greek with any translation scattered and buried in the discussion. This format is difficult for students and pastors with little or no Greek. Moreover, Dunn's excellent philological discussions cloud interpretation for nonspecialist readers. However, he concludes each analysis with useful interpretation and summary.

Despite these caveats, this is an excellent commentary precisely because Dunn interprets Colossians against the background of Diaspora Judaism and does a careful analysis of the Greek text. Greekless readers, or those intolerant of grammatical discussion, should skip straight to the end of each unit and peruse his summary. For those who want to struggle with Colossians, this commentary is an excellent starting point.

Lynn Allan Kauppi
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians. By Ben Witherington III. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998. xvii and 477 pages. Paper. $37.00.

After producing socio-rhetorical commentaries on the Corinthian Letters, Acts, and Philippians, Witherington brings his socio-rhetorical methods, comprehensive bibliographic coverage, and an eye for detail to the interpretation of Galatians. He opts for the South Galatian theory, dating the letter before the Jerusalem council (p. 13). He analyses the letter in terms of oratorical structure, whose utility I do not see in Galatians, and regards it as a form of deliberative rhetoric, though in terms of letter analysis it is a "rebuke-request letter" (p. 39). Accepting the South Galatian theory makes the social analysis difficult in terms of specifics. Excavators have done little with the cities of the first journey, Pisidian Antioch alone being in the first stages of excavation. Thus Witherington can only refer to generalities as he stresses Emperor cult (pp. 43–45), though there is little evidence of its influence in Galatians. Nor does he make a convincing case to account for the strong Old Testament influence in the letter, given Paul's short stay in the Lycaonian region of the province Galatia. The discussion of Jews in Anatolia is similarly general. In view of his support of the South Galatian theory, it was strange not to find Pisidian Antioch on the map (pp. xvi–xvii).

The commentary proper is helpful and clear in its details, but does not, in my opinion, demonstrate the value or validity of the rhetorical analysis. In this case I think Witherington is captive to his own method. Read the commentary for its valuable contributions, but disregard the rhetorical analysis and recognize the generic character of the social analysis. Do that and you will benefit from this work.

Edgar Krentz

First and Second Thessalonians. By Earl J. Richard. Sacra Pagina 11. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, a Michael Glazier Book, 1995. xx and 409 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Romans. By Brendan Byrne, S. J. Sacra Pagina 6. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, a Michael Glazier Book, 1996. xix and 503 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Sacra Pagina, a series of commentaries written by the best English-speaking Roman Catholic biblical scholars, has established itself as a major contribution to New Testament studies. Both volumes listed here maintain its high standards and so are valuable resources for interpreting Paul. Each discusses the origins, theological content, etc., of the letter in an introduction. The commentary proper interprets the text section by section, giving for each the commentator's original translation, philological, historical, and exegetical "notes" on specific details, terms, or problems in the text (including excurses on special topics), an "interpretation" (an essay on the significance of the text), and a comprehensive bibliography for further study. The format enables a grasp of details about the text and an understanding of the text's logical progress and theological import.

Earl Richard's brief introduction to the Thessalonian letters holds that 1 Thessalonians is the conflation of two authentic letters of Paul to the church in Thessalonica, the earlier 2:17–4:2, the later 1:1–2:13 and 4:3–5:28 (2:14–16 is a later non-Pauline interpolation). Richard holds that 2 Thessalonians is a later pseudepigraph. The commentary on 1 Thessalonians is full and detailed (pp. 37–293), that on 2 Thessalonians more terse (pp. 295–396). Richard dismisses recent rhetorical analysis of the letters, giving preference to epistolary analysis. His interpretation is full, somewhat discursive in presentation. He makes clear what alternative interpretations are and why he opts for those he prefers. Every one who reads him will benefit much.

I do have a few problems with his commentary. He cites the Old Testament often in his discussion of 1 Thess 1:1–12, 2:14–16, 4:6–8, and 5:1–11. But in interpreting 2:1–12, 2:17–4:2 (the whole of the earlier letter) he rarely cites the Old Testament, interpreting the text more in the light of contemporary philosophic or rhetorical teachers (following Malherbe). Well and good. But he never mentions that Paul in 1 Thessalonians never explicitly cites the Old Testament or refers to any of its major personages, history, or institutions. The OT may have shaped Paul's language; but the Thessalonians apparently did not have rich OT knowledge. How would they have heard all these Old Testament allusions?

While he gives a compressed description of the city, the importance of Roman ruler cult and other local religious phenomena play almost no role in his interpretation, e.g. in the interpretation of "peace and safety" in 5:2. I wonder why he does not give more credence to the possibility that the phrase λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ might mean "an account of the [true and living] God," given the stress on this in 1:8–10. I noticed no reference to the great commentary by B. Rigaux either in the bibliography or the commentary. Finally, I have problems with a number of his translations, more in 1 Thessalonians than in the second letter. But I repeat, anyone who uses Richard on Thessalonians will be enriched.

Byrne's interpretation of Romans joins a plethora of recent commentaries. His work is more terse than Richard's, covering Romans' sixteen chapters in only 100 more pages. Byrne fuses the methods of modern rhetoric and social theory to argue that Romans is epideictic in genre, and therefore "an instrument of persuasion" (p. 8). In looking for the rhetorical exigence to which the letter responds, Byrne examines both the situation Paul is in when he writes and the situation in Rome to conclude that Paul did not write the letter as a form of self-presentation, nor is the view that he wrote to further his missionary plans adequate to account for the letter. Nor does the letter's content correlate plausibly with any reconstruction of the situation of the Christians in Rome, not the expulsion of the Jews by Claudius or the attempt to interpret "the strong and the weak" along ethnic lines. One cannot identify it with any known ancient letter form. Rather the letter stresses the values that adhere to the gospel, and that stress on values is characteristic of epideictic in the New

Rhetoric. Paul writes to celebrate "values held in common [with the Romans], to increase adherence to those values and further detachment from rival values that could threaten them" (p. 18). But he does that to gain a deeper sympathy for and conformity with his own gospel, notably the inclusion of the Gentiles. It seems to me that Byrne ultimately comes around to a position close to that of scholars who do not proceed first and foremost by rhetorical analysis but by historical. And that reinforces my gentle skepticism on overreliance on rhetorical genre as a key to a document's intent or purpose.

Byrne stresses what Paul and the Romans hold in common (the constraints, to use the language of the New Rhetoric). These include the Jewish heritage, an inherited pattern of Christian belief, and therefore also an apocalyptic framework for theological argument. He holds that chapter 16 (exclusive of vv. 25–27) is an integral part of the letter.

Byrne's commentary proper demonstrates wide acquaintance with Paul's thought, his world, and the modern scholarly literature on the book. I was surprised to find no discussion of a possible pre-Pauline formula in Rom 3:24–26, or any suggestion for a *Sitz im Leben* for the "Abba, Father" acclamation in Rom 8:15 (baptismal?). Thus, while I would probably urge the primary use of Käsemann, Fitzmyer, or Dunn over Byrne, this commentary is thoughtful and instructive—a useful addition to an exegetical library, though it does not consistently, in my opinion, seek to support his theory of epideictic form and intention.

Sacra Pagina is a valuable addition to any professional library. And it can communicate well to the Greekless who are willing to work along with it. These two volumes are useful additions.

Edgar Krentz

Introduction to Christian Theology. By Bradley C. Hanson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. vii and 376 pages. Paper. $28.00.

While many authors dutifully tell us that their new book is intended for "the beginning student of theology" (*and* that it will challenge scholars in the field), few actually *write* for such a student. Bradley Hanson's book is the exception; he writes with clarity and simplicity, with obvious sympathy for readers who know no theology. Hanson gives us a book that introduces readers to the "great issues of Christian theology" by acquainting them with a wide variety of issues in a fair and balanced way. I applaud his efforts and look forward to using his text with a class of undergraduates.

Hanson confesses up front his five key commitments: the importance of the biblical narrative; a conviction that faith is reasonable; a sympathy for liberationist and feminist theologies; a strong ecumenical interest; and a concern for spirituality. The text covers everything from Plantinga's critique of classical foundationalism to a discussion of the anthropic principle, the mysteries of the rosary, and types of fundamentalistic apocalyptic eschatology. Throughout Hanson makes copious use of examples likely to be relevant to college freshmen and sophomores.

There are points upon which I would quibble. The downside about writing a book that beginning students will understand is that often complex and controversial issues are introduced as if they were clear and undisputed. For example, Hanson alludes to Polkinghorne's use of "downward causation" without giving students a sense of the considerable disagreement surrounding it.

It is really quite surprising how much material Hanson has been able to cover in 376 pages. Arranged in classical *loci* order, Hanson treats faith, God, creation, Christ, Church, Spirit, sacraments, and eschatology in his twelve chapters. I particularly liked the penultimate chapter, "Christianity and Other Religions." This text would have been even more student-friendly had Hanson included a glossary of terms.

Dennis Bielfeldt
South Dakota State University
Brookings, South Dakota

The Gospel of Matthew. By Donald Senior. Interpreting Biblical Texts. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. 205 pages. Paper. $28.25.

The Letters of Paul. By Charles B. Cousar. Interpreting Biblical Texts. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 212 pages. Paper. $28.25.

These volumes inaugurate a significant series, which eventually will cover both testaments. Writers address two questions: (1) What are the critical issues that recent scholarship faces? and (2) How do interpretations of particular passages relate to the movement of the text as a whole? Thus these volumes orient the reader to recent scholarship and give significant aid in interpretation. In addition, the editors have selected authors known as authorities on these texts. Each volume includes extensive endnotes, a selective bibliography, and an index.

Senior deals with question 1 by surveying scholarship on Matthew's sources, structure, use of the Old Testament, attitude to the Jewish law, the Gentile mission, Christology, discipleship, and community. I wish that he would have devoted more space to the shape of Judaism in Matthew's environment—though that is a minor criticism. His interpretation of the text, divided into six sections, is fundamentally a narrative commentary. Pastors will find this a highly useful volume: Senior writes very clearly, controls the literature, and gives judicious evaluations. Readers should read the survey of scholarship from beginning to end, since it will inform their use of the interpretation section.

Cousar has a more difficult task, in my opinion, since the Pauline letters show tremendous variety. In his first section, "Issues in Reading the Letters of Paul," Cousar discusses the letter form, Paul's rhetoric, sources, the character of his communities (including ethnic tensions), and Paul's theology. The second section, "Theological Themes in the Letters of Paul," discusses the significance of Paul's conversion, Paul's view of God, the decisive effects of Christ's death and resurrection ("The Old Life and the New"), the idea of community, and the Christian life ("Embodying the Gospel"). A too-brief chapter on the deutero-Pauline letters (2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, Colossians, the Pastorals) concludes the book. They deserve a volume of their own!

In many ways these volumes update and replace the well known Proclamation Commentaries by Fortress Press. Both clearly written volumes merit a place in a parish library and deserve wide reading by pastors. Both would be excellent preparation for preaching in Year A of the common lectionary.

Edgar Krentz

Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul. By J. Louis Martyn. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. xvii and 334 pages. Cloth. $39.95.

Not too long ago Martyn's Anchor Bible commentary on Galatians was published—a commentary that belongs on the shelves of all students of Paul (and preachers, I hasten to add). The present volume's seventeen essays, arranged in four categories, are in large part products of the research for that commentary.

The first five (on Paul and Christian Judaism) hold that Paul's negative statements re Judaism are directed against Christian Jews, not Jews per se. Romans is, in part, an attempt to refute their false interpretations of Galatians before he begins a mission to Spain. The four essays of the second section (Apocalyptic Rectification) maintain that Paul's soteriology is presented in apocalyptic terms. Martyn interprets 2 Cor 5:16–17, Gal 6:13–15, the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Gal 4:3, 9, and Gal 2:16. Life in the Spirit, known in the middle of the cross by the proclamation of the resurrection, is the apocalyptic key for Paul's strong proclamation against his opponents.

The four essays in section three (Interpreting Scripture) demonstrate how Paul interprets Scripture in the face of the exegesis of others: the Abrahamic covenant in Gal 3:6–4:7, 4:21–5:1 (Martyn argues against others that Paul did not hold to a covenantal nomism!) and Romans 9–11; the contradiction between Hab 2:4 and Lev 18:5; the covenant of Hagar and Sarah (Gal 4:211–5:1 and Genesis 16–21), and the relation of the Gospel and Scripture in Paul and John. The final section's four essays relate to the life of

the Christian community. He interprets the πεπλήρωται of Gal 5:13–14 as "fulfilled," not "summed up." Christ has made a change in the role of the law, as the war between flesh and Spirit makes clear. His final essay discusses how Pauline grace is represented in the writings of Flannery O'Connor.

These essays deal with fundamental theological issues in the interpretation of Paul. Martyn stands in the tradition of classical Reformation interpretation. He thus deserves wide reading and discussion. This is a book to read slowly and to ponder; it is worth the effort it demands.

Edgar Krentz

Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles. By L. L. Welborn. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997. ix and 238 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

This text is not really a new book at all but a collection of essays previously published elsewhere (between 1987 and 1996) and now revised for the current collection. Having access to these superb essays in a single volume will be welcomed by all who are interested in the social-historical and rhetorical study of Paul's Corinthian correspondence. And they will find in Welborn an astute and able interpreter of Paul.

The first essay, "Discord in Corinth: First Corinthians 1–4 and Ancient Politics," shows Paul's indebtedness to Greco-Roman political rhetoric in his response to the discord (*stasis*) in Corinth. Comparison with the first draft of this essay (*JBL* 1987) reveals the addition of some footnotes but no major revisions in the body of the text itself.

A second essay on the difficult text in 1 Corinthians 4:6, "Nothing beyond what is written" (*NovT* 1987), argues a similar thesis, namely, that Paul's language reflects a common rhetorical *topos* against political hubris and pride. It, too, shows only minor revisions in comparison with the earlier draft.

The three remaining revised essays deal with topics in Second Corinthians: "2 Corinthians 10–13 and the Letter of Tears" (*NovT* 1995), "2 Cor. 1:1–2:13; 7:5–16 and Ancient Theories of Literary Unity" (*NTS* 1996), and "Character and Truth in 2 Cor. 1:17" (*ZNW* 1995). All three demonstrate Welborn's vast knowledge of the Greco-Roman literary and rhetorical tradition, which he argues has thoroughly influenced Paul's language and theology in all these Corinthian letters. An extensive bibliography and indices of classical citations make this volume an indispensable resource for the study of Paul's letters to Corinth.

Barbara E. Bowe
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois

The Old Testament and the Significance of Jesus: Embracing Change—Maintaining Christian Identity. By Fredrick C. Holmgren. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999. xviii and 204 pages. Paper. $16.00.

Whatever the title may mean to the reader, the topic is Jewish-Christian relationships. Within the biblical material, for the most part, Holmgren, Research Professor of Old Testament (sic!) at North Park Theological Seminary, deals with material that has been used to denigrate Jews in some form or another.

Holmgren treats the following problems: the prophetic denunciation of an Israel that has strayed from God's will; the use of the Old Testament by Christians primarily to find Jesus; the understanding of the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old (*Heilsgeschichte*); and the distinction between old covenant and the new covenant as seen primarily in Jeremiah 31:31–34. In each case Holmgren shows that the issue has been overplayed by those who would suppress Judaism in favor of the more superior Christianity.

On a more positive note Holmgren then describes the dependence of Jesus on Judaism and the Old Testament, but also asks whether such a dependence really warrants the terms Old Testament and New Testament. Holmgren rejects the terms Old and New. He prefers First Testament but balks at calling the New Testament the Second Testament. Finally, he delves into the divinity of Jesus as a way of saying that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob actually is

Jesus. In a quite interesting (self?) analysis he comes to two major conclusions. The so-called divinity of Jesus actually reflects the Jewish sense of Wisdom rather than a metaphysical reality. So calling Jesus divine does not make Jesus the God of the First Testament. Then, in Harnack-like assertion, Holmgren claims that the Nicene Creed was formulated in a world that did not know or understand the Jewish faith.

Holmgren writes clearly and wisely. For the most part, however, the debate comes from a world I do not know. My background would never use the Bible itself as a cause for anti-Semitism. The issue would be love of neighbor, not faulty biblical exegesis.

Graydon F. Snyder

Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul's Imprisonments. By Craig S. Wansink. Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series 130. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996. 239 pages. Cloth. $52.00.

Wansink noticed that there was no adequate study of Roman prisons or Paul's imprisonment. Brian Rapske's *Paul in Roman Custody* (Eerdmans, 1994) focuses on the text of Acts, discussing prisons in specific locales. Wansink set out to fill in that lacuna.

His first chapter, "Prisons in the Ancient World," presents a detailed analysis of imprisonment in the Roman empire under the following rubrics: role of Roman prisons, physical condition of the prisoner, status of prisoners and differential treatment, daily life in prison. He bases his description on the analysis of numerous accounts of imprisonment in classical Jewish and early Christian texts, since ancient legal texts give a distorted picture of imprisonment. Provincial governors had immense freedom to detain prisoners. Unless the prisoner had status and wealth or there was support from outside, the life of a prisoner was very grim. Prisoners often chose suicide as a way to escape the loss of status, possessions, and the hope of release.

Wansink then examines passages in Philippians and Philemon in the light of Roman imprisonment, using letters Cicero wrote to his brother Quintus from exile as parallels. Cicero first gets his brother to share his goals and only then thanks him for his financial support. In similar fashion Paul urges his readers to share his goals in the gospel, strengthens ties between them, speaks of the difficult choice between life and death that harsh imprisonment brings to mind (Phil 1:21–22), and finally, in Phil 4:10–20, thanks the church for sending Epaphroditus with money to aid him in prison.

In Philemon Paul, God's ambassador, describes his imprisonment using military language to describe himself as remaining steadfast in position, obedient to his commanding officer, a metaphor known from Epictetus, Seneca, and other ancient philosophers. Philemon had sent Onesimus to serve Paul in prison—a custom used by non-Christians and early Christians alike. He was not a runaway, but acting on Philemon's behalf. When Onesimus is converted, Paul sends him back to Philemon, urging him to recognize the convert's new status.

This revision of Wansink's Yale dissertation, written under Wayne Meeks, is a meticulous study of a narrow topic with significance for the understanding of Paul's self-evaluation and his letters to Philippi and Philemon. A good example of using social analysis and description to illuminate an ancient text, it deserves wide reading.

Edgar Krentz

The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology. By John Michael Penney. Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 12. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997. 143 pages. Paper. $19.95.

The Anglican missiologist Roland Allen wrote in 1917, "it is in the revelation of the Holy Spirit as a missionary Spirit that the Acts stand alone in the New Testament." An independent Pentecostal scholar, John Penney affirms Allen's insight. He also acknowledges that the Pentecostal movement's commitment to God's missionary Spirit has made it a major force in world missions today. Penney summarizes Lukan pneumatology with his catchy phrase, "the Spirit as the Director of Missions." Penney's broad use of

scholarly resources from German exegetes to Pentecostal writers makes this short, easy-to-read scholarly study both ecumenical and enjoyable. The result is a practical pneumatology thoroughly oriented towards mission.

Penney's initial goal is to grasp the pneumatology of Luke-Acts on its own merits. Neither the Johannine nor Pauline conception of the Holy Spirit is absent in Acts (e.g. the "internal personal," the christological or soteriological function of the Spirit). However, Luke-Acts highlights an "external prophetic" pneumatology. The Holy Spirit inaugurates, directs, and empowers for mission. The bottom line is: "All God's people are to prophesy . . . are called to proclaim the story of God's love." The dominant motif, therefore, is prophetic witness.

While unpacking the missionary dimension of the Spirit, Penney does not hesitate to take issue with traditional Pentecostal doctrines. Penney's reading of Luke-Acts, however, is that at Pentecost, the apostolic company became the reconstituted Israel from which the word of God will proceed to all nations through prophetic witness. In the light of his study, Penney suggests that classical Pentecostal doctrines of "subsequence" and "initial evidence" should be rethought in ways more consistent with Lukan pneumatology. But he also concludes that Pentecostals have correctly recognized the fundamental missionary emphasis of Lukan pneumatology—a message that, for Penney, the whole church needs to hear.

Richard Bliese
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary. By Ben Witherington III. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1997. xlviii and 875 pages. Paper. $50.00.

Witherington's introduction is remarkable for its clarity and equitable tone. His conclusions are moderately conservative about authorship and historicity, but he recognizes that Luke was an accurate historian *by the standards of his time* and not by modern historical standards.

He fills his commentary with detailed observations about the rhetorical structures and effects of each textual unit under review. Thus he consistently discusses the *exordium*, *narratio*, *propositio*, *argumentatio*, and *peroratio*, the use of particles, and the different sorts of rhetoric present in the individual speeches in Acts. To a lesser degree, he also interacts with the most important secondary literature on rhetoric and Acts (Martin Dibelius, George A. Kennedy, and Marion Soards).

I have strong reservations about the "Socio" or social context analysis of the commentary. These comments are often very general or reflect an attempt to reconstruct the exact chronological history behind a given passage. For example, Witherington (like almost all exegetes) all but ignores the sacrificial ritual in Acts 14:8–18 (the acclamation of Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes). Instead he attempts to prove the text's historical authenticity by citing inscriptions that date to the second and third centuries C.E. He also calls Lystra an *important* city. Historical Lystra was an obscure rural town. The Romans settled retired army veterans there only because of Lystra's strategic importance in guarding a major transportation route.

In his discussion of Acts 17:16–33, Witherington mentions the many herms, columns topped with the head of Hermes and displaying a penile erection in the middle of the pillar. His comments imply that herms indicated immorality. Though its presence is subtle, Witherington's remarks are anachronistic and Christianizing. Herms served apotropaic functions, "good luck charms" to ward off evil or misfortune. In 415 B.C.E., the Athenians were outraged and dismayed when a group of citizens mutilated the city's herms, considering the vandalism as a blasphemous affront to the god. We can consider the herms idolatrous, but we dare not import modern morals into the text.

Unlike most commentaries, Witherington commendably adds photographs to his text to illumine the social context. Unfortunately, his captions are frequently wrong or the pictures ill suited to illustrate his discussion. His illustration (p. 425) for the attempted sacrifice in Lystra (Acts 14:8–19) depicts not a bull sacrifice as mentioned in the text but the *suovotaurilia* (the

sacrifice of a bull, a ram, and a boar). This sacrifice was almost entirely restricted to Rome and the Italian mainland. Any one of a number of Greek vase paintings or illustrated votive plaques would have better served his purpose.

To illustrate Acts 17:16–33 (Paul before the Areopagus), Witherington uses pictures of the Parthenon and the Acropolis (pp. 513, 516). In his commentary, he insists that Paul appeared before the Areopagus *Council* (pp. 515–16) in the Athenian agora and not before a council on *Mars Hill* (the literal meaning of Areo Pagus). In this instance, pictures or archaeological site plans of the morethan thirty shrines, temples, and altars in the agora would have been more appropriate.

Paul's appearance before Gallio (Acts 18:12–17) is illustrated with a photo of a statue (p. 536). According to Witherington, the statue displays "typical Roman male public attire." The statue is not, however, of a man wearing either a toga or a *himation* but an elaborate military officer's cuirass with an attached kilt. Such statues were usually portraits of the emperor in his role as supreme military commander and were often components of the imperial cult.

One final criticism. Witherington intermingles verse-by-verse analysis with lengthy discussions of an entire passage. Unfortunately, either he or his editors did not choose to clearly mark excurses and subsections. Nor do they use reader-friendly page headers. The page headers often cover portions of three chapters (e.g. 15:36–18:23), so the reader interested in consulting the discussion of just a few verses must page through the commentary.

This is not a commentary for preaching, nor is it the most appropriate to consult for the Greco-Roman sociocultural context of Acts. It *is* an excellent commentary for extended personal or classroom study of Luke as a rhetorician and historian and for detailed analysis of Acts.

Lynn Allan Kauppi

Briefly Noted

The latest addition to the Abingdon New Testament Commentaries is C. Freeman Sleeper's **James** (Abingdon, $20). His 43-page introduction sets it into its literary and social context. James is a form of protreptic literature, close to that of Hellenistic Judaism. It is close to the Q tradition and 1 Peter in the New Testament, a representative of Jewish Christianity. James is concerned with the development of Christian character. Sleeper mentions but does not address the lack of christological content. The commentary proper is useful, the bibliography at the end a helpful guide to further study. It is a useful addition to a parish library, too thin to be of major help to the pastor. *Edgar Krentz*

Paul J. Achtemeier's revision of his 1980 work, **Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture** (Hendrickson, $9.95) brings a most useful book back into print. While Achtemeier recognizes the problems with the critical interpretation of the Bible, he argues well that such an interpretation, informed by confessional commitment, is far better than the literal interpretation of "conservative" interpretation. I agree heartily with Raymond Brown's comment on the first editipn: Achtemeier "is a first-rate scholar who combines scientific investigation with faith, and his sensitivity and honesty make this a most useful book for all interested in the Bible. It will save Catholics from repeating simplistic attitudes that distort the authentic biblical message. A better practical book on the subject would be hard to find." I recommend this one highly. Achtemeier is a Presbyterian, emeritus professor of New Testament at Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. *EK*

Preaching Helps

The Resurrection of Our Lord—The Day of Pentecost
Series B

And God Said . . .

In an ad for the video version of "The Prince of Egypt" a four-year-old is asked to explain what the movie is all about. Her summary is charming, simple, and profoundly true. "Moses told the Pharaoh, 'Let my people go.' And Pharaoh said, 'No, no, no.' And Moses said, 'Yes, yes, yes.'" She keeps it up, as only a four-year-old can, repeating "Pharaoh said, 'No, no, no!' And Moses said, 'Yes, yes, yes!'" As we know, the "Yes" won the day over the world's "No."

And so on the first Easter, about which historians are either so reluctant to speak or about which they speak so skeptically, God said "Yes," and Jesus' body awoke, leaving behind gravecloths and shuffling off this mortal coil. Or did he? Did he leave the body behind? Or did he take his body along in some new, as yet unimaginable fashion?

As I read the tradition, God on that first Easter morning spoke a divine and everlasting "Yes" to the whole Jesus, the real Jesus together with his entire history. At the same time God said "No" to the judgments rendered on Jesus by the collaborations of chief priests and elders and Roman governor. They could not see in Jesus one who was doing the will of God or who was speaking the truth of God. They saw an incorrigible, a troublemaker, a dissident, a protester, a man who had no respect for temple and tradition, for law and order, or for themselves as the official guardians of religious, economic, and political institutions. That made him a blasphemer in the eyes of the leaders of the people (Mark 14:64).

According to the charges leveled against him before Pilate at the beginning of Luke 23, Jesus was leading the nation astray, telling people not to pay their taxes, indeed forbidding support of the emperor, giving it out that he was himself King Messiah and therefore Caesar's rival. Jesus was stirring up all the people, carrying the torch of insurrection south from Galilee, where he began, down to Jerusalem itself. In John's Gospel the charge is simply that he is "a criminal" whose deeds are so evil that he deserves to die (18:29–31). By raising Jesus

from the dead God registered a divine objection to the evaluations of priests and governor. Seeing the verdict and the deeds of Jesus' judges and executioners, God said, "No, no, no."

And to Jesus and his life God said "Yes." It's the year of Mark, even though readings from John predominate in this Easter season, so let's review the opening of Jesus' ministry in Mark for a moment. God said "Yes" to the expulsion of the demon from that man in the synagogue (Mk 1:21–28), "Yes" to the lifting of the fever from Peter's mother-in-law (1:29–31), "Yes" to the cleansing of the leper (1:40–45), "Yes" to the healing of the paralyzed man (2:1–12), "Yes" to the calling of a tax collector (2:13–24), "Yes" to eating with tax collectors and sinners (2:15–17), "Yes" to breaking the sabbath for the sake of humankind (2:23–27; 3:1–6). For these deeds others would kill him (3:6), trying to call a halt to such actions, but God said "Yes" because those deeds are exactly what God desires. All of that is what God raised up on Easter. God wanted the rejoicing to continue (2:18–20). Easter says that God has a taste for this new wine and intends to keep on pouring it into skins both new and old, even though the old skins will burst (2:21–22). The old tomb itself burst wide open and proved too brittle to contain the New Human Being who was laid in it on Good Friday.

So Easter celebrates something more than one additional miracle that somehow tops all the other miracles. Easter is the fresh and stunning deed of God which, in one shining moment, in one divine shout, cries "Yes" to the whole miracle of the life of Jesus. Easter is God's "Yes" to Jesus' love and healing and generosity and self-giving. God will not permit human hands to bring to a grinding halt all that unaccustomed benevolence and blessing. Jesus lives. The exorcist lives, the healer lives, the generous and extravagant host lives, the mysterious lover of our life lives, the bearer of grace lives, the opener of blind eyes lives, the one who takes children into his arms and blesses them lives. The one who calls us to come and follow him lives.

The Easter Gospel in Mark 16 is reserved and mysterious. The strange "young man" sitting calmly in the tomb on the right hand side (side of good fortune and good news) says to the women, "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified." That's Jesus' entire biography in a nutshell. It's like those exercises in which we are asked, "What would you like to have on your tombstone?" Jesus' bio says that he is "from Nazareth" and he was "crucified." Mark earlier said that Jesus left Nazareth, broke his ties with family and with whatever craft or trade waited for him there, broke with the lives and hopes of ordinary Nazarenes, saw farther and heard the call of a different voice than other Nazarenes. And he was "crucified." I take that to be his whole story: that is, his

life was one great act of self-giving, self-emptying agape, a life of rendering unto God what is God's, of loving God with his whole being and loving his neighbors (including us) as himself. That is the Jesus whom God raised on Easter according to Mark.

John's Gospel portrays a Jesus who emerges from the tomb with wounds in hands and side, even a week later. Why hasn't Easter taken care of those wounds? Why hasn't he healed up? Doesn't Easter transform and transfigure and transcend all wounding? But the wounds are the signs that he lived the Truth of God in a world that loves the lie, that he was Light in a world that often prefers darkness, that he was Bread for others in a world that delights in hoarding. The post-Easter Jesus is still Truth and Light and Bread for us. This is the Jesus whom God brought back to new life when he uttered that Easter "Yes." And this is the Jesus who now calls our names as he called Mary's and sends us as he sent her.

Helping us to hear the "Yes" and sort out "Yes" from "No" is Steve Harms, pastor at Peace Lutheran Church in Danville, California. Steve has an M.A. in Theater Arts in addition to his M.Div., and he put his skills to good use as street minister in San Francisco, as developer of an arts ministry. And he still uses all his manifold gifts as pastor at Peace, as President of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County, and as Director of Ruah Drama Ministry.

Steve has worked with a variety of peace and justice ministries, and he is cofounder of "A Just Harvest," which advocates for just living conditions for immigrant strawberry farm workers. On the more personal or private side, Steve and his wife Bev have three sons, and Steve is a practitioner of Tai Chi and loves jazz and the ocean.

The words and images Steve shares in the following pages have the ring and the zing that those of us who know him have come to expect. Steve is never dull, never plain vanilla, always pushing the verbal envelope, always searching for the word or phrase that will clear our minds and open our eyes and move our hearts.

My thanks to Steve for his work and words on the Easter texts, and blessings to all of you who proclaim God's word and God's works in this bright season.

Yours,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
2770 Marin Avenue
Berkeley, California 94708

The Resurrection of Our Lord
April 23, 2000

Acts 10:34–43 *or* Isaiah 25:6–9
Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24
1 Corinthians 15:1–11 *or* Acts 10:34–43
John 20:1–18 *or* Mark 16:1–8

First Reading

What an Easter beginning! God has no favorites, shows no partiality. All who stand in awe of God and do what is "right" (loving) are accepted by God. Grace upon grace. Peter's vision and Cornelius's conversion impacted and liberated the whole church (see the Council of Jerusalem, Acts 15:7–11).

"You know the heart of the message—preaching *peace*, preaching peace by Jesus Christ, preaching shalom." Do we know that message? "How God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with *power* (*dunamis*)." I would carefully examine that word *power* and the nature of such power. It does not function according to the way we use power—control over, domination of, amassed wealth or political influence which forcefully directs agendas without the genuine participation of the many. Instead this power is a non-power: weak and vulnerable yet life-giving and immense. Isn't it the exquisite presence of God as crucified power?

"Jesus is *judge* of the living and the dead." What does that mean? The end of condemnation among us, the surpassing legitimacy of Mercy? Who topples from center stage as a result of Christ's being our only judge? What happens when the central authority in our lives is solely focused on this dying and rising forgiveness?

"Everyone who *believes* in him receives forgiveness." To "believe" in Greek does not mean conceptual assent, it means "to give one's heart to." Belief isn't buying or signing off on doctrines. It is a giving of one's self in response to love. We've been offered. Two phrases catch me in the Corinthians passage. "Christ died for our sins" is the first. This formula has become such a cliché that it means everything or nothing to people. The reality of sin is not a series of moral infractions but a distortion of our being/life/identity. It's a refusal to trust the Giver of Life with our life. The result is either pride or sloth—either the claim to superiority over nature, history, and other people, or indifference to our fallen condition, adjusting to failure, or fatalizing one's condition. If we don't address the sources of our suffering, the good news will be hollow and devoid of vitality.

The other phrase, "By the grace of God I am what I am," can create such liberty for people. A reckless persecutor of the faithful, Paul acknowledges that he is cherished by God, and he refuses to condemn his own self. If God won't negate, then neither will I! Grace unlocked the tomb of one who considered himself chief of sinners, and that grace has not been exercised in vain.

In John's Gospel, the disciples raced, hearts pounding, everything depending upon their searching. The tomb's evidence was assessed and the "other disciple *saw and believed*." After hearing a terrible Easter sermon, a professor once challenged us: "The empty tomb proves nothing! How do we know the rats didn't eat him?" (I have never used that in a homily, but perhaps the occasion will arise.) John "gave his heart to" the conviction that the compassion and truthfulness of Jesus have not stopped engaging us.

By her grieving, Mary expresses her anticipation of only a corpse. Hearing her name—experiencing the intimacy of her friendship with Jesus—awakened and resurrected Mary.

Pastoral Reflections

I find Easter Sundays difficult days to preach on. Yes, there is an expanded, captive audience, but that's the problem. They are there for the lilies, the ritual, and a day of obligation. I am aware that addressing the Culmination of Lenten realities would leave a significant number of guests clueless. Never abandon the audience before you.

Since this is the Sunday closest to Earth Day (April 22) in the emerging millennium, you may want to draw connections with how the whole earth rocked and rolled in disgorging the First Fruits of the New Creation. Through one of our own kind, a person of mud and water, the whole universe has been restored and redeemed. (It is also Shakespeare's birthday, so choose a quote from some play of your liking.)

Musings on these three texts: Imagine yourself one day being totally happy, healed, whole, free, alive. Well, that day began on Easter, and Jesus promises that will become our future reality—so how shall we live now?

If God really has no favorites, then the Resurrection can truly make the world wide open. Nelson Mandela rarely goes to church, but he spends immense time with prisoners, the homeless, hungry and impoverished. By what criteria should he be judged? It is time to welcome the God-inspired in every nation into our hearts—our future depends on such recognition. Luther said that he expected three surprises in heaven: the good company of friends he longed to be with, the surprise of being there himself, and the surprise of all the people he hadn't expected to see in heaven!

Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power. To be a modern person is to equate life with power. Moderns do not believe life comes from friends, the earth, love, imagination, or understanding God. Rather, life is generated by wealth, strength, weapons, political and economic deals. Yet Jesus subverts our notion of power and reveals on the cross that only by living in the yearning/will of God can we become human, free and alive. His is a great inversion and transformation.

To those who believe in him he gives the power to forgive by being forgiven. There are no hoops to jump through, no criteria to be met. You are loved for who you are.

The apostle Paul, the least of the apostles for having been a murderer and persecutor of the church, was overwhelmed by the grace (the openhearted acceptance) of God. "By the grace of God I am what I am." Grace meets us in our sin, brokenness, fear, failure, and alienation. Jesus came to raise the dead, not to rescue the new and improved. The dead, the wholly dead, and nobody but the dead are Jesus' territory. The sacraments are disasters of death turned inside out and made life-giving, resurrecting actions of hope.

Who are you looking for today? Are you expecting anything on Easter? Mary thought Jesus was a gardener. She was right. In the Garden of Eden we lost our intimacy, friendship, and playfulness with God. Jesus is the Gardner of the New Creation. Adam and Eve named each animal and flower. When Mary heard her name, she realized Jesus' unending love for her. Someday you will hear your name called by Jesus. What will that be like for you?

The struggle is not about an empty tomb, but it's about our empty hearts aching for a peace we can trust.

Art Suggestion

Plaster the word *Yes!* on small (easy peel off) labels/stickers all over your church—the pews, walls, altar railing, hymnals, font, cross, bathroom walls and mirrors. God is saying Yes to you, Yes to life in Christ all the time.

Second Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2000

Acts 4:32–35
Psalm 133
1 John 1:1–2:2
John 20:19–31

First Reading

Look out—Easter coming at you! Often our texts are obscure, but this portion of Acts is crystal clear. "Those who believed were of one heart, no one claimed private ownership, all was held in common, great grace was upon them and not a needy person was among them." Good or bad news? It depends where you are on the economic spectrum. Is this utopian naivete? Do you doubt such sharing is possible?

The opening of First John may be the language of ecstasy, but it is also crude expression and full of grammatical impossibilities. Intensity of soul doesn't guarantee clarity of mind. Yet a hidden beauty is revealed in the flesh of our flesh, the Word of Life is *Alive*! "We have experienced this and desire your communion with us so joy may flourish." Perhaps the author is trying to anchor friends in the eternal life revealed. Or perhaps the author is crying out, "Get on with it! That which we heard, saw, gazed upon (*etheasametha*), touched—is creating life among us." The writer may be testifying to his orthodox beliefs, but he also invites his readers to stop wallowing in religious matters and taste the aliveness of connection, communion, and joy with God and each other. There is no Gospel of John eloquence here, but there is a beauty in the passion of this passage.

The core message: "God is light, and in God there is no darkness at all." Strangely, "God is light" is a statement found nowhere else in the tradition of Jesus' teaching known to us. The writer sees light and dark as two distinct realities, and on becoming a Christian he believes one is transferred from the dark realm to the light. Yes, God is a radiating source of light, but I can't accept this dualistic division from darkness. God is often a deep darkness of obscure understanding for me, a darkness we must pass through on our Spirit-led journey into God. In God there may be no darkness, but God often seems surrounded by an impenetrable void.

"Walking in the light" also means an acceptance of my dark side. The nasty, neurotic, destructive tendencies I still possess will not be overcome and dismissed through some personal, interior battle. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, and that includes our interior ones as well. Only when welcomed into the light can "they" (the "me" I don't appreciate) become integrated and transformed into loving and healing capacities. If not brought to the light, repression and suppression do us in. So we freely confess, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

In the Gospel these phrases catch me. "Locked for fear of the Jews." I always refer to "Jewish *leaders*." We've done enough anti-Semitic damage for the centuries, so let's be accurate about the scriptural intent. "Peace be with you" occurs three times in the text. Is this not the fulfillment or culmination of Jesus' work as promised in the Last Discourse (14:27–28), to give us the peace beyond all understanding, the abiding peace of God? "He breathed on them (*emphysaō*)." Meditation practitioners know the centrality of the breath. There is no life apart from the breath of God. Jesus' breath inspires the work of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive) who conspires to make us a New Creation through a community devoted to forgiveness and mercy. (This Gospel opens

and closes with the Creation theme.) "Touch my wounds . . . believe . . . that you may have life"—the vulnerable Christ remains available to our every form of inquiry.

Pastoral Reflections

For openers, you can ask your congregation which model of government most closely resembles the Acts text. The difference, of course, is that early Christians participated voluntarily. Their communal action was a response to their faith.

Let's not kid ourselves about globalization. With minor adjustments, it is a new name for the old game of colonialism. Whoever controls the banking institutions wins. That's why Jubilee 2000 is important if for no other reason than symbolically declaring that we must not continue to exploit the poorest of the poor.

In the U.S. the poorest 10% of the nation lives on $16 billion per year, the middle 80% live on $40 billion per year, and the upper 10% live on $192 billion per year. Our lives are shaped, warped, and destroyed by greed. (Shall we address this sin of thievery or just go on being absorbed with sex?

Communion today also means creating work that benefits human beings (not just profits), sharing food justly, providing affordable housing, health care, and education so that God's yearning is done on earth as it is in heaven. True wealth is found in the will of God, in generous and just hearts, in the Abundant Life of Christ's community. Beware—our selfish individualism will destroy us.

For all its incoherence, I love this opening passage in First John, its flesh and blood incarnational realities. Douglas John Hall writes in his book *The Steward* that it is high time for the Christian church to get over its ambiguous relationship with the world (as if in heaven we'll be better off). It is *this* earth, *this* world, *this* life that God cherishes and gave the son's life for.

Verses 8–10 remind us that sin (personal and systemic) is so insidious and enveloping that it cannot be found out or "improved" upon. It is a condition in which we find ourselves (chiefly experienced today as alienation) and from which we can't escape. It is like quicksand—the more we struggle to act holy or righteous, the deeper we sink in trouble. Instead we focus on the Light. Just like trees, which always grow toward the sunlight, we acknowledge our sin yet keep our attention on Christ's light and forgiving love.

A forgiveness story. Tomas Borje was a Sandanista leader who was captured, imprisoned, and viciously tortured. After the Triumph of 1979, his chief torturer was captured and imprisoned. Borje, who was now a government leader, went to visit him. The torturer froze, knowing full well what was coming. Borje said, "My punishment is to forgive you. I will teach you and your children so you will never again do such things to human beings." Forgiveness makes new life possible again.

Celebrate Doubting Thomas. Proclaim it "Doubt Sunday"—bring all your doubts to church. I believe many of our parishioners are scared or ashamed of their doubts. Open the closet doors and let them all out. I suggest these homiletical assurances: We don't decide to doubt—it just happens; doubting is a sign of a maturing faith—it's a probing of reality; we are all unbelievers—to hesitate, change one's mind, make mistakes, these are proofs of honesty. Thus, we all live in between blasphemy and adoration.

We substitute fighting over our certitudes or convictions for actually discovering the truth. Genuine truth emits joy, energy, and lightness of heart. Faith isn't about doing things right but enjoying how everything in Christ is becoming "All Right!"

Faith is not a product to be possessed,

it's a gift of the Spirit. Do you doubt? Great! Only remember to doubt your own doubts too. How marvelous that the climax of John's Gospel, "My Lord and my God," is uttered by a doubter.

Worship Note
For the Greeting of Peace, sing "Shalom Alechem" (or "My Friend") to the traditional melody. Perhaps you have someone who can lead a simple grapevine folk dance with members. Or have people join hands, couple up, and sing it to each other, but switch partners at least four more times. The chaos will bring humor and delight. This could also take place after communion instead of the Canticle.

Third Sunday of Easter
May 7, 2000

Acts 3:12–19
Psalm 4
1 John 3:1–7
Luke 24:36b–48

First Reading
If you've read this far, you can see my homiletical "methodology." I assemble fragments, chunks, and strands of material and attempt to see if there are any common threads or a dialogical tension that denotes vibrancy or intrigue. If the material doesn't bring a smile to my face or provoke some kind of fascination, I don't preach it. Congregations instantly recognize when their preachers are not captivated by their own message and quickly dismiss their sermons. After severe editing I pray my collage will finally have backbone, integrity, and guts.

In Acts we have the "old story" in a nutshell. Why is it that we go on rejecting the Author of Life and choosing murderers instead? What is the source of our ignorance?

With the desire for cheap "glory" all around us in the religious culture, I would examine the phrase "God glorified Jesus." In particular, I would turn to C.S. Lewis's *The Weight of Glory* to reexamine the meaning and experience of glory. If the Messiah of God suffers, where is our glory to be found?

The first three verses of 1 John 3 are beautiful. "See [absorb, take in, enjoy, savor, understand, remember] what love God has given us, that we should be called children of God—which is what we are." Get it straight, be clear: this *is* your identity by God's grace. Baptism has redefined you. We are *in relationship* with life now as God's beloved children. "What we will be" answers the question of 2:28 and doesn't refer to the death of individual Christians. "We do know, when it is revealed, we will be like God." Since Adam and Eve were made in God's image and Christ is the one in whom this is fully realized, our relationship with Christ by exposure to the glory of his cross leads to our transformation into Christ's likeness.

Pastoral Reflections
Regarding Acts 3: It is always a potent exercise to name the various ways in which we in our community are condemning, abandoning, rejecting, or crucifying Christ anew. This old story remains ever fresh because while the power of sin has been broken and can be overcome by grace, the disastrous consequences of sin are yet available to inflict mighty damage to the well-being of other persons, communities, and ourselves.

We need to remind our friends that sometimes we reject Christ in ignorance, sometimes in blatant indifference, and sometimes in the name of The Right or The Good.

An elderly, religious white man from the deep South told me he'd had no idea

African Americans were human beings until the day when Martin Luther King's teachings suddenly pierced his heart by speaking to core spiritual values he had trusted for decades but never applied beyond his church. He was broken open. "That must have killed you," I said. "Yes, it did," he agreed. "We call that story a crucifixion," I continued. There was a thoughtful pause. "I bet you've been a new man ever since." "I sure am," he beamed.

Our friends also need to know that rejection and abandonment of the way of Christ is also part of the rhythm and reality of a life of faith. We all betray the mercy of God. No one stayed at the foot of the cross. The important thing is to keep returning, no matter how many times we've broken our vows. The Author of Life welcomes, embraces, and graces again and again. Our healing will occur in the process almost incidentally. We are all wounded and wounding believers.

The greatest communion on earth, the first and foremost experience we all share, is suffering. It has been said that if suffering made a sound the whole earth would be deafened by the noise. The Messiah of God suffered and suffers with us. His suffering, though, was to put an end to all the suffering, to stop the crucifixions. Not until every tear is wiped away, every injustice overcome, and death is abolished will Christ be taken off the cross. That is his glory. "Why love what is vain and chase after illusions?" (Ps 4:2). Repent, turn to God, taste the suffering turned to mercy.

It's Mother's Day, that most sacred of feast days. It may be important to recognize that the chief sin of women has not manifested itself as pride but in self-denial or self-denigration. It may appear to be a Christian humility, but it denies/buries the voice of the person's integrity and a gift of wisdom to the community. The origin of Mom's Day occurred about a decade after the end of the Civil War when mothers stood up and declared, "Never again will we send our sons and husbands into the lunacy of war." It was a protest action. It fits well with our texts.

Do everything possible to persuade the congregation that they are already the children of God as First John informs us. I addressed each member at communion one Sunday as "Child of God." A 3-1/2 year old son of a family who worshiped with us for the first time that day repeatedly reminded his parents all week long, "I am a child of God." He was totally *amazed* by this reality. In the process, he awakened his parents to their true identity. Eventually they joined the church because of their son's clarity and insistence.

"Someday we will see God as God is." God is too close to us, too intimate with us to be perceived. That's why we don't see God, for now we see through God.

The dualism of verses 4–7 does a disservice to our spiritual relationship with Christ. It is not either/or. We must endlessly remind people it is not our behavior modification or the accumulation of doing what is right that attains salvation. Rather, our response to a loving God is to love others, practice mercy, and walk humbly with our God. It is not stiffening our hearts to accomplish the good but transforming and tenderizing our hearts into God's desire for our lives that matters. Right or wrong behavior doesn't diminish or increase a parent's love. "Fruitful action" simply reveals an honoring of one's true Parent.

Luke 24: "he opened their minds to understand the scriptures that the Messiah must suffer." To get Christ off the cross is not too difficult; to get us off is another matter. That alone is Christ's work. The cross intersects those points where human possibilities are canceled. As a broken state-

ment about life's brokenness, the cross participates in what it describes. For Luther, a person becomes a saint "not by understanding, reading and speculating but by living, dying and being damned." We are beggars before the wisdom of the cross.

A theology of glory wants to circumvent the catastrophe of reality and just give us direct access to power (with or without God). The cross calls reality what it actually is. Our security is not in certitudes or platitudes of faith but in the crucified God who stands with us and within the experience of negation.

We rejoice in the Easter uprising, but Christ forever returns to his cross to be with us. Life in this world remains a participation in evil, sin, and death and thus exposure to nothingness. The gospel is not an avoidance but an engagement with life as it is, not an act of deliverance from negation but the permission and encouragement to enter into this experience with hope. Disciples are equipped to bear the cross and enter the promise that a new day is at hand. "Peace is my gift to you. Would that you knew the things that make for peace." Isn't that every mother's prayerful desire?

Worship Note

You can easily compose a litany with verses 1 and 2 of the second lesson. Use the phrases repetitively, break them apart and have them intersect in different ways, assign lines to different voices (women, men, children, teens, those over 50, those with blue eyes, and so on) and turn the whole congregation into a speech choir. It is much fun, and you can't make any mistakes. Let it serve as your creed for the day.

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 14, 2000

Acts 4:5–12
Psalm 23
1 John 3:16–24
John 10:11–18

First Reading

Peter and John are held as political prisoners in Acts. They are arrested for the threat of all being made well. Remember Julia Esquival's poem "Threatened with Resurrection"? We must not forget that Easter undermines business as usual. "By what power do you do this?"

"By the name of Jesus—the stone rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone." We must constantly go back to the rejects to discover the gifts of God that we the church have discarded.

It has been proposed by some scholars that the closing line of Psalm 23 should be read not as "will follow me" but as "surely goodness and mercy shall *pursue* me all the days of my life"—a striking interpretation.

First John is simple and clean. We know love by this—the sharing of life and its goods just as Christ laid down his life for us. The issue here is not mere material distribution (crucial as it is) but the integrity of our soul. Where is the Source of our life? In whom are we grounded? When the Giver of Life is experienced as infinitely generous it is easier for us to participate in that selfless current of openheartedness. Easy come, easy flow. Sustaining life together, not our own selfish survival, becomes our essential aspiration. When the heart is not trapped by fear, the spirit becomes free to live and love.

"When we love in truth and action, whenever our hearts condemn us (and we will go on condemning ourselves, though Christ will have nothing to do with that

negation) we will be reassured and restored more easily because God is greater than our hearts. "Beloved" (if you've not read Henri Nouwen's book, *Life of the Beloved*, it is a must-read), with hearts free and bold we may obey (*ab audens*—Latin, to listen attentively) God's command to love one another. Abiding in God is embodying and reflecting God's steadfast love.

The Good Shepherd text is full of promise. "I know my own and they know me, I lay down my life for the sheep; no one takes my life from me, I have the power to lay it down and take it up again." Here Jesus exudes that supreme, almost casual confidence of John's Gospel. With ease I lay down my life, it is my choice, I have nothing to defend. I saw a picture some years ago of a crucified Christ in which the head and torso had been boxed in an interior frame. One arm, stretching out through the box, was nailed to the cross, revealing the intense pain to the musculature. The other arm and hand, inside the box, were being examined indifferently by Jesus as if searching for a hangnail. Remarkable.

Pastoral Reflections

"We know love by this." When do we know we're loved? Doesn't that experience include respect, inclusion, forgiveness, being understood, sharing humor, affection, or loving-kindness? Love can be hard to define, but you certainly know when you're loved and when you're not.

What do you love? Why do we usually ask each other what we think instead of what we love? Who and what does God love? Christ laid down his life for us—an extravagant gift. It is more valuable than a war hero's sacrifice, because this offering has the power to restore us to God, to our right minds, and to each other. Yet this very best gift of God was rejected for not being good enough to heal the damaging fractures of the human soul and community.

Jesus laid down his life for us that we might know life as a blessing. Just because you have a body, that doesn't mean you are alive. There is so much more than mere existence or surviving. In receiving the compassionate nurture of Christ and in caring for one another—especially those in need—we love in truth and action, not just words and speech. This is fulfilling God's commandment.

A powerful example of this is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, chaired by Bishop Tutu. Here former torturers who fully confessed their crimes were pardoned through a general amnesty. I returned to South Africa in July of 1999. I spoke with black friends—some of whom had been imprisoned, others tortured. They agreed, "There are things worse than death. To live one's remaining years with a guilty conscience is too much. They must be forgiven so life can go on." This is love beyond knowing, love in truth and action.

Instead of petty squabbles, let us focus on what builds up, encourages, and enlightens others. What breathes life into the loves of others? When the freedom to love is exercised, this *truth in action* births joy in the community of faith because we become richer the more we give away. God is not saving just the church but the whole precious world through the loving commitments of the children of God. When we liberate hungry people, unhoused families, the lost and confused, addicts, friends with AIDS, battered women, and political prisoners we act in communion with God and abide in God's death-defying love.

"Shepherding the sheep" . . . I don't know about you, but my congregation is more like a herd of cats than a flock of sheep.

John 10:16, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold," may be an opportunity for you to address interfaith realities.

Are we not to offer our love and lives to those not of our household of faith? It seems to me that we are called to share not enforced compliance with grace but the compliments of grace. The outsiders (are we not all out-siders?) hear Christ's voice, too. We are all in God's hands.

How or when have you heard Jesus' voice? I suspect most of us have literal audio expectations here. Rather I think we free people by letting them know this is more of an existential experience. We hear the Voice that speaks to our yearning for connection with the divine from a quiet within. We hear the Voice through friends, events, art, music, silence, creation, solitude, work, prayer, liturgy. The voice of love is usually heard in hints, guesses, intimations, whispers, and stillness. We need careful listeners and bold actors today. The church really needs tigers, not sheep.

Worship Note
To link Mother's Day and Good Shepherd Sunday, Bobby McFerrin has an incredibly beautiful rendition of Psalm 23 on his Medicine Man tape/CD. It concludes with a feminine doxology.

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 21, 2000

Acts 8:26–40
Psalm 22:24–30 (Psalm 22:25–31 NRSV)
1 John 4:7–21
John 15:1–8

First Reading
Acts 8:33—"In his humiliation justice was denied him." It is the humility of Jesus Christ that accepts us as we are. But his humility also brought the humiliation of the cross. The strong embrace of a broken people was and is perceived as less than godly, a violation of the sacred as blasphemous. Who can fathom the immensity of such compassion?

It would be a fine thing if we were accused of preaching about love too much. "Beloved . . . love is from God; in this is love . . . that God loved us and sent the Son . . . so we ought to love one another." Simple, direct, rhythmic, almost hypnotic. No debate about the Source, intent, or action of love, nor about our response to it. Only when we love *one another* does God live in us, and then even God's loving is perfected in us.

"God is love." Gandhi's great dictum was "God is Truth," and this is reversible: Truth is God. Dare we claim the same—Love is God? Here the text makes clear that the truth of God for the Christian community is only found in the loving of others. Truth is not reliable if it doesn't increase the experience of compassion.

"Love has been perfected among us in this: as the Son is, so are we in this world, therefore be bold on the day of judgment." Our true identity is as the hand, feet, eyes, and heart of the compassionate Christ in the world. As we are melded into this Christ relationship and reality, as we succeed and fail at mercy, forgiveness, justice, generosity, putting the best construction on everything, and living joyously—the love of God is emerging through our pores and our choices. And has not the verdict for the day of judgment already been pronounced on Good Friday? Mercy for all! Now, do we accept the verdict—which is to commit ourselves to loving others, or do we wish to file an appeal?

"Perfect love casts out all fear." Surely fears will continue to arise, but by the grace of God and the practice of loving others our fears can be transformed into occasions for relying on God and the understanding of others.

"Those who say 'I love God,' and hate their brothers and sisters, are liars." You can let that sentence hang in the sanctuary for a very long time. The love of God, the crucified love of God in Christ and neighbor are indistinguishable.

There is much speculation about the Vine of John 15—tree of life, Israel as vineyard, eucharist, and more. Suffice it to say the image makes clear the absolute necessity of a vital connection with Christ so that we continue to grow and bear "much fruit." (This may be the origin of Polycarp's name.) "Abide, remain (*menein*) in me as I do in you." No branch wittingly severs itself. Rest, evolve, re-emerge in me, is Jesus' constant invitation. Without the centrality of the Word made flesh, the community of faith quickly loses its direction and purpose and we degenerate into a religious club.

"Those who do bear fruit the Father prunes/cuts in order that we bear more fruit." There is no plateau in the faith journey. We are being cut into a cruciform life. Be prepared for cuttings which hurt but expand our hearts' vision and capacities.

"Apart from me you can do nothing." All is grace, pure grace. We get to participate, be enlightened, and witness the hopes and defeats of ministry, but every energy surge, movement, or change remains the work of the Spirit. Faith calls for a committed life—a commitment to paying attention to God and a commitment to our neighbors.

Pastoral Reflections

Acts reveals that the fullness of love which John and 1 John speak of results in the cross. The embrace of grace, radical unconditional love, can intimidate us and those we seek to love. The humility with which God first loved us becomes critical for a life of faith. Humility alone can destroy the self-centeredness which makes the joyous connection with God and others impossible. We cannot grasp God, but we can become absorbed in God. And this absorption in God is not dependent on our worthiness or sanctity but is God's *gift* to us—for no reason at all. God chooses to befriend us.

A humble person is not disturbed by praise, a humble person is not afraid of failure. There are no illusions to defend; one's movements are free. Humility implies confidence in the power of God. Humility is a sign of strength. Abide in God.

Beloved—for that is what you are, you were intimately loved long before parents, teachers, spouse, or friends loved or wounded you. That is the Truth of your life and a truth you must claim. Because God loves us, let us love one another. Your worth is not dependent on accomplishing something relevant, spectacular, or powerful but on trusting that you are God's Beloved. When we trust and delight in being God's Beloved, that joy begins to permeate everything we think, do, and say. This truth becomes visible and tangible with others.

1 John 4:12—If we love one another, God's love is perfected in us. Give up seeking perfection; instead, perfect your loving. Faithful Christians who have lived desiring to love others get discouraged by three things: false expectations, unappreciated responses, and the blindness to human need of other Christians.

False expectations. The insistence on always having what you want, always being satisfied, always being fulfilled, makes love impossible. Love is not a deal or a bargain, it is a sacrifice. Love is not marketing kindness, it is a form of worship. Love is a positive force, a transcendent spiritual power, the deepest creative source in human nature. Love is living appreciation of life as value and gift. Love "knows" the inner mystery of life and responds to the demands of life with warmth, abandon, and surrender.

Unappreciated responses. Rejection

of the way we want to love and be loved cuts to the quick. Only humility is big enough to put things back in perspective. "Perfect love casts out fear." We need the freedom of heart to be renewed in the midst of discouragement. As Rumi said, "Let the Beauty we love be what we do!" Let our lives be shaped by what we believe in and not by our fluctuating reactions to circumstances.

Blindness. Liars are those who claim to love God and hate their brothers and sisters. Worse yet are the indifferent, neither hot nor cold, those who feel themselves above or beyond the conflicts which destroy others. Love is not about coping. It's about healing, confronting, transforming, nurturing. Woe to those who think racism is somebody else's problem. It's a *white* problem. Beware to those who overlook the needs of our children, 13 million of whom live in poverty. Attention, those who hate gay, lesbian, or straight people: Jesus calls us to love our enemies, and if we hate them we aren't followers of Jesus. It is of course most difficult to love those closest to us because we see each other's foibles and neuroses everyday. Here we can learn much about humility.

"If you abide in me, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you." As St. Augustine said, "Love God and do what you please. If our will is joined to the will or yearning of God all we ask for can only be blessed for it will be free and good and true." Jesus is inviting us to a profound oneness of heart with him. "Abide in me as I abide in you." Only those who are joined to the Living Vine can embody that love which dissolves all barriers and bears much fruit. We must grow into it for a lifetime. Finally I must "discover" my truest self as one with Christ, in God and others. Not to love others is to violate my truest self. "I have died and the life I now live is hidden with Christ in God." To abide in Christ is DeVine.

Hymns
"Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"
(*LBW* #315)
"Ubi Caritas et Amor" (Taize)

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 28, 2000

Acts 8:26–40
Psalm 22:24–30 (Psalm 22:25–31 NRSV)
1 John 4:7–21
John 15:1–8

First Reading
Our Acts text picks up where the Easter Day lesson concluded. There are two lessons here. First, God is making it clear that Gentiles are to be received into the church without being forced to obey the Law. Secondly, God shows Peter that he must accept the hospitality of the uncircumcised. This is even more shocking and contrary to the Law than authorizing their baptism. Peter is *abiding* with the unclean. The issue is not only social relations between pagan and Jewish Christians, it is the question of the contamination of the sacred.

Just as in the scattering of the seed, God is extravagant and even seems deranged in the pouring out of the Spirit indiscriminately on the Gentiles. Those of the household of faith are astounded and disturbed. Psalm 98 is overwhelmed with joy at how the whole world has seen Yahweh's saving power. That rejoicing can be dramatically undercut when we of the faith must suddenly welcome specific people with histories and circumstances we may know nothing of. As Charlie Brown used to say, "I love humanity, it's people I can't stand." I'll baptize you, but don't ask me to stay with you.

First John focuses on the nature and content of faith. *Pisteuō* (believe, trust) is a new word. It signifies active affirmation, not the passive acceptance of *homologeō* (acknowledge, confess) used in earlier chapters. The core of the orthodox faith is expressed. "Jesus is the Messiah." To believe Jesus is to believe in his true nature, role, teachings, crucified loving. Love of the parent leads to love of the child.

As usual, each statement gives rise to the next, without much regard for a complete line of agreement. Love of God leads to obeying commands which are not burdensome because in Christ we overcome the world. Does that mean God's family enables us to overcome evil with good? If Christ has conquered the world (John 16:33), does that mean Christian life is now a constant battle? Has the eschatological now given place to the ethical?

Jesus came by water and the blood. To us an enigmatic phrase, originally it must have been very clear. Is this a Word-made-flesh reference (effusion of water and blood from the side of Jesus at the time of his death) to demonstrate his physical reality? Or does it point to baptism and eucharist? These questions go unresolved.

The authenticity of faith in Jesus is attested by the Spirit who is truth. What the Spirit generates is genuine and trustworthy because the Spirit belongs to truth. How does the Spirit testify? This question is left open.

John 15—Becoming Jesus' disciples means loving Jesus and one another even to the point of laying down our lives for one another. As Ignatius of Antioch said on the road to martyrdom, "Now I am beginning to be a disciple."

Verses 9–17 are the epitome in John's Gospel of his theme of love, which is an interpretation of the idea of bearing fruit. Certainly the cross incarnates the depth of this love. And here we most closely work with the motifs of 1 John.

Love can be emotional and ethical, but it is most profoundly the Source of our being, a being which only thrives when we are united with God and others. For John, love is being in or remaining in Jesus.

Keeping the commandment to love is not mere compliance with an order to love and obey. It is the desire and intent of love to understand the other, to participate with, to create in the spirit of, to enjoy and savor the Presence, to risk whatever it takes to remain within the Lover because, as the psalmist says, "your love is more precious than life." Love can only exist if it produces more love. Joy flows from the disciples' loving union with Jesus. Joy provokes fulfillment of the mission and bearing fruit. The result of loving graciously is joy, not unswerving allegiance.

And the boundaries of love are not containable. "Love your enemies . . . so you may be sons and daughters of God in heaven" (Matt 5:44–45). Without our enemies Christians can't be whole people. So we are no longer servants who follow orders without comprehension but the Beloved of God to whom Jesus makes everything known. The church exists to share the vastness of Christ's love by our willingness to offer our lives for one another. That's why we've been given these commands—because we were made to love.

Pastoral Reflections

Well, good heavens, are there no standards anymore? Must the Lutheran church let anybody and everybody in?

I'm afraid so, if the Gentile Pentecost experience of Peter in Acts has anything to say about it. Of course, whether we make ourselves accessible and inviting enough for people to want to bang our doors down is a whole other matter. God is forever calling

a wide variety of characters (out and inside our congregations) to enter into the body of Christ—the fullness of Love. Spiritual formation has become an issue of great concern for our children and adults. How shall we integrate the faith in the lives of the baptized and larger community? But precautions must be taken to ensure that the vehicles or symbols of the faith (sacraments, liturgy, confirmation, language, and so on) do not become barriers or gauntlets to congregational participation.

1 John 5:5—Does Christ want to conquer the world? Or does that conflict with the loving purpose of Jesus Christ? Why gain the whole world and lose your soul? Bearing fruit is not about winning, nor is mission about winning souls. Christ came to serve, not to be served.

The church is about expanding Christian service, not Christian influence. We promote the good wherever it is found and midwife the truth in all its unpredictable manifestations. Loving is not about power and property but about the care and nurture of God's life among us, especially with the most vulnerable and those seeking authenticity. We are the Beloved, and we dare not turn others into hirelings. Emmanuel: God is with us in the water and the blood to act and suffer for the repairing of God's beloved world. The cross doesn't conquer by force, but in being broken with us we are broken open to care passionately for all whom God cherishes. Genuine gutsy love—that's what we're about.

How many commandments do we have? Just one: *Love one another as I have loved you.* Imagine the cleansing of priorities that would occur if we devoted rapt attention to this word.

We lay down our lives for others in ordinary and extraordinary ways. This cannot be done out of compulsion, "I have to help because I'm a Christian." The effort is worthless then. Rather sacrificial actions inspired by Christ free us to become human. Sacrifice is not "giving up something," it is "making sacred."

From eternity, long before you were born, you existed in God's heart. Before friends or employers recognized your gifts, you were "chosen" by God as precious, of infinite beauty and eternal value. You are God's Beloved. And when Love chooses one, it does so without excluding others. Your preciousness, uniqueness, and personhood are bestowed by the One who loves you with an everlasting love.

Love begets love. You don't have to take care of everything. Just try to love God in all things, through all things, with all things. The Spirit of Christ will show you how whenever you consent to love.

Hymns
"Where Charity and Love Prevail"
(*LBW* #126)
The contemporary song "Dazzling Bouquet" opens with the line, "Mine is the church where everybody's welcome, I know it's true cause I got through the door. . . ."

Seventh Sunday of Easter
June 4, 2000

Acts 1:6–14
Psalm 1
1 John 5:9–13
John 17:6–19

First Reading
In 1 John, the three unified witnesses of the Spirit, the water, and the blood concerning the Son are the vehicles for God's witness to God's self. The believer absorbs this testimony. In verse 9 God bears witness to the Son; in verse 11 the witness consists of

God's having given us eternal life. The former is God's saving action in Christ, the latter is the result of that action. The two are connected. Life is in the Son who redefines life, death, and new life for us.

In the Last Discourse of the Gospel, Jesus' prayer on behalf of his disciples is an extension of the prayer for his own glorification. For in the perseverance, joy, and mission of these disciples will the name of God be glorified on earth. The disciples are left in the world, but they do not belong to the world. They/we are aliens in the world whose very presence incites trouble. The world responds with hatred.

In John "the world" represents those who have turned away from Jesus and are under the power of evil. That world is condemned and not to be prayed for. This "world" (those turned away) is not the same as "the world" whom God so loved he sent his Son.

The disciples are *sent* by Jesus into the world for the same purpose as Jesus—to change and challenge the world. The disciples are not spared any hostility. Hostilities can purify interior motivations as well as exterior action. Hostilities can also destroy.

"Sanctify/consecrate them in the truth." The consecration of the disciples is directed toward their mission. Consecrate (literally "make holy") is an echo of verse 11, "Father most holy." "Consecrate them in truth" means sanctify them by truth and for truth. Truth has the power to act. "The truth will set you free." Truth is both catalyst and sphere of our activity. Consecration in truth is not simply a purification from sin but is dedicating us to Christ's mission. "I have sent them into the world."

Interestingly, there is no mention of the Paraclete/Spirit here who will be the most important guide in creating that future. Some think the Spirit is implied by references to Truth.

In the last verse, Jesus consecrates not only his disciples in truth but himself as well. Perhaps we are to think of him here as not only the incarnation of God's Word but as the priest offering himself for those God has given him. As in 10:17–18, "I lay down my life . . . I lay it down of my own accord." Or also in Heb 10:10, "We have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all," that we may become one.

Pastoral Reflections

"Happy are they who hope in God. They are like trees planted near running water, that bear fruit in due season" (Psalm 1). You may appreciate this translation of the psalm by Stephen Mitchell:

Blessed are the man and the woman
who have grown beyond their greed
and have put an end to their hatred
and no longer nourish illusions.
But they delight in the way things are
and keep their hearts open, day and night.
They are like trees planted near
flowing rivers,
which bear fruit when they are ready.
Their leaves will not fall or wither.
Everything they do will succeed.

We must never forget that Christian faith is far more than intellectual acceptance of a religious message or doctrinal formulas. It is a *living experience* of unity in Christ which transcends all conceptualizations. Faith opens the door to the full inner life in the divine gift of grace which realizes that all life is dependent on God. We are offered "the mind of Christ" and the kenosis (self-emptying) of Christ in a deep personal experience which is at once utterly unique and yet shared by the whole body of Christ in the Spirit. By water, blood, and the Spirit God is made known to us by the passion of Jesus Christ in history. Christianity begins

with revelation, but it is much more than an "explanation" of life. It is immersion in the mystery of God's life in Christ in us and the turning of the whole world upside down.

"Do you love me?" is Jesus' pivotal question to his disciples. Today's texts have a tendency to sound as though merely declaring our agreement with God's testimony is enough. Believing means engaging—incorporating—manifesting the truth that the Son is *life*. How does that conviction affirm or alter the way we live? *Do you love me?*

Hasn't eternal life already begun? We are living in eternity now. Freed from the lordship (domination/enslavement) of Death, how shall we orient ourselves in order to create the Beloved Community for which Christ died and rose?

The dualistic tendencies of John irritate me because I've learned how prone people are to strict black-and-white thinking. It's either right or wrong. John speaks from profound depths, but beware of superficial hearings and interpretations. Example: "They do not belong to the world." We are in but not of the world—absolutely true. But we come out of the world and enter Christ in order to belong more passionately to life in the here and now. Christ became human that we might become truly human.

"Father most holy, protect them . . . that they may be one." Until we love God wholeheartedly, everything in the world is able to hurt us. The disorder of our desires has us place things (reputation, degrees, money) above God, and our pain is inevitable because none of these things can satisfy or fulfill what they promise. Yet as long as we are on this earth, the love of Christ that unites us will also bring us suffering by our contact with one another, because this love is resetting a Body of broken bones. Even saints don't naturally get along with other saints. Our unity in God is a painful process.

"Now I am coming to you." Jesus knew where he came from and where he was going. To return, to return, to always return to the Holy One. There is no obstacle to prevent our returning to God except the ones we construct and refuse to tear down.

"The world hates them." Why? Two reasons come to mind: first, we refuse to play the Game, to go along with the powerful, to pretend everything is working out just fine. We won't adjust. We insist that life has a richer intention not for just the few but for all. Second, the evil one would have us believe in the irreversibility of evil. All modern tyrannies build their power on this notion. Evil (sinners, enemies, those different from us) must be eliminated/destroyed. But the Spirit of truth knows that only grace, mercy and forgiveness can overcome the evil within and among us. Grace risks exposure with failures and undesirables who threaten "the good." So we are dismissed, discounted, or hated. For now we live facing despair, but we do not give our consent.

"They do not belong to the world." For most Lutherans the issue today is not persecution but seduction by the world.

"Your word is truth." For Christians truth is interwoven in love. Without love, truth can become a calculating cleverness; without truth, love becomes sappy.

We are sent into the world to bring about healing and transformation, to be salt and light for the earth. No sting, no zing = no church. Remember your baptismal covenant.

The Day of Pentecost
June 11, 2000

Psalm 104:25–35, 37
(Psalm 104:24–34, 35b NRSV)
Romans 8:22–27 or Acts 2:1–21
John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15

First Reading

Pentecost is the birthday of the church, a shocking, explosive, and hilarious beginning. Those filled with the Spirit were given the ability to communicate in other languages. And the crowd was bewildered because they found themselves addressed. The topic is God's deeds of power. Note the responses: perplexity and sneering mockery.

Peter responds in the words of the prophet Joel. The Day of Yahweh promises an outpouring of the Spirit. The Spirit will be poured out on all, regardless of social standing. It prompts both a spirit of prophecy characterized by dreams and visions as well as inward renewal. The portents in the sky and on the earth herald the final judgment on the Day of Yahweh.

From Romans 8:19: "It is the fondest dream of the universe to catch a glimpse of real live sons and daughters of God" (Clarence Jordan's *Cotton Patch* translation). For this the whole creation groans and struggles in birth pangs as do we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit. Christian living is anticipating—we live into, we create the new Beloved Community within the shell of the old. Our groanings go not unheard. We hope and work toward a kinship with life which is beyond immediate tangible expression yet is more real and vital than our illusory passing realities ("Now the eye of my eye has been opened" —e.e. cummings)

"We wait for it with constancy." I prefer "constancy" to "patience," since constancy implies active participation as opposed to boring lingering.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray—such a relief for so many people to hear, because they don't know how to pray. "The Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words"—this is the heartfelt longing of our souls for the love of Christ, for the chance to be whole and free. It is a prayer of anguish, desire, and remembering. "God searches our hearts" —in the end it is not our knowing God but being known by God that matters.

In the Gospel we learn we have an Advocate who defends us from the Accuser (the one who destroys us by self-rejection, by the denigration of others and the deceit of evil). The Spirit of truth tells the truth about God and us—we belong together and we are not separate.

Again, Jesus speaks of returning to the One who sent him as we too shall fully return one day. It is to our advantage that Jesus departs, because then we can mature into the richness and fullness of life in God. Faith is not an imitation of holy principles or people. It is an embodiment of Christ's compassion and unconditional love in us. But it's got to ring true in each of us.

Verses 8–11 are very difficult. Augustine avoided it, and Aquinas only cited others' opinions. If this is a trial scene, the courtroom is occurring in the understanding of the disciples. The first element in the Paraclete's forensic activity proves the world guilty of sin—for refusing to believe in Jesus. "The light came into the world but people preferred the darkness" (3:19). While this is puzzling for us in a pluralistic society, it made sense in John's polemical context.

Second, the world was wrong about justice in judging Jesus as guilty when he was quite innocent. In going to the Father, Jesus confirms the claim that he is One with God and not a blasphemer.

Third, in condemning Jesus the world

was judged. In what seemed to defeat on the cross we have unearthed a surprise, Jesus present after his death in the Paraclete. Therefore, death, accusation, and condemnation are no longer in control of our lives.

"The Spirit will declare the things that are to come." Be prepared: the church is on the move. This is not a maintenance operation. "No eye has seen, ear heard, or mind imagined what God has in store for those who love God!"

Pastoral Reflections

It takes a great convulsion to shake and break out the church from its tomb of fear and non-comprehension of the ministry of Jesus. Pentecost is much like an atom bomb detonation—the rush of a violent wind, earth rumbling, a brilliant display of fire and light. Jim Douglas has argued that what the world needs today is the incarnation of a spiritual equivalent to the atom bomb, a fierce concentration of compassion working in the tiniest repose of the human heart that would explosively impact millions of lives with agape through the briefest contact. (Can you imagine ten St. Francis of Assisis on the planet at the same time?) Is that not the Word of Jesus? Is that not the passion of the Spirit and the work of the church? Imagine vaporizing humanity with the Breath of the Spirit.

There is no life without the Spirit. As Paul says, you can forget the whole Christian enterprise if we are not becoming and enacting the New Creation. The sneering mob is right: we are filled with a new wine which bursts asunder old skins. The church is not beholden to tradition. We honor and value our history, but we have only one tradition—the living experience of Jesus Christ. What we shall be and who we shall become is in God's hands. Are we open to the possibilities? The Spirit is our catalyst. Our ministry will always have a cruciform nature about it. The day we are accused of loving too much will be the day we've begun. Until then, attend to the visions of our youth, the dreams of our elders, and the passion of the faithful. Expect the wisdom of the Spirit to be constantly surprising us in people and circumstances beyond our scope. For the Spirit who moves and dances freely is not mandated to work within the church alone.

Regarding Romans, if you know an adult who has experienced adoption and they're willing to share their story with you, you will appreciate the longing for home, for belonging, for connection as is often expressed in these stories. This *aching within* permeates the groans of Paul's passage.

"Wait in constancy/patience." Africans have a proverb: Don't anticipate the drums. It was explained to me this way. "We Africans like to sing and dance. Sometimes at a party or a reception we begin dancing before the band gets there. But by the time the band arrives we're too tired to dance." It's all about kairos. God works with a subtle rhythm. Keep focused.

"When the Advocate comes" (John 15). The church has never lacked saints, yet why does the Spirit of the gospel spread so slowly? Perhaps because we've been satisfied with ritualism, legalism, rationalism, and superficial emotional expressions of faith. We baptized people need to be seized inwardly by the devouring Presence and undergo an experience of transformation that brings us to metanoia or complete renewal. Maybe we've said enough and done enough. Now it is time to listen to the summons of the Spirit who will bring us into the abyss of God who is wisdom, consuming fire, absolute justice, pure freedom, constant joy. Only God can direct us. Only God's love can mend that deep emptiness within. Only God's yearning or will can satisfy our deepest desires and renew the church.

"I have much to say to you but you cannot bear it now." "Be thankful spiritual truths come slowly," said Rilke. "If they came all at once, they would kill you."

"The Spirit will take what is mine and declare it to you." The Spirit has nothing new to offer. Yet all is being made new. The Holy Spirit reveals the insights of Jesus and intensifies our capacity to understand the act. Everything we need to live as noble human beings has been given us in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Pentecost delights in celebrating the truth that our peace with God and each other has been superbly accomplished. This *has* happened—now live it out to the max!

Worship Note: Fire bowl

Get a large ceramic bowl, not too heavy, place a damp rag in it (a diaper is ideal), place a metal bowl on the rag and fill it with rubbing alcohol. Let sit 30 seconds. Light it by waving a match over the fluid. Have the bowl danced or processed into worship while Veni Sancti Spiritus (a Taize chant) or other appropriate opening Pentecost hymn is sung. Place the bowl on the center of your altar. It will extinguish itself within about 30 minutes. The bowl (it may be hot) can then be moved aside for communion. You will grab prayerful attention.

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