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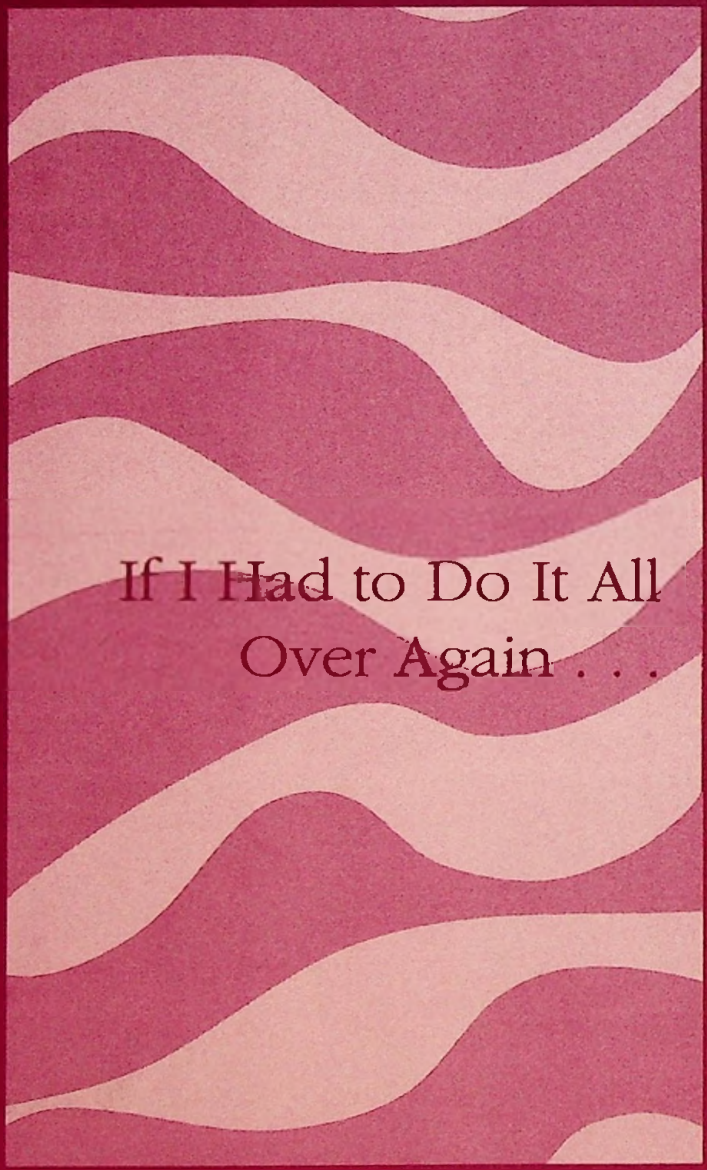

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If I Had to Do It All Over Again . . .

The seminary library recently presented a display on the life of President Franklin Gruber, who presided over the Chicago Lutheran Seminary, in Maywood, from 1928 to 1941. One of Gruber's great legacies is his rare book collection now housed in the seminary library, but the display also pointed to an inaugural address he gave on theological education when he ascended to the presidency. After bemoaning the fragmentation and overspecialization of theological education in 1928—imagine what he might say today!—he cited the deathbed lament of a famed German professor as Exhibit A in the woes of theological education: "If I had to do it all over again," sighed the dying German professor, "I would devote my entire life to study of the iota subscript."

This absurd little anecdote reminds me of two truisms: (1) Seminary education attempts to prepare church leaders who are able to witness to the reconciling Word of God, both through their lives and through such ministries as teaching, preaching, administering the sacraments, and inviting people to the faith, who are able to provide care for God's people, and who are able to work for the revitalization of the church as it seeks to transform the world (an excerpt from LSTC's mission statement). (2) The scholarship that supports these lofty goals is often detailed, abstract, non-utilitarian, and difficult—though not necessarily lost in the wonders of the iota subscript.

Vítor Westhelle is the latest to achieve the rank of professor at LSTC and shares with us in this issue his own passionate inaugural address. He recalls that much twentieth-century theology devalued space and celebrated time, and he argues that this separation of time and space is neither necessary nor desirable. The time of judgment also comes in a place of trial. Apocalyptic revelation refers to the literal meaning of the death of God in the cross of Jesus, but in a metaphorical sense it also designates our small apocalypses or experience of limits that are enlightened by the cross itself. The cross reveals and at once also conceals. It is at the end that a beginning is possible; it is death that brings about life; it is the awful that is also awesome. New creation arises exactly then when the world ends, or there where the worlds end.

Allen G. Jorgenson explores the relationship between Christianity and culture with a view toward the law/gospel distinction and Luther's view of the two reigns. The law in the law/gospel dialectic clarifies the human predicament in light of sin, and the gospel clarifies God's response to that situation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The place of culture in the divine movement of redemption is located in the reign of law, while the gospel is pancultural, for all people. The gospel is pancultural because no culture stands outside of the need for the good news. The gospel declares culture to be good and in that declaration frees a culture to be what it is meant to be. Every culture has elements that counter the claims of Christ. The gospel is the antidote to the degeneration of culture that afflicts every culture. Ignoring the paradoxical nature of the relationship between Christianity and culture presents profound potentials for destruction. The demise of the supracultural character of the gospel leads to syncretism, and the demise of the pancultural character of the gospel leads to sectarianism.

Andrew Weyermann believes that preaching is truly biblical when the sermon is in continuity with and serves the gospel. Biblical preaching involves applying the message of the text to the contemporary situation by centering both in the gospel. A gospel hermeneutic is a method of biblical interpretation that makes explicit the gospel context that may only be implicit in the pericope itself. A sermon is moralistic when the hearers are exhorted to do something they cannot do by themselves. These presuppositions are then applied to preaching on the beatitude "Blessed are the poor" and to the parables of the Pharisee and the Publican and the Good Samaritan. How can the preacher give the hearers the gift of God's justifying deed in Christ so that the Spirit might persuade the hearers to surrender to God's grace and acknowledge the truth about themselves?

Bruce V. Malchow laments the absence of modern biblical studies from many sermons and ponders the reasons for this absence. With numerous examples from the Chronicler's history, he reinforces the point that theological emphasis rather than historical accuracy is the main characteristic of the text. He concludes that pastors should be careful not to preach what they know to be untrue. If preachers are aware that the story in a preaching text is not historical, they should be careful not to give the impression it is. Ultimately members trust preachers more because they know they are being told the truth.

In an extended review of a recent book on the modern world, **Mark C. Mattes** notes that contemporary North American religious life exists in a strange paradox. On the one hand, belief in God and church attendance seem steady if not actually thriving. On the other hand, our public institutions go

about their daily work as if there were no God. Contemporary society and culture so emphasize human potential, that we are for the most part tempted to go about our daily business of life as though God did not exist, or at least as if God's existence did not practically matter. Modern humans think that self-interest and self-preservation *alone* can motivate humanity. In contrast to Augustine, many moderns believe that there is no restlessness of the heart that can be satiated by God alone. The Spirit still empowers the church to invite people into God's new reality, offering them a sense of what is truly ultimate, the coming kingdom, the hope for which can truly sustain them as they work in this world.

Next Sunday, tomorrow, or next Thursday we have to do it all over again. We are caught—for better or worse—in the rhythms of the church year and the imperious cycle of the week. Sometimes we change in mid-career, and our generation has made second and third careers part of the routine of normality. But mostly we keep doing it all over again—from the same wellsprings of gospel freedom and to and for a world and a church caught in injustice and plain old sin. We tell people obsessed with the iota subscript to "get a life." Which is what we are all trying to get—next Sunday, tomorrow, or next Thursday at St. John's by the gas station or the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, our calling.

—Ralph W. Klein, Editor

The Way the World Ends: An Essay on Cross and Eschatology

Vítor Westhelle
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Beginning

For the last eleven years, since I resumed teaching in an academic setting after being a parish pastor and working for the Ecumenical Pastoral Commission on Land in Brazil, my reflections have been, to a significant extent, an attempt to reread theology from the point of view of those years when I did grassroots work. I am fully aware that a point of view is always a view from a point. So I don't claim my experience to be in any sense universal. I don't presume to have with it the hermeneutic key to theology in general. As Brazilian poet Vinicius de Moraes once said: "Ninguém é universal / fora de seu quintal" (Nobody is universal outside their backyard).

However, that experience raised in me the awareness of a deficit or a blind spot in western theological thinking that hindered me from reflecting theologically on some very existential and pastoral topics I was encountering: small farmers driven off their land, landless peasants living year after year in plastic tents on the side of highways, squeezed between the roadway and the fences of the underutilized farms nearby.

It all started when I was still a parish pastor and was commissioned to write the chapter on Creation for the systematic compendium entitled *Lift Every Voice*. There I brought up the category of "space" as an indispensable theologumenon. Since then I have written on several theological loci taking that insight into account. And they did not pass fully unnoticed by the theological community. Some theologians have taken up my argument and raised significant questions that have led me to the theme of this lecture. Two of them are exemplary. José Míguez Bonino in his book *Faces of Protestantism in Latin America* suggests that "a Trinitarian vision of this theme [I suggested] could provide an adequate theological key" for the reconstruction of theology, but he asks me if I would not be giving up the biblical eschatological vision of the future of God.[1] Catherine

[1] José Míguez-Bonino, *Rostros del protestantismo latinoamericano* (Buenos Aires/Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 102–104, 163 n. 44. (There is a published English version of this book.) My article he discusses is "Re(li)gion: The Lord of History and the Illusory Space," in *Region and Religion*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Geneva: LWF, 1994), 79–95.

This is the puzzle I am working with: How does time take *place*?

Keller, in her book *Apocalypse Now and Then*, recognizes and commends me for the same insight but notes that I seem "all too trustful of the apocalyptic-move, indeed even translating it into the later doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*." Such a move, she says, threatens to become "utopianized in just the sense Westhelle wishes to oppose." Instead, she suggests a "counter-apocalypse" that would "translate the notion of creation out of that absolute *origin* into that of *perpetual origination*."[2]

Apparently I am being criticized for exactly opposite reasons—one for not taking eschatology seriously enough, and another for carrying it to apocalyptic extremes. But in a certain sense both have recognized important points in my argument that I would like to underscore. Keller is right in pointing out a recurring apocalyptic theme that runs through my argument (although I think I never used the word) and indeed goes against her suggestion of a "perpetual origination." Míguez-Bonino does detect a departure from a certain eschatological vision. However, I would like to argue that it is a departure from a western view of history and of eschatology but not from a biblical view of the eschaton, even if the former has been inscribed upon the latter. The task I impose myself in this lecture is that of explaining how can I hold an apocalyptic vision that is not utopian, but localized, related to time and space—and therefore relevant to our present situation—and faithful to the biblical witness. It is the realization that I had this task in front of me that led me in the last few years to work on a theological topic that has become crucial for sustaining my argument: the cross. Its absence in my essays that Míguez-Bonino and Keller were commenting on, I came to realize, is probably the reason for their reading of my argument in ways I did not intend.

This is my beginning. In what follows I will speak of time, space, cross, and home, and then I will end.

Time

"What is time?" "Where is tomorrow?" These are questions that Peter Høeg in his novel *Borderliners*[3] pursues relentlessly, telling in an autobiographical fiction the story of institutionalized children that did not fit socially. They were "borderliners." What does time mean for those who are on the edge? The book examines and questions conceptions of linear time running across the Newtonian universe, or the inborn category of a Kantian mind. Were these the only meanings of time, then, for borderliners, time is a machine that nudges "out toward the edge of the abyss." How to think about time when one knows that at the limit it either loses its meaning or pushes you over the edge? Time has different velocities in our experiences of it. It can be

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[2] Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 172. Her comments are in reference to my "Creation Motifs in the Search for a Vital Space: A Latin American Perspective," in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theology from the Underside*, ed. Susan Thistlethwaite and Mary Engel (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 128–40.

[3] New York: Delta, 1995.

the ecstatic experience of a *kairos* or the relentless movement of a rhythmic *chronos*. But these are only extremes in a spectrum of countless other velocities that intersect our experiences depending on where we are. I needed this language of Høeg that touches upon poetry in order to detect the abstract character time has assumed in modern theological prose. And I need the probing of Sethe, the character on the edge in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*,[4] when she says:

> I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Somethings just stay. I used to think it was my memory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there . . . not just in my memory, but out there, in the world . . . I mean even if I don't think it, even if I die [it] . . . is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (pp. 35–36)

This is the puzzle I am working with: how does time take *place*? What is the time of salvation, of trial, of condemnation? *Where* does it happen? Or doesn't it also take *place*? What do theologians say about it?

Although figures like Karl Barth or Karl Rahner might have had more impact in their respective theological traditions, Barth in Protestant theology and Rahner in Roman Catholicism, it is arguable that it is Paul Tillich who in this century made a greater impact in both theology *and* cultural life in the western world. His simultaneous impact on both areas is due to the fact that unlike other great theological minds he dipped and soaked the core of his theology into the cultural milieu of the middle of this century and learned as few others how to read the "signs of times" on both sides of the North Atlantic world. Unlike Barth's prescription to have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in another, Tillich encoded the Bible into the newspaper, or vice versa. He is, therefore, a good candidate for anyone to consult on what the West perceives as the basic challenges theology faces and what is the theological agenda to be pursued. What he saw became the explicit agenda of much of theology and, sometimes, the tacit one. The explicit agenda was the one in which his contributions were controversial within the theology of the West and therefore openly debated, like his Christology, his expressivist theory of symbol, his method of correlation, and so forth. What interests me here is to look at the tacit or implicit agenda that he laid out and was never much debated, I assume, precisely because it was taken as a truism, something that was largely self-evident, a commonplace shared by the prevailing culture in the North Atlantic world.

Tillich, who understood himself as being on the borders and used in his systematic theology a plethora of other spatial metaphors like dimensions, depth, limits, and structure, was the very same person who wrote an essay about the struggle between time and space.[5] In a typical binary western approach, Tillich sets the two categories against each other and lines up other binary oppositions in which Christianity sides with time and paganism with space. The predominance of *time* gives rise to prophecy and monotheistic faith; *space* gives rise to tragedy, mysticism, and polytheism. History and the church universal are on the side of justice; the rule of space is nationalism and tribalism producing injustice, it is the victory of naturalism over the spirit. And so on and so forth. There is

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[4] New York: Plume, 1988.

[5] "The Struggle Between Time and Space," in *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 40–51.

Place, locale, cannot be circumvented. God's revelation requires *place.*

hardly any reason for getting intrigued by Tillich's motivation to debunk space from Christian theology. Tillich is reflecting implicitly his own traumatic experience with National Socialism and its ideology of blood and soil, of Aryan purity combined with the nationalistic concept of *Lebensraum* (living or vital space). Yet we should be reminded, *abusus non tollit usus* (abuse does not suspend the use).

In spite of many metaphorical uses of space in contemporary theology, Tillich's diatribe against space, and in favor of time, has received very little attention in theological literature until very recently. And I suspect that this is not the case because Tillich was seen as being completely off the mark, which he hardly was as both an incisive observer of culture and an amazingly well informed philosophical theologian. The reason, I suggest, is the opposite. He was playing a key or composing a melody that was in consonance with the cultural symphony of his time *and* his place. He only formulated a virtual consensus: God's revelation happens in history regardless of geography.[6] At least that is what one of the most disturbing and incisive critics of modern western culture, Michel Foucault, has noted. He recalls in an anecdote "having been invited . . . by a group of architects to do a study of space . . . and at the end of the study someone spoke up [and tried to] . . . firebomb me saying that *space* is reactionary and capitalist, but *history* and *becoming* are revolutionary."[7] That any one could even think about setting these categories of time and space against each other, relativity theory notwithstanding, reveals the disembedded character of our existence and its symbolic systems to describe western modernity.

Space

In a 1975 dissertation, for the first time in my knowledge, a basic question was raised regarding the adequacy of using time-bound or exclusively historical categories to interpret the biblical view of God's action and presence in the world. It was written by an Eritrean theologian, Yacob Tesfai. In "This is my Resting Place: An Inquiry into the Role of Time and Space in the Old Testament,"[8] he criticizes modern western biblical theology, canonized by the work of Gerhard von Rad, that God's actions and God's revelation are to be seen as God's intervention in universal history for which the locale of God's epiphany is only circumstantial. Tesfai's analysis shows a curious development in modern western ways of thinking: the separation of time from space. In the biblical world, says Tesfai, this would be a complete oddity.

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[6] Comments like the following are typical of this stance: "Gott handelt in der Geschichte und gibt sich dadurch den Menschen zu erkennen. Mittel der Offenbarung Gottes ist also nicht in erster Linie die Natur, sonder die Geschichte" (God acts in history and thereby reveals Godself to humanity. The means of the revelation of God is not in the first instance nature, but history). *Evangelischer Erwachsenenkatechismus* (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1975), 218.

[7] *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 252.

[8] Ph.D. dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 1975.

Time and space are "pocket-experiences." Events are at the same time temporally and spatially circumscribed. Place, locale, cannot be circumvented. God's revelation requires *place*.

What happens, happens in time because of a given space. And what literally takes place, takes place because the time is ripe. Anthropologist Anthony Giddens in his book *Modernity and Self-Identity* noted that in pre-modern settings "time and space were connected *through* the situatedness of place," while in modernity "the separation of time from space involved above all the development of an 'empty' dimension of time, the main lever which also pulled space away from place."[9] The best illustration is the parallel and progressive divorce between the development of mechanical and then electronic clocks, on one side, and of western cartography, on the other. What the mechanical clock did was to invert the causal relationship between the rotation of the earth in relation to the sun. The analogical clock established time in analogy to the earth's rotation but without causal dependence on it (as with a sundial), so that we have time zones and even daylight saving time. And when we get to the digital watch even the inverted analogy is no longer there. The day virtually breaks when the electronic alarm clock sounds. And maps from the fifteenth century on became homogeneous representations of extension, losing the connection with situatedness which was still present in the older itineraries. (Remnants of situated space can still be found in sixteenth-century maps, where sea monsters would mark perceived places of danger and risk.)

That it took an Eritrean to diagnose this peculiarity of western scholarship is not a coincidence. It normally takes a stranger to lift up one's own idiosyncrasies. The West since the fifteenth century did these two things: it conquered the world geographically and intellectually, and it justified this conquering with a notion of history that was regarded as the parchment on which the adventures of western men (*sic*) were inscribed as deeds of *universal* history. In the words of Tzvetan Todorov, "'to discover' is an intransitive action."[10] Incidentally, the word "discover" and its etymological cognates in western languages (*entdecken*, *descobrir*, *découvrir*, *discovrire*, etc.) was first used to describe a landfall only in the sixteenth century to account for the Portuguese and Spanish maritime explorations (and was shortly thereafter used by John Donne to describe a sexual encounter in his infamous poem "To My Mistress Going to Bed"[11]). The rest of the world became a parchment to which the deeds of the West would extend themselves without limit, only the rest of the world did not know it. In the words of Karl Löwith, *Weltgeschichte* was read as *Heilsgeschehen*, world history was the register of saving events.[12]

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[9] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 16.

[10] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 13.

[11] "O my America, my new found land, / My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned, / My mine of precious stones, my empire, / How blessed am I in this discovering thee. / To enter in these bonds is to be free, / Then where my hand is set my seal shall be." John Donne, *The Oxford Authors*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 12–13.

[12] Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Löwith is here elaborating on Hegel's suggestion that world history is the history of its self-consummation ("Die Weltgeschichte is das Weltgericht.")

That there were no limits meant exactly that "discovery" became an intransitive verb. What was discovered did not make a difference, except that it was incorporated into a historically preordained logic. Hegel, exactly after discussing the conquering of the Americas, gives expression to this conviction with his famous statement: "Europe is definitely (*schlechthin*) the end of world history."[13] Schleiermacher, Hegel's colleague and foe at the University of Berlin in the beginning of the nineteenth century, shares at least this in common with the philosopher. Arguing that there are no new heresies, for since antiquity Christianity was no longer challenged or infiltrated by other religious ideas, he shows that the missionary efforts of the church followed the same pattern of "discovery." Because there were no longer limits, therefore, there is no possible transgression. One needs a limit to be able to transgress, a "beyond" to trespass. What others thought or believed did not make any difference, for Christianity became the universal name for religion in its purest positive manifestation. In these circumstances, he writes, ". . . new heresies no longer arise, now that the Church recruits itself out of its own resources; and the influence of alien faiths on the frontier and the mission-field of the Church must be reckoned at zero."[14] Where heresy is no longer possible, novelty is also an impossibility. The word "heresy" etymologically means "a choice," "option," or "setting apart," but it can also mean "conquest," "capture." The irony in this is that the European or western conquering of the world, the great "heresy," became the norm from which no deviation would be possible, no "anti-heresy" would be allowed. Heresy became absolute, normative.

But all of this does not mean a desacralization or profanization of all spaces, locales, things, and bodies. In fact, the very opposite is the case. Columbus is here proverbial. His justification for conquering and plundering the New World was that it was done for the sake of amassing the resources to launch a Crusade to conquer the Holy House of Jerusalem.[15] Sacred spaces and sacred things were now understood within this same story in which time and space are held apart. Sacred spaces, like chastity, are hardly more than markers to define by default what can be plundered and raped. A sacred thing is a cipher for all the rest that is disposable or is deemed disposable. A sacred thing is protected from time, while the profane is only a function of it. As long as we have sacred things, sacred places, dissociated from their epiphanic time—geography without genealogy—we will have never-ending dump sites, and places or bodies to be violated.

Take, for example, the studies of Mircea Eliade on *The Sacred and the Profane*.[16] The distinction, he shows, emerges from the analysis of societies that demarcated their cosmos from the unknown territories and societies at their margins, the chaotic. But something happens once there is no longer the mysterious "beyond" in space, when the whole world has been colonized.[17] The homogenization of the Earth came as a result of the establishment

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[13] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke* (Frankfurt a/M: Suhrkam, 1970), 12:134.

[14] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 96.

[15] *Diario de Colón* (Madrid: Cultura Hispanica, 1968), 139 (26 December 1492). Hegel confirms that this was well known in Europe (*Werke* 12:490).

[16] New York: Harvest, 1959, 29–32.

[17] Actually the true continuation of the ancient distinction between cosmos and chaos has now to be located in our fascination and awe attached to extraterrestrial speculations.

of its spherical nature and the actual conquering of it through navigation since the fifteenth century. The chaotic, the uncanny was cosmicized. Since then, the profane is separated from the sacred by an abstract act of the mind that sets those spaces, the sacred and the profane, against each other. There was always the holy, the sacred, but it was defined by the religious experience as such; it was the predicate of a hierophany and not, like now, its presupposition. It was only with Schleiermacher *Speeches* (1799), Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), and Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1923) that the *idea* of "the holy" defined religious experiences and, then, whatever else existed was deemed profane.[18] In other words, the *idea* of the holy, of the sacred, and the *idea* of the profane is quite a recent creation.

It is in this context that eschatology as the doctrine of the last "things" becomes the teachings about the last times or of a decisive time, either in a millennialist sense of a time set in the calendar for the end of the world, or as an eternal present, a "kairotic" dormant possibility slumbering beneath the tick-tock of the clock of history.[19] Whether, present, future, realized, inaugurated, kairotic, proleptic, consequent, or whatever interpretation eschatology has received, it has been purged from the disturbing undecidability of the biblical view of the eschaton. The word *eschaton* in Greek can mean something that happens in time, but it can also describe rank, the last in a series, as it can also be descriptive of the outer limit of a place. When we translate the term now it receives a single, definite meaning referring either to a place or to a time. But even when the context suggests one meaning, like "being witnesses . . . to the end of the world" (*heos eschatou tes ges*), which in our translations receives an exclusively geographical connotation, in

the ears of the early Christians it very likely also suggested something that could be equally well translated as "until the end of the earth," suggesting a temporal connotation. It is only *we* who need to think of an either/or.

Can we step outside of the modern western predicament of thinking into this binary separation between time and space? Can we along with the signs of the times, as the poet and bishop Pedro Casaldáliga suggested, consider the signs of places? Do we realize that the *time* of judgment always

[18] "Heilig," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1959), 3:146–55.

[19] With these words Bultmann closes The Gifford Lectures 1955: "Always in your present lies the meaning in history, and you cannot see it as spectator, but only in your responsible decisions. In every moment slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment. You must awaken it." Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity: History and Echatology* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 155.

[20] See Richard A. Shweder, *Thinking Through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 108–10.

comes in a *place* of trial? The temptation here, of course, is to fall back into the binary opposition and just revert the axiological values and say space is good and time is bad. But this would be nothing else than reinstating exactly the same problem. How can we think differently, but not in a different way *we* might be able to think, but thinking differently by way of an *other*, or "thinking through others"?[20]

Cross

In his long poem, called "The Book of Monastic Life," Rainer Maria Rilke has some lines that can serve as an approach to these questions:

YOUR very first word: Light
thus made was time. Then silent you were long.

Your second word became flesh
and distressed
(darkly we are still dawning in its pitch)
and again your face is pondering.

Yet your third
I want not.[21]

Light and darkness and the absence of a third is not unlike time and space and the absence of a place that, consumed by an event, is at the same time a no-place, where presence (*parousia*) and absence (*apousia*) are one and the same. Can we think this last thing? Can this thing be the unthinkable: the naked God exposed in the middle of the day when suddenly night falls and agony and death imposes a dreadful absence? Calvary, the place of the skull, the no-place, the skull, the no-face, where what happens is only annihilation. And yet was not that the place and the time of salvation? Second-century writer Melito of Sardis still testified to this impossibility of a "third":

> He that hung up the earth *in space* was *Himself* hanged up; He that fixed the heavens was fixed *with nails*; He that bore up the earth was borne up on a tree; the Lord *of all* was subjected to ignominy in a naked body—God put to death! . . . Alas for the new wickedness of the new murder! The Lord was exposed with naked body: He was not deemed worthy even of covering; and, in order that He might not be seen, the luminaries turned away, and the day became darkened, because they slew God, who hung naked on the tree.[22]

There is no theo-*logy* of the cross, at least not in the sense of being a disciplined and organized discourse about the cross and Christ's passion. The cross is the crucial point in time and space in which the third option is absent—yet somehow there. How to express it? How to name it? Language fails us. And yet we must speak; we must transgress the impossibility of language.

Let me call this transgression of language an apocalyptic gesture. I will be using the word "apocalyptic" here not as a literary genre, but rather to designate the precise sense of conveying this crossing of time and space in which there is this simultaneous coincidence, a clenching, a concoction of opposites (what Nicolas of Cusa

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[21] "DEIN allererstes Wort war: *Licht*: / da ward die Zeit. Dann schwiegst du lange. / Dein zweites Wort ward Mensch und bange / (wir dunkeln noch in seinem Klange) / und wieder sinnt dein Angesicht. / Ich aber will dein drittes nicht." Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Gedichte* (Frankfurt a/M: Insel, 1997), 227. (To Rahel Hahn my thanks for helping me with the translation of this poem, although mine is the responsibility for its accuracy.)

[22] *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:757. See also Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 21.

called *coincidentia oppositorum*), of affirmation and denial, of disclosure and concealment, of presence and absence. It is not a moment of transition, an opportunity for a syllogism, but the denial of all mediations, in which the experience of both, the end of the eon and the beginning of it, are so imminent that it suspends all transaction, all economy. The Latin equivalent to "apocalypse," *revelatio* (hence the English "revelation"), conveys this, as much as the Greek *apokalypsis*. In one sense it is an unveiling, a laying bare, but the prefix (*re-* in Latin, or *apo-* in Greek) reserves some surprises in the undecidability of its meaning. It can be the removal of the veil, but it can also mean something else, the moving away from the veil so as to make it even more veiling, or even double veiling. The text from Melito of Sardis shows this well when the naked God, the utterly revealed God, is simultaneously the one on which the light no longer shines. The totally visible stripped down God (what Luther called the *deus nudus*) is the utter darkness in the middle of the day.

The apostle Paul, groping for language to express this impossibility, which he himself called the "apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 1:7), could only express it in paradoxical terms pairing notions like foolishness and wisdom, weakness and power, noble and low. He composed in the opening of the First Letter to the Corinthians a text that is striking insofar as its boldness in language is concerned but helpless insofar as any systematic effort to put order into his language and clarify the meaning of its semantics. Luther would be another example. How should we read *ad deum contra deum confungere* ("to flee to and find refuge in God against God") if not in this undecidable apocalyptic verve?[23]

I here use the term "apocalyptic" to designate, then, the literal meaning of the death of God in the cross of Jesus, and in a metaphorical sense to designate our little, small, or weak apocalypses insofar as the former (the literal meaning) sheds light into, or offers an impossible language to,

> The totally visible stripped down God is the utter darkness in the middle of the day.

the understanding of our own experience of limits, of being at the edge of the abyss. The literal and the metaphorical meanings are unlike, yet they share the same linguistic impossibility. The cross of Jesus, in the words of Mary Solberg, represents an "epistemological break" with the ways we organize our knowledge of the world.[24]

The limit of language is also a language about limits. A spatial concern, the lifting up of the importance of locale, of place, is theologically speaking not a concern for the celebration of places, a theological version of the Sierra Club Calendar, the crowning of a theology of geography to outdo a theology of history. The spatial quest is decisive insofar as it is a quest for the limit, the borderline, the frontier, the margin, the horizon, the divide—words that define a place that is no-place, for it is only the limit of a space, but a limit intersected by a time that is equally evasive; a

[23] WA 5.204, 26f.

[24] Mary Solberg, *Compelling Knowledge: A Feminist Proposal for an Epistemology of the Cross* (New York: SUNY Press, 1997).

time of ending which is no-time, but simultaneously the time of coming (*ad-ventus*) which also eludes measurement, chronometered; for what comes does not come *in* time, instead it comes *on* or *upon* time. What the cross does is precisely this reorientation of our gaze to the limits, the *eschata*. What it reveals is exactly the apocalypse which is revelation and at once its very concealment; a revelation hidden in its opposite (*revelatio abscondita sub contraria specie*), as Luther said in trying his hand in explaining the apocalypse of God in Jesus of Nazareth.

How to keep the gaze at that unseemly spectacle is what the apostles, so reluctantly, had to learn. It is the uncanny, the unbearable vision. We all know about this. We might have not been there when they crucified our Lord, yet we have experienced something analogous every time we run into the limits of the spaces we inhabit, the borders of our geographies. And they are legion. We know them as much as we avoid and dread them. For example, there is a psychological geography, the terrain of our gathered self, which has its limits, the point in which the self collapses. There is the geography of our body that is delimited by the point it "reveals" its dysfunction, a condition that invites our constant denial, or else threatens to turn us into hypochondriacs. And so there are ethnic, racial, social, cultural, political, economic, geopolitical, and so many other geographies that lay bare the apocalypses; the limits of the homely, the familiar, that which centers our spaces. They are often not more than small apocalypses whose weak power is yet strong enough to awaken in us the onslaught of the uncanny, the unfamiliar, the *Unheimlich*.

Yet, the apocalyptic message wants to convey precisely this paradox: it is at the end that a beginning is possible, it is death that brings about life, it is the awful that is also awesome, the *tremendum* is the *fascinans*. As Friedrich Hölderlin, in his poem "Patmos," wrote:

Near
and hard to grasp is God.
But where danger lies, grows
also that which saves.[25]

But do we want to be saved? Or do we long rather to be safe? Is this not the message, the lesson that we learn from that other apocalypse, the apocalypse of Jesus Christ? Between that apocalypse and ours there is a trail marked by the blood of those who have witnessed, have been martyrs (the very word we translate as "witness"), not only because they confessed Jesus, but because they themselves stood at the borderline of their own familiar, because they had learned to keep the gaze steady and read their own apocalypse in the light and the darkness of that other one that they attested to. Martyrs are needed because only they, from Stephen to Don Oscar Romero, can show us the way back to that one apocalypse that reorients us and allows us to read the signs of times and places, face the uncanny filled with hope, but which is a hope against all hope.

But, Rilke added, "your third I want not." If this is the cost of discipleship, who can be saved? How many, say, tenured professors, have left, are leaving, or are ready to leave safety behind in order to be saved? The uncanny, the apocalyptic obfuscating light and blinding darkness, the *Unheimlich*, this limiting space and time that is at once no space and no time, is not

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[25] "Nah ist / Und schwer zu fassen der Gott / Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch." Friedrich Hölderlin, *Gedichte/Hyperion* (Augsburg: Wilhelm Goldmann, 1978), 138.

broad enough for all of us to inhabit at once, in the unlikely case we would opt for it. We have been spared, and our weak apocalypses don't mount most of the time to a situation without remedy. We have insurance policies and psychoanalysts, community organizers and drugs, racism workshops and families, political treaties and labs, street rallies and churches, not-for-profit organizations and Sunday brunches, self-care techniques and committees, this and that, mediating detours that have spared us from or circumvented our small apocalypses; they do alleviate and buffer the impact, the concoction that apocalypses produce. There is home, at least for many of us.

Home

Indeed we have been spared—not yet saved, but spared. But at what cost? Whose blood has spared our own shedding? Whose crosses have sent us to the coziness of a home?

A little story that could be read as a modest parable for sacrifice and safety: There have been seasonal blood drives here at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Every single time I volunteer to donate blood I have to fill out a questionnaire in which one of the questions is whether I have been in recent months in areas of the world, there listed, that are considered to be of health risk, and therefore have potentially exposed me to infectious diseases that my blood could spread further around. Every time I flunk the test and am not allowed to donate my blood. So I have been spared this "sacrifice" of giving my blood because in some corner of the world I have been to, in some *eschaton tes ges*, there are people bleeding to death of malaria, Chagas, yellow fever, AIDS, dengue, whatever name you or the World Health Organization give to these apocalypses.

> It is at the end that a beginning is possible, it is death that brings about life, it is the awful that is also awesome . . .

And yet I am home, safe as I can feel in the south side of Chicago. And I think about the places I have been which have ironically spared me from giving a gift that would not have cost me more than some ounces of blood and a nice treatment by sympathetic nurses. This is a sort of a parable, an illustration of the story I am trying to convey, i.e., that we have been spared by some sacrifices. But is this what the apocalypse of Jesus has to tell us? Is it a tale about the need of some amount of sacrifice to be constant in the world so that we can enjoy some safety?

There is a theorem of sorts attributed to Justin the Martyr which attempts to demonstrate that the greater the number of Christian martyrs forced into the arena, an exponentially greater number of other Christians would be spared. Literary critic and philosopher René Girard earned his fame by popularizing this theorem in what he called the "scape goat" theory, according to which every society in order to relieve potentially annihilating internal strife singles out "scape goats" that embody in themselves and thus represent the causes of the contentious enmity and by their sacrifice relieve society from the consequences of an open confrontation of all against

all.[26] But is that what we can conclude—that we have been spared only to be then finally condemned, like a death-row inmate being treated for an illness so that he might, in good health, reach the day of his execution? Where is grace in this apparently unavoidable calculus of a proportional relation between sacrifice and safety?

No words, but a labor of mourning, a labor of love connects Friday and Sunday and fills the spaces of death with fragrance.

How do we get across the apocalyptic Rubicon to see a glorious new day, while we are being spared? Can we be saved, can we enjoy the hour and the place of a new creation, the glory of the *fascinans* and the uncanny *tremendum* of an empty tomb?

I was considering this question, meditating on the apocalypse of Jesus Christ, and thinking about that empty time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday; an empty time, administered by an impassive Father in heaven, in which nothing really happens; a time not to be filled, for it was an apocalyptic time. And likewise we think about the empty spaces as well; Golgotha, the place of hollow skulls, where God dies, or then the tomb found empty. And all the rest is quietness and immobility, no rush in the air, no *ruach*, no breath, no spirit stirring the face of the earth—or so we are led to believe.

Yet "your third I want not"? Indeed, there is not a third *word* to fill that time, to explain the meaning and connection between those hours that span from Friday to Sunday, if that is what the poet meant. No words. But there is fragrance in the air; a scent of spices and perfume that the women, who had *seen* where the body of the beloved one was laid, went to buy (Mk 16:1). And then there was a home where they went to prepare those spices and oil to anoint a decaying body (Lk 24:56). They have been spared, and on the shabbat they even rested, for there was a home and still work to be done—even in the midst of the apocalypse. No words, but a labor of mourning, a labor of love connects Friday and Sunday and fills the spaces of death with fragrance. The wind, the breath, the Spirit in those days did not utter words, but it did spread a scent countering the odor of death. There was work to be done even and above all in the midst of the apocalypse. Yet it was a work of another economy, a mad economy (or call it "grace-side economics") that spends for a gift that could not be returned: spices for a dead and decaying body.

Those women, who have been spared in the midst of the apocalypse, saw salvation and new creation *first* because they gazed at the place where the beloved died and the place where the body was laid. (I have said it often that if it were not for those women Christianity would confess to apparitions of Jesus and not to the resurrection of the body.) What brings them on Sunday with oil and spices to the tomb is what Wendell Berry called the "practice of

[26] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977).

resurrection," a labor of mourning and love, done also because there was a place called home in the midst of the apocalypse. The time is not empty, for there is an itinerary, a movement through spaces that has a very clear trajectory. The movement goes from the limit, from the end (Good Friday, the cross, the tomb), then to a center (the home, the shabbat), and then back to the margin (Sunday, the tomb revisited). We must realize that it is because of this movement, this graceful but mournful dance, this liturgy, this labor of love and mourning, that we came to know at all that there is salvation, that there is new creation that springs exactly then when the world ends, or there where the worlds end.

End

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

. . . . . .

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.[27]

T. S. Eliot knew something that poets often teach theologians: how to name the unnameable. The unnameable: a broken sound of one who is forsaken, a senseless combination of tones and pitches, a whimper. Can we hear it? Can we see the places from where it comes? Might it be closer to the 63rd Street south Chicago, or to the landless peasants on the side of the roads in Brazil, than to the Y2K? Have we been there? Are we ready to return? There and then is where and when the world ends. But it is because there and then it ends, it is there and then, where and when, it also begins.

[27] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 79–80.

Living in Christ, Living in Culture

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If anything can be learned from an overview of the theology of culture represented in the writings of Christians from every age, it is this: Christian theology is always provisional, always inadequate, and ever in need of comment, criticism, and revision. This inadequacy, of course, does not deprive any given theology of its doxological character, but it does present the topic at hand in the very midst of its own concern: the located character of theology.

Douglas John Hall, to cite one example, has underscored the importance of location by placing the concept of context at the heart of Christian theology.[1] According to Hall, contextual theology asks the theologian to view the relationship between the gospel and culture with an eye to the presuppositions that inform our understanding of both as well as the historical evolution of that same understanding.[2] Cultural engagement does not occur in a context devoid of history. Hall provides us with an insightful comment when he notes that

> contextual theology should be distinguished from mere *situationalism*. Too much of what goes by the name of contextuality is so entirely lacking in historical perspective that it cannot be considered anything more than narrowly regional or transient concern, superficially conceived.[3]

A faithful theology of culture recognizes that tradition is a part of context, not *apart* from context. Such a theology pays heed to the matrix of both time and place in which the nonidentified but interrelated worlds of gospel and culture meet.

The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between Christianity and culture with a view to two key hermeneutical principles as articulated in Lutheran theology. More precisely, we will consider the law/gospel distinction at the heart of Luther's thought as well as his related and much-maligned doctrine of the two reigns of Christ. We will begin our investigation by developing a working definition of culture before providing an articulation of the

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[1] Douglas John Hall, *Thinking the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 97.

[2] Hall, 130. He speaks from a North American and particularly Canadian perspective, but his work is one among many that address this issue. More recently, the Lutheran World Federation has initiated a series of studies dealing with this very topic that include: *Worship and Culture in Dialogue*, ed. S. Anita Stauffer (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994) and *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*, ed. S. Anita Stauffer (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1996).

[3] Hall, 130, n. 81.

law/gospel distinction. We will then consider the relationship of Christianity to culture in light of Luther's doctrine of the two reigns. We will propose that this perspective invites an understanding of Christianity as both pancultural and supracultural. In conclusion, we will consider two principal dangers inherent in an understanding of the dialectical relationship between Christianity and culture.

Culture

In discussing culture, it is imperative that a working definition of culture be established that will allow us to consider what it is we wish to relate to the gospel. Claude Geffré proposes the following suggestive definition:

> an ensemble of technical, social, and ritual knowledge and behaviors which characterize a specific human society. . . . In the largest sense, the word culture indicates everything by which humanity refines and develops the many capacities of its spirit and body. . . .[4]

This rather far-reaching description goes on to note the importance of human social life, family life, tradition, and communication in understanding human culture. Geffré also states that this definition of culture has some particular consequences that must be considered in our discussion. He points out that this broad understanding of culture will recognize that within the matrix of culture there is a dynamic of cultivation and destruction. Cultures are ever moving and being redefined. Geffré notes that this understanding of culture presumes an historical connection. History remains a key category for an analysis of culture. The third characteristic that Geffré brings forward is the ethical dimension of culture. Cultures rise (and fail to rise) to the occasion of benefiting humanity. The final point that Geffré brings forward is that every culture has a religious dimension. Religion is not external to culture.

In effect, we see that Geffré suggests a definition of culture that points us beyond what may be considered "pop culture" and redirects us to the reality that culture encompasses all of what it means to be human. This comprehensive definition makes a conclusive statement on the relationship between Christianity and culture much more difficult.

In considering the manner in which culture and Christianity interact, it will be helpful to clarify the religious dimensions of culture. John F. Kavanaugh, in his book *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, makes three pertinent observations about the intersection between culture and religion. In discussing the etymology of "culture," he notes that "a culture is a cult. It is a revelation system. . . . The culture, then, is a gospel—a book of revelation—mediating beliefs, revealing us to ourselves."[5] He then notes that culture cultivates us. We both make and are made by culture. Culture does not just reveal us to ourselves, it also defines us. Culture is "our symbolic dwelling place."[6]

But even though the etymology of "culture" suggests the interdependence of cult, culture, and cultivation, ours is a world marked by the disintegration of these etymologically related concepts. Louis Dupré, in *Metaphysics and Culture*, notes that the loss of the cohesion that once united culture, religion, and science results in the

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[4] Claude Geffré, unpublished lecture, "*Christianisme et culture*," presented at a 1994 seminar in Strasbourg, France, which the author attended. Translated by the author.

[5] John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991), 70.

[6] Kavanaugh, 70.

establishment of each as private domains in modernity.[7] He suggests the need for a "mysterious principle" in reintegrating these seemingly disparate phenomena of human life.[8] To that end a Christocentric reading of the relationship between Christianity and culture may be proffered using Luther's hermeneutic of the two reigns of Christ. Such a reading presumes a particular understanding of the gospel, and the law that attends it. It is to this understanding that we will now turn.

Law and gospel

The classic understanding of gospel, as it is developed in Lutheran theology, is understood in both a general and a specialized sense. In discussing the distinction between law and gospel, it is noted in the Formula of Concord:

> And when the word "Gospel" is used in its broad sense and apart from the strict distinction of law and Gospel, it is correct to define the word as the proclamation of both repentance and the forgiveness of sins. For John, Christ, and the apostles began in their preaching with repentance and expounded and urged not only the gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins but also the divine law. In addition, however, the word "Gospel" is also used in another (that is, in a strict) sense. Here it does not include the proclamation of repentance but solely the preaching of God's grace.[9]

The reformers understood that the gospel, in the narrow sense, was the promise of God's gracious forgiveness made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. The gospel, in this sense, does not simply stand over against the law, but in a relationship of interdependence. It would be meaningless to speak of the gospel in isolation from the law. Each needs the other to exist. The law in the law/gospel dialectic clarifies the human predicament in light of sin, and the gospel clarifies God's response to that situation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Tillich, to cite one example of a theologian governed by this dialectic, displays his Lutheran roots in his method of correlation insofar as the law can be identified with the question while the gospel (in the narrow sense) can be identified with the answer. The fact that the answer precedes the question[10] reminds the careful reader of the fact that gospel (in the broad sense) encompasses law. As we develop our bridge between gospel and culture, this dialectical understanding of the terms "law" and "gospel" will be presumed.

Living in two worlds

H. Richard Niebuhr, in *Christ and Culture*, draws a picture of the Lutheran perspective: "Living between time and eternity, between wrath and mercy, between culture and Christ, the true Lutheran finds life both tragic and joyful."[11]

Niebuhr views the Lutheran position within the motif of "dualist" which finds its biblical source in Paul.[12] This dialectical

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[7] Louis Dupré, *Metaphysics and Culture* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 45.

[8] Dupré, 56.

[9] *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 559.

[10] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1:61.

[11] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1951), 178.

[12] Niebuhr, 149–89. By "dualist" Niebuhr is referring not to a Manichaean cosmology but rather to a dialectical

perspective is one in which Luther distinguishes Christ from culture, but does not divide the two. Luther pointed to our need to live between culture and Christ, between the times.[13] This perspective is clearly seen in the Lutheran doctrine of the two reigns. Christians are citizens of both the reign of grace (the church) and the reign of law (the world). Luther, however, clearly understood that we are citizens of this fleeting world *as Christians*. Christians are not people who live double lives in two unconnected spheres. Christians simultaneously live as citizens of two worlds. This perspective is evident in Luther's comments regarding the roles of both the government and the Christian in creating a just society:

> Likewise, it is not right for the government to take a holiday and let sin rule and for us to say nothing about it. I must not regard my own possessions, my own honor, my own injury, nor get angry on their account; but we must defend God's honor and commandment, as well as prevent injury and injustice to our neighbor. The temporal authorities [have the responsibility of doing this] with the sword; the rest of us, by reproof and rebuke.[14]

We see, then, that Christians are not to live a faith external to the realities of political life. This implies, of course, that faith also has implications for the larger category of culture. The doctrine of the two reigns can be useful in understanding how Christianity and culture are to meet. For Luther, it is obvious that the category of culture is found in the reign of law, the locus of temporal existence which depends upon God's providential care. Consequently, Christians cannot deny the importance of culture. Culture defines the world in which we live, and that world is good. The doctrine of creation affirms this goodness. The doctrine of creation, however, also affirms that this world is both transitory and finite. Cultures come and go, and indeed, culture as we know it will one day be gone. This view, however, need not lead one to an instrumental view of culture. Cultures are not to be understood as tools that will be destroyed when God is done with them. Through the gospel, cultures become the locus of God's activity in drawing sinners to Christ. In this sense, cultures are seen as the spheres of the activity of God. Cultures come and go as movements of divine activity. This fluid understanding of the relationship between culture and God is important for two reasons. First, it denies the view that posits culture's transitory nature as evidence of a suspect character. Second, it reminds us that culture is not something external to God.

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Luther's discussion regarding the reign of the left (of the law) can help us to understand how Luther saw the relation of Christianity to culture.

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[13] Niebuhr, 178, 185.

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> More than any great Christian leader before him, Luther affirmed the life in culture as the sphere in which Christ could and ought to be followed; and more than any other he discerned that the rules to be followed in the cultural life were independent of Christian or church law.[15]

Culture is the matrix in which all humans live, and as the sphere external to the reign of grace, it is under the jurisdiction of the law. Luther, however, in developing his theology of law and gospel was extremely suspicious of anything that smacked of either legalism or antinomianism. In discussing culture, it is important that we keep this concern in mind.

When culture is seen to be the anthropological face of the law, we can approach culture with an understanding that reinforces the concerns for the proper use of the law that Luther developed in his doctrine of law and gospel. This is not to make human culture into divine law, but rather it is to recognize that God is able to make use of the ambiguity that is a part of human experience in preparing sinners to meet Christ. Certainly this would be Luther's reading of Paul's assessment that

> When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law unto themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all (Rom 1:14–16 NRSV).

If we were to try to understand the role of culture within Luther's doctrine of the two reigns, the place of culture in the divine movement of redemption would be located in the reign of the law. As the anthropological experience of the law, culture is a gift from God. Within culture, however, we experience our inability to rise ultimately above the ambiguities of human existence. Culture serves God by preparing us for the ultimate resolution of our ambiguity in the person of Jesus Christ.

We see that the relationship between Christianity and culture is one that is informed by our understanding of the law in the lives of believers. The role of the law in the lives of believers serves to steer a *via media* between legalism and antinomianism. In reading the relationship between Christianity and culture in the light of the theme of the two reigns, we will posit that culture, like the law, needs to be understood as significant (in opposition to antinomianism) yet not absolute (in opposition to legalism) in its relationship to Christianity. The former points to what we will consider the pancultural dimension of Christianity, while the latter points to the supracultural dimension of Christianity.

The pancultural dimension of Christianity

The biblical witness is clear that the gospel is good news for all people. This is clearly seen in First Timothy:

> This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all. (1 Tim 2:4–6a NRSV)

The first sense in which we understand that the gospel is pancultural is that the good news is for all people and all cultures God desires self-transcendence for every

[15] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 174.

people and for all human beings who face the ambiguity of their inability to rid themselves of their propensity for self-absolutization and self-aggrandizement. The biblical record is clear that this ambiguity is the experience of every human being and every culture. In this sense, we see the relevance of the gospel. It addresses an existential need that humans face in their place in culture. The gospel is pancultural because no culture stands outside of the need for the good news.

The gospel is also considered pancultural because every culture is able to bear the gospel. This is true because language is a universal dimension of culture, and language is the medium of the gospel. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, there is salvation. This is why Paul understands the gospel to be something spoken:

> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom 10:14–16 NRSV)

Good news is *heard* because language is the human conduit through which we encounter the Symbol that draws us into the mediation of the universal and particular[16] (cf. John 1:1–5). The gospel is considered pancultural because it is accessible to all cultures, is intended for all cultures, and meets a need common to all cultures. Finally, however, the heart of the gospel revolves around yet another theme common to all cultures: particularity. Because all cultures experience particularity, particularity is a universal cultural experience.

The Incarnation points to the manner in which the gospel embraces the universal experience of particularity. This theme is often presented in christological discussion as "the scandal of particularity." Particularity, in itself, can hardly be scandalous. The scandal of the Incarnation, however, is located in its *telos*, which demonstrates that the Unique enters particularity by a kenotic participation that is characterized by self-descent. Consequently self-transcendence, insofar as it involves participation in the divine, involves kenosis. The scandal of particularity is a scandal because it speaks the truth to humans who have mistaken self-aggrandizement and self-absolutization for self-transcendence. Our experience of self-transcendence is grounded in the decision of the Divine to be immanent to others.

The pancultural dimension of the gospel underscores the realization that Christianity is relevant. The gospel meets an existential need common to human beings who exist in cultural contexts. In so doing, it demonstrates that culture is not evil. Culture is not antithetical to the presence of the Divine. The Divine, in embracing culture, declares culture to be good, and the sphere of divine activity. Thus we are again reminded that the gospel declares culture to be good, and in that declaration, frees culture to be what it is meant to be. In that action, the gospel proves itself to be relevant to culture.

But relevance in and of itself is an inadequate criterion for truth. A proper understanding of the relationship between Christianity and culture will recognize that not only do we need to see that Christianity is relevant, and culture is good; but we also need to see that Christianity is authentic, and culture is provisional. The gospel is not only pancultural, it is also supracultural.

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[16] Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 3:255, 256.

The supracultural dimension of Christianity

Although it is true that the gospel embraces every culture, it is also true that every culture is a *provisional* conduit for the message of the gospel. No one culture is able to make absolute claims regarding its status in relation to Christianity. Lamin Sanneh comments:

> For most of us it is difficult enough to respect those with whom we might disagree, to say nothing of those who might be different from us in culture, language, and tradition. For all of us pluralism can be a rock of stumbling, but for God it is the cornerstone of the universal design.[17]

Cultural pluralism continues to be as scandalous to humans as the Incarnation. The biblical witness not only asserts and affirms the equally legitimate character of all cultures, but also the equally provisional character of all cultures. Jesus says, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Mt 3:9 NRSV).

Relativization is always a painful experience, especially for cultures that have been proud of their special relationship to God. But we are reminded, as we focus on the supracultural dimension of Christianity, that all cultures are finite. The relationship between the gospel and culture is not one of equality. Culture is grounded and sustained by the goodness of God, but God is not grounded in culture. Niebuhr notes that

> If we regard our political structures as kingdoms of God, and expect our papacies and kingdoms to come closer to Him, we cannot bear His word or see His Christ; neither can we conduct our political affairs in the right spirit.[18]

The relativization of all cultures is presumed in the idea that the gospel is supracultural. All cultures participate in various forms of domination and exploitation. All cultures have a demonic side to their makeup that necessitates an element of self-transcendence. But self-transcendence presumes that there is something above and beyond the self. This is why the gospel is understood to be supracultural. There is a sense in which the gospel transcends culture. Culture can never be equated with the gospel. Culture needs to be redeemed by the gospel which is beyond culture's present position of brokenness. The supracultural dimension of the gospel reminds us that we live an already/not yet experience of redemption.

Consequently, the supracultural dimension of the gospel demands that the proclaimer include repentance as a part of the message. Every culture has elements that counter the claims of Christ. In a sense, the supracultural dimension of the gospel is countercultural, although the gospel is not really "counter" culture but "counter" the degeneration of culture that afflicts every culture. The supracultural dimension of the gospel provides the ground in the Absolute that gives credence to the provisional, although in giving culture credence, it also critiques culture and declares it relative.

Culture is a conduit for the good news. There are, however, elements in every culture that cannot express the story of Jesus. Every culture has elements that deny the lifegiving call of Jesus Christ. The interaction between the gospel and culture at these points is one of a call to repentance. Cultures are called to transcend that which counters the claims of Jesus.

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[17] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 27.

[18] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 177.

The supracultural element of the gospel is ultimately that which leads to cultural transformation. Cultural critique is always *for the sake of* the culture. Redemption is possible because naming sin is a part of the turning from sin that secures new sight (cf. 2 Cor 5:16–18). Those who have encountered Christ are able to view Christ and all of creation from a new perspective, a supracultural perspective. All things are new because we come to see that all things are finite, except the One who draws us to himself. We become immersed in the movement of redemption as Christ lives to make all things new. There is a movement from finite to infinite by grace. This movement of redemption is the movement from the provisional to the ultimate by participation in the One who redeems. Culture is not seen to be the ultimate but rather the penultimate, through which Christ draws all people to himself.

If Incarnation points us to the scandal of the particular, in redemption we find the scandal of the universal. The One who has embraced the particular in the Incarnation takes a new position in his death and resurrection (John 12:32). It is scandalous that this one particular person should be relevant for all people. This claim, of course, points us to authenticity. Ultimately, this claim is one that can be made only by the One whose particularity is of universal importance. And it is of universal importance because only Christ can make absolutely authentic statements. In Jesus Christ, the universal and the particular, the subject and object, the authentic and the relevant meet. Jesus Christ alone embraces the dichotomies that characterize our experience of ambiguity in life. Jesus Christ alone can draw all people to himself, because Jesus Christ is the Word of God that bridges who we are and who we ought to be.

Culture is grounded and sustained by the goodness of God, but God is not grounded in culture.

Conclusion

The relationship between Christianity and culture has been presented as one in which the gospel is considered to have both pancultural and supracultural dimensions. This view of the relationship between Christianity and culture recognizes that the gospel is grounded in Jesus Christ, who embraces both the particular and the universal in his Incarnation, death, and resurrection. Ignoring the paradoxical nature of the relationship between Christianity and culture presents profound potentials for destruction. The two greatest dangers exist when either the pancultural or the supracultural is sacrificed to the other. The demise of the supracultural leads to syncretism, and the demise of the pancultural leads to sectarianism.

By examining the relationship between Christianity and culture in the light of Luther's law/gospel dialectic and his treatment of the two reigns, we have seen that a Lutheran explication of this relationship is never far removed from an articulation of the identity of Jesus Christ. In short, insofar as these two hermeneutical principles are christologically ordered, the relationship between Christianity and culture is illumined by the kenosis and glorification of the Logos, complete with all the clarity and obscurity that attends the mystery of that event.

Biblical Preaching

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Preaching for the church is expected to be biblical, based usually on an exposition of a text. The Scriptures are regarded by the entire church as the unique source of—and so the base for preaching—the word of God.

Preaching can be biblical, however, without the use of a biblical text. A topical sermon on "How Can We Stay in Love?" can express the biblical faith of the church without a single specific reference to a Bible passage. Conversely, the fact that a preacher employs a biblical text is no guarantee that the sermon will be biblical. Sermons exhorting racial hatred or anti-Semitism not only are *not* biblical but are antibiblical regardless of the text used to authorize such a message.

It is when the message of the sermon is in continuity with and serves the gospel that the preaching is truly biblical. The entire biblical message relates—directly or indirectly—to the gospel promise of God seated in the raising of the crucified Christ. As Luther put it, the whole Bible is the cradle that holds the Christ (John 5:39).

The goal of the Scriptures is to bring God's life to people so that they can believe in and live that life: "Now Jesus did many other signs which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30–31).

The biblical message is one of hope, and its purpose is to bring hope: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4).

The church views all Scriptures from the perspective of the faith born in the encounter with the risen Christ. Theologically, the scriptural message may be pictured as a series of concentric circles with the resurrection of Christ at the center. The birth narratives and the accounts of the ministry of Christ circle that center and are interpreted in its light. Even the Old Testament finds its ultimate meaning for the church in Christ. Conversely, the meaning of the New Testament message cannot be fully understood or sustained apart from the Old Testament context.

One reason preaching often is not centered in the gospel is the failure to interpret the biblical text in relation to its situation in the gospel. The text is presented as an isolated piece without seeing its meaning and purpose in the deed of God in Christ.

I call this practicing a gospel hermeneutic for an evangelical homiletic. A gospel hermeneutic is a method of biblical interpretation that makes explicit the gospel context that may be only implicit in the pericope itself. An evangelical homiletic is a method of sermon preparation which clarifies how the gift of God's grace in Christ is the ground and power for the exhortations to the hearers to trust God and love their neighbor.

In this essay I focus on biblical texts that have little or no explicit reference to the gospel within the confines of the pericope itself. These texts are unclear as to their theological meaning and function until such "contextual criticism" is done. Contextual criticism means making the implicit gospel context of every text explicit. Only then can the goal of the sermon and means of achieving that goal be clearly understood and achieved.

What makes a text theologically unclear? It might contain language that functions as a demand on the hearers, with little or no sign of God's gift. The hearers are the subject of the sentences. They are told what to do or not to do. They are criticized, challenged, and promised reward for good performance. There is almost no clue that God is the subject giving gifts to the hearers. This gospel indicative would actually determine the meaning, and functions as the means for achieving the goals exhorted in the text.

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged" (Mt 7:1). Like much of the Sermon on the Mount this pericope contains only the language of demand and retribution. If this text is not placed into the context of the gospel in Matthew, the demand will either be trivialized or be lethal to the hearers. The goal of not judging can neither be understood nor approximated apart from the gift of God's grace in Christ. Making the connection between that gift and the demand is crucial.

Before engaging in such contextual criticism, a reminder is in order. Biblical texts can be clarified in the gospel but should not be homogenized into a single mix. The gospel in Paul can illuminate the gospel in Luke, but Luke's distinctive emphasis should be maintained. The attempt to homogenize the message in the biblical canon inevitably results in a reduction of the meaning and power of the biblical message as a whole.

Some parts of the canon are clearer for the faith of the church than others. The Old Testament is interpreted in the light of the fulfillment of God's deed in Christ in the New Testament. But history has shown that the failure to maintain the integrity of the Hebrew Scriptures leads to a loss of meaning and power of the New Testament message.

The church has regarded the Epistle of James as less clear theologically than Luke or Paul. The implicit gospel indicative in James needs to be made explicit in relation to his assertion, "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). Luther was disturbed by James but included the epistle in his translation of the Bible as part of the canon. There is a rough edge, an unresolved irritant, in James that Lutherans in particular, with their passion for "faith alone," need to confront.

A biblical text is useful for preaching only when it can be placed in an evangelical context. If the preacher cannot make the connection between what the text says and what the text means theologically, in the light of the gospel, the text should not be used. There are biblical texts that cannot be redeemed evangelically at this moment in the church's history. That is one reason why some portions of the Bible are almost never used for preaching.

To illustrate gospel contextual criticism I offer three texts from the Gospel of Luke: the beatitude "Blessed are the Poor" (Luke 6:20), the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9–14), and The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37).

Blessed are the poor

A text may contain the language of gift and still be unclear. "Blessed are you who are

poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). This is the language of blessing with Jesus as the Christ serving as God's benefactor to those in poverty. Many preachers turn this into the language of demand: "Become poor in spirit, and God will bless you."

But questions remain calling for clarification: What is the blessing God gives the poor? Is it because they are poor that God blesses them? Does that mean the blessing cannot be for those who are affluent? These questions can only be clarified by unpacking what God's deed in Christ entailed. Without this center clearly in focus there is no way to do justice to Luke's concern for the economically poor.

Preachers often avoid the problems in Luke's version of the beatitude by almost unknowingly switching to Matthew's "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3). Why? Because in an average middle-class congregation there are no economically poor to bless. So the preacher blesses members who, though affluent, are "poor in spirit." If Luke is taken seriously, the application of "blessed are the poor" changes in an affluent church. The goal becomes convincing those who are blessed with wealth to act as the community of God's mercy to the poor.

Luke's version of the beatitude "Blessed are the poor . . ." needs to be seen in the context of his gospel message. Some answers emerge. No, God does not bless the poor because they are poor, but because God in Christ is the benefactor of grace and mercy to all people including those regarded as unworthy outsiders—the poor.

No, there is no intrinsic virtue in being poor. Poverty is the obscene result of social injustice, personal greed, natural catastrophe, and the inability or unwillingness to work for pay. Yes, God's blessing includes the economic mercy the community of the Spirit forms. But the blessing is at heart in God's acceptance, forgiveness, and adoption of outsiders into the family of God.

No, you don't have to take a vow of poverty to be blessed by God, but you had better take seriously the snares of wealth and the call to show economic mercy.

This is the good news for the affluent congregation. "God blesses you with the rich mercy of forgiveness and fellowship in Christ and by the Holy Spirit enables you to be merciful to the poor as God is merciful. You can act as a community dedicated to being God's 'bread for the world.'"

Luke's Gospel clarifies "Blessed are the poor," but some questions remain: What does it really mean to live as a community of the Spirit showing mercy to the poor? Is this really possible? If not, how can any community or person trust that they are in a community of the spirit?

Luke raises these questions for me, if not for himself, when I read "Whoever has two coats must share with those who have none" (Lk 3:18). This is not a universal prescription for all disciples, but neither is it merely hyperbole. Luke, in Acts, envisions the ideal community of the Spirit as one in which every possession is shared so

that no one is needy (Acts 4:32–37). Ananias withholds money from the sale of personal property and lives a lie. Peter's exposure of the lie and the force of the accusation actually condemns Ananias to death (5:1–6).

What does this mean for Christians in America, most of whom have more than one coat in their closet? What does this mean for church institutions with expensive real estate or hospitals that have to make money to survive?

Luke's vision of the community in Christ is never fully realized because of human frailty. It can't be, in the real world, because the community envisioned is an eschatological community. Every Christian and every community of faith is limited by sin and must live in compromise in order to function in the real world.

Even in Acts, the vision is never realized. After the story of Ananias (chapter 5), there is no sign that the community engaged in such radical sharing. Acts 10 makes it clear that the Christians in Antioch send disaster relief to Jerusalem only "accordingly to their ability" (10:29).

Does Luke's gospel message explicitly answer how an affluent person or congregation can be called Christian in the face of the demand that can never be fully met in a fallen world? No, because Luke never asks the question.

But I, as an affluent preacher, am asking the question. Luke's own address has called me into this question. I will have to employ the Scriptures as a whole to find a more explicit answer.

Paul, for example, does ask the question more directly: "How does God who is just justify the impious?" The answer for Paul and for the church lies in God's unique justifying deed in raising the crucified Christ from the dead. "For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin; so that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

Does Paul's view of the way God forgives add a dimension to Luke that has any practical significance? Yes, it exposes the ground for the guarantee of God's unconditional grace and forgiveness to believers who know that every moment of their life is lived in compromise of perfect mercy.

Does Luke's perspective illuminate Paul's message? Yes, if the preacher wants to convince the hearers that they already have the gifts and the power to engage in eschatological license by practicing an economics of grace. The community of the Spirit of Christ can give more abundantly to the poor with no strings attached. The diversity remains between Paul and Luke, but the interaction enriches the community of faith as a whole.

The Pharisee and the Publican

The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Temple (Lk 18:9–14) is a classic case study for contextual criticism. The parable is largely in the form of demand or exhortation. It is easy to summarize the application by saying, "Don't be like the Pharisee who trusted in himself and judged others. Be humble like the publican, and God will exalt you."

Most of the sentences in this text have the Pharisee, the publican, or the hearers as subjects of the action. The one exception is the plea of the publican: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Questions, however, remain: On what basis does God justify the publican? Is the publican right with God because he confesses and is humble? If that were the case, then the goal of the sermon would be to be justified by God, and the means for achieving the goal would be the hearer's act of confession.

The reverse is actually the case. The

goal is to have the hearer walk humbly before God, and the means is God's unconditional grace in Christ given the hearer as the source and power of true humility.

Taking this parable out of a gospel context is a recipe for moralistic preaching. A sermon is moralistic when the hearers are exhorted to do something they cannot do by themselves. "Humble yourselves" is a valid exhortation addressed to a person of faith. But as a demand standing alone it cannot produce true humility.

The humility that expresses true faith can be neither understood nor possible apart from the gospel. The demand must be viewed in relation to the gift. When this is done, the gift of God's grace in Christ is the Spirit's means of making the hearers humble before God, putting the best construction on everyone else.

How does that work in this case? Remember, the text is a parable of the kingdom of God. In Luke, it is God who brings the kingdom of God through Jesus as the Christ and the gift of the Spirit. Whatever the exhortations are, they are in response to God's initiative. The fact that it is Jesus who is telling the parable is a clue of the indicative that is the ground for the imperative, "Humble yourself."

The observation that God brings in the kingdom throws light on the way that "God justifies" in the parable. "I tell you this man went down to his home justified rather than the other" (Lk 18:14a) cannot mean that the publican's contrition determines whether God justifies or not. Some scholars point out that the case could be made that the whole prayer of thanksgiving by the Pharisee is within the rubrics of Jewish worship. The central point is that God justifies.

God justifies Pharisees who practice their faith. Everybody assumed that. But God also justifies disenfranchised tax collectors who have cheated, stolen, and betrayed God's people (Lk 19:1–10). Again Luke does not tell us how God justifies the sinners as Paul does in Romans 3. The parable rather describes the recipient's response to God's verdict of approval. When the focus is on God, the one who justifies, everything changes. Now the preacher can define both the Pharisee's problem and the nature of the goal as modeled by the publican.

The goal is not some form of self maceration as a condition for acceptance. The goal is not false modesty. It is, rather, the praise of the God who justifies even sinners like the publican and the celebration of the freedom to put the best construction on what everyone else is doing in their lives. That is true humility. The means the Spirit uses to evoke such humility is the good news: "God in Christ justifies you. You don't need scapegoats. Just tell it like it is. Surrender to God's grace."

The sermon that declares God's mercy is the answer to the hearer's prayer for God's mercy.

The problem is not that the Pharisee practiced God-fearing religion and engaged in righteous living. It's not that the Pharisee criticized the cheating and betrayal of tax collectors. Embezzlement needs to be condemned by the pious. The problem is that the Pharisee believes he justifies himself before God by what he does. He is compelled to do this because he lives in response to demand—not gift. His judgment of others is a self-justification. That is why the judgment goes too far and is destructive. The Pharisee is a man who bears the terrible burden of a religion in which a person must justify himself before God.

The question now becomes: How can the preacher give the hearers the gift of God's justifying deed in Christ so that the Spirit might persuade the hearers to surrender to God's grace and acknowledge the

truth about themselves? In Paul's language, how can the preacher free the Pharisee to "boast in the Lord?" (1 Cor 1:31).

A summary diagnosis and prognosis of a sermon based on this parable in Luke might read:

Diagnosis: We boast about how good we are and put down other people because we carry the burden of having to justify ourselves before God and other people.
Prognosis: God alone justifies by grace in Christ, and the gift of the Spirit enables us to praise God, confess the truth about ourselves, and put the best construction on our neighbors who are also sinners justified by God's grace.

The Good Samaritan

By way of summary, I will briefly center the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25–37) in Luke's Gospel context. The pericope is unclear as to how the demand to be a good Samaritan is a response to the gift of God in Christ by which the Spirit makes Samaritans good. Nor is it clear how the problem that compels the priest to pass by the man in need necessitates God's healing and liberating power in Christ.

A process of meditation to and from the gospel center of the parable in Luke might be summarized:

Prognosis: Jesus, as God's Good Samaritan, brings God's grace to a defiled and despised Samaritan. By the Spirit this alien becomes a member of God's community of grace for all people. The Samaritan is empowered to show mercy to a Jew who is now a brother in need of God's aid.
Diagnosis: The priest passes by a brother in need because he fears ritual contamination. Intent on maintaining his status as a privileged son of God, he is compelled to treat his brother like an untouchable. The priest needs to be freed in the purity of grace God offers him in Christ.

> The sermon that declares God's mercy is the answer to the hearer's prayer for God's mercy.

Notice there are actually two different "problems" here. The Samaritan needed to be adopted by grace into God's family in order to affirm his true identity and that of his Jewish enemy. The priest needed to accept God's forgiveness as the basis for his purity and be free to risk helping a bleeding brother. The preacher would do well to focus on one and save the other for another time.

Now that the text is centered in the gospel, the preacher uses his lens to center the contemporary scene. This is a gospel hermeneutic in the service of an evangelical homiletic.

Telling the Truth: The Chronicler, A Case in Point

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Now that I have reached late middle age I have listened to a vast number of sermons delivered by a large number of preachers. One thing that particularly strikes me about these sermons is that I have so seldom heard any reference to the findings of modern biblical studies. These pastors have discussed all different sorts of scriptural narratives as if they were one kind of material, history. They have preached on stories from Genesis as if they were as historical as some material in the books of Kings. They have dealt with the infancy narratives of the gospels as if they had as much historical value as some of the healing stories of Jesus.

While this problem has been present as long as I have heard sermons, the recent trend toward narrative preaching has seemed to increase the difficulty. Preachers tell various types of biblical stories in exactly the same way. Unless hearers have learned differently, they assume that they are hearing history. This impression increases when pastors make their own additions to the stories. Then listeners hear not only the actions of Adam or Abraham as told in the scriptural stories but additional details such as what they thought while they were doing these actions.

When one thinks about this, it is rather surprising. Historical criticism of the Bible has been taught in mainline Protestant seminaries during most of this century. Most preachers that we have heard for many decades have been exposed to it. Why then do they preach as if they had never heard of historical criticism? There are several possible reasons. Some may not know enough biblical scholarship to be aware of the type of narrative they are preaching on. Perhaps their seminary training was adequate, but they have not done any biblical study in preparation for their sermon, or they have used fundamentalist sources. So they talk about a legend or saga as if it were history. Other preachers may have learned enough about their material, but they do not accept the findings of modern scholarship. Their approach to Scripture remains fundamentalist.

But I suspect that neither of these is the primary reason. The most frequent cause may be that pastors are afraid to rock the boat. They fear that honestly discussing the nature of scriptural stories may upset their parishioners. Then these members may force the pastor to leave, stop contributing to the congregation, or go to other churches.

How valid are these reasons? Are they enough to keep us from telling the truth about the Bible?

The Chronicler's "history"

To begin, I shall provide material that helps to deal with the first two reasons given, that pastors do not know enough about their scriptural texts or that they do not accept modern findings. As the twentieth century has proceeded, it has become increasingly clear that the Bible does not contain history as we define history today. As an example I shall examine some of the narrative in the work of the Chronicler. The Chronicler is the name used for the author, or more probably authors, who have produced the books of Chronicles and possibly also the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. That Ezra and Nehemiah are part of the work of the Chronicler has been the usual critical conclusion in the past, but it has been challenged in recent years. However, I do not find these challenges convincing and shall include Ezra and Nehemiah in the discussion of the Chronicler that follows. The story in Ezra and Nehemiah ends in the last part of the fifth century B.C.E., so the whole work of the Chronicler is customarily dated between 400 and 300 B.C.E. The authors intend to survey all of history from creation to the present, so they begin with Adam and conclude with Ezra and Nehemiah. The focus of the writers' presentation is the temple in Jerusalem and the worship that takes place there, so they are probably part of the temple staff.

A good reason for using the Chronicler as the example in this article is that, unlike most biblical material, we have the sources for much of the presentation. The authors have regularly used the books of Samuel and Kings, so we can compare their work with their sources and see how they have changed the story. They have also used other sources including the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The first part of the Chronicler's work that we shall examine is its portrayal of King David. In Samuel and Kings the focus is on David's role as a political and military leader. His strengths and weaknesses are graphically pictured. 1 Chronicles lessens the emphasis on his political and military role and practically eliminates his and his family's weaknesses. Gone is the story of David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah (2 Samuel 11–12). Now we do not hear that David's son Amnon raped his half sister and that his half brother Absalom murdered him (2 Samuel 13). There is no account of Absalom's attempt to seize the kingdom from his father (2 Samuel 15–19). The story of David's son Adonijah's effort to get the throne is eliminated (1 Kings 1). Gone are David's last words instructing Solomon to get revenge on David's enemies (1 Kings 2:5–9).

In contrast to this material, 1 Chronicles presents David as the organizer of Israel's worship. It greatly expands the story of David bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13, 15–16). The final chapters of the book, 22–29, are new material with no counterpart in Samuel and Kings, and therefore they particularly reveal the Chronicler's emphasis on David as worship organizer. Here we hear for the first time that David gave Solomon the plan for the temple and provided the building materials for it (chap. 22). Then we are told that David organized the priests and the Levites and assigned them their duties in the temple (chaps. 23–26). Chapter 27 is the only one in this new material which has no relation to worship. But in chapters 28–29 appears the Chronicler's version of David's last words. They are a speech to the people about the temple and say nothing about revenge, as they do in 1 Kings.

Are the Chronicler's changes in the portrayal of David historical? That is very

doubtful. The changes seem motivated by these writers' biases. We have seen above that the focus of all of their books is worship, and so they do as much as possible to stress this theme in the story of David. They want to legitimate temple worship as it exists in their day, so they read the current duties of priests and Levites back into David's time. Another of their biases is that David is the greatest person in Israel's history. Therefore his weaknesses are eliminated, and his role in something as vital and religious as worship is expanded. Everyone in Israel knew that Solomon had built the temple; the Chronicler could not claim that David had done it. But these authors get as close to making David the builder as possible. They create the idea that he provided the temple plan and materials. Then they excuse the fact that he did not build it by claiming that he could not do it because he was a man of war (1 Chron 22:7–10). But this disagrees with 2 Samuel which says that David did not build the temple because God preferred to dwell in tents (2 Sam 7:5–7). The Chronicler is not teaching history but theological ideas.

Another story in which these writers change their source is the account of the overthrow of Queen Athaliah and the coronation of King Jehoash (2 Chronicles 23). According to 2 Kings 11:4–12, Jehoiada, the high priest, secretly crowns the boy Jehoash in the temple while he is surrounded by military guards. The Chronicler adds these verses to Jehoiada's instructions to Jehoash's supporters, "Do not let anyone enter the house of the LORD except the priests and ministering Levites; they may enter, for they are holy, but all the other people shall observe the instructions of the LORD. The Levites shall surround the king, each with his weapons in his hand" (vv. 6-7).

The author of this passage has changed the guards from laymen into Levites. Why would he do that? By his time the Pentateuch had been generally accepted as authoritative by the Jewish community. The Pentateuch insists that no one is allowed to enter the sanctuary except priests and Levites (e.g., Num 1:51). If he repeats the story in 2 Kings, he will picture lay guards breaking the Law of the Pentateuch under the command of the high priest. This he cannot allow to happen, so he converts laymen into Levites.[1] It is possible that he intentionally changes history here because the Law is more important to him than history. On the other hand, it is equally possible that he believes that 2 Kings must have made a mistake, and he is correcting it.

A similar example of the Chronicler rewriting a source occurs in the story of the reign of Jehoash. Early in that account 2 Kings said, "Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all his days" (12:2). Our author changes that to, "Joash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of the priest Jehoiada" (24:2). Although 2 Kings tells no story of Jehoash doing wrong, 2 Chronicles now adds an account of an event after the death of Jehoiada. The officials of the land mislead Jehoash, and he joins them in practicing idolatry. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada prophesies against them for their sin, so Jehoash has him stoned to death (24:17–22). Then our writer returns to his source but makes some alterations. According to 2 Kings, the Arameans took Gath of Judah, and when they intended to attack Jerusalem also, Jehoash paid them to withdraw (12:17–18). But in 2 Chronicles the Arameans

[1] Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles, A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 832; Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles*, Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 131.

take Jerusalem and destroy the officials there. In Kings two of Jehoash's servants assassinate him (12:20–21), but Chronicles adds to this that the Arameans severely wounded him before the assassination (24:25). Kings concludes the story by saying, "He was buried with his ancestors in the city of David" (12:21). But the Chronicler alters that to, "they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings" (24:25).

This is a drastic rewriting of the traditional account. Again it is theology that causes our author to make the changes that he does. One of his most important principles is that retribution always works in this life. God gives people the appropriate punishment or reward for their deeds. Therefore the story in Kings created a major problem. A king who was good all his days was assassinated. This could not happen. So the author rewrites the story to fit his principle. He leaves the report of the assassination from his source, but he creates the story of Jehoash's sin to account for it. Then he adds elements to strengthen the retribution theme. He makes up corrupt officials and then has them punished for their corruption by creating an account of an Aramean attack on Jerusalem. He is also able to increase Jehoash's punishment by having him wounded in this same attack. Finally, the writer cannot allow it to stand that Jehoash was buried with his ancestors if he was so sinful, so the author reverses that statement.[2] This story is a clear example of theology rewriting history.

The Chronicler does something very similar in his version of the reign of King Uzziah. 2 Kings tells little about this king, but one thing it says is that "He did what was right in the sight of the LORD" (15:3). It also relates that "The LORD struck the king, so that he was leprous to the day of his death" (v. 5). 2 Chronicles adds a considerable

amount to its account of this reign including the following story. Uzziah was false to God and entered the temple to offer incense. Eighty-one priests told him that he should not make an offering because only priests were allowed to do that. As Uzziah became angry at them, leprosy broke out on his forehead, and he was leprous for the rest of his life (26:16–21).

Again, this author is rewriting the former story because of his belief in divine retribution. He finds it intolerable that God gave serious illness to a king who had done right. But the writer can keep both ideas from his source by adding his new story. Now Uzziah is only good until he usurps the priests' prerogative, and it is appropriate that God punishes him for doing so. Retribution still works![3] However, the Chronicler gives away the fact that he is making up this story by creating the wrong misdeed. At the time of the monarchy it *was* legitimate for kings to offer sacrifice (2 Sam 6:18, 1 Kgs 8:62–63, 2 Kgs 16:12–13).[4] In fact, they were the highest priests in the

[2] Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 840.
[3] Japhet, 876.
[4] Myers, *II Chronicles*, 153.

land. But by the time of the Chronicler, the rule of the Pentateuch that only descendants of Aaron could sacrifice was followed. So this author inadvertently lets us see that his story comes from his time and not that of Uzziah.

The Chronicler also writes history creatively in the book of Ezra. At the beginning of the book he reports that Cyrus, the first king of the Persian empire, gave the following decree about the Jews:

> Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of those among you who are of his people—may their God be with them!—are now permitted to go up to Jerusalem in Judah, and rebuild the house of Yahweh, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let all survivors, in whatever place they reside, be assisted by the people of their place with silver and gold, with goods and with animals, besides freewill offerings for the house of God in Jerusalem (1:2-4).

However, chapter 6 tells us that Darius, Persia's third king, found Cyrus' same decree in the archives and that these were the words of the decree:

> Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought;[5] its height shall be sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, with three courses of hewn stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. Moreover, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God (vv. 3-5).

The main point of both decrees is quite likely. We know from Persian history that Cyrus did allow his subject peoples to return home and encouraged them in the practice of their religions. But we have two different versions of the same decree. Which is Cyrus'? The first is very suspect.[6] In it Cyrus recognizes that Yahweh has given him his empire and has instructed him to build the temple. It is hardly plausible that the ruler of the Persian empire accepted the God of one of his minor, subject peoples. The version in chapter 6 sounds much more like something that a Persian king might say, but it has its own problems. The height and width of the temple are to be sixty cubits, about ninety feet. But the original temple of Solomon was only ninety feet long, forty-five feet high, and thirty feet wide (1 Kgs 6:2).[7] And Scripture tells us elsewhere that the Jews who saw the new temple considered it inferior to the first one (Ezra 3:12, Hag 2:3). So neither decree seems to be Cyrus'.

What has probably happened is that the Chronicler had some historical information about the main ideas in Cyrus' edict. But this writer has given us two different versions, neither of which goes back to the original. He may have received one or both from his Jewish tradition, or he may have written either one.

Our final example comes from the fourth chapter of Ezra. At the beginning of this chapter the inhabitants of Samaria ask the Jews if they can help the Jews build the temple. The Jewish leaders refuse to accept their assistance, so the inhabitants of Samaria bribe officials in the Persian court to

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[5] The original text is emended here. The reasons for the emendation are in Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah, A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 124.

[6] Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, 74.

[7] Blenkinsopp, 125.

keep the temple from being finished. The building is stopped from the reign of Cyrus till that of Darius, Persia's third king (vv. 1–5). This story is not resumed until 4:24, where we see that the work was discontinued till the second year of Darius' reign.

Surprisingly, in the material between 4:5 and 24, we read about a similar situation at a later time in history. But the author writes as if he were continuing the original account. In verse 6, he tells us that the Jews' opponents wrote an accusation against them during the reign of Ahasuerus, Persia's fourth king. Then the writer says nothing more about that event but goes on in verse 7 to talk about a similar letter in the days of Artaxerxes, Persia's fifth king. And adding to the confusion, the author begins to discuss still another letter sent to Artaxerxes in verse 8. This is the only letter which he deals with in detail, first quoting it and then giving Artaxerxes' reply to it (vv. 11–22). The apparent reason that the Chronicler includes this correspondence at this point is that it talks about building. But at the beginning of the chapter, the account dealt with the building of the temple, and these letters are about the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (v. 12).

Why does the Chronicler write this way? Some have suggested that he was unclear about the order of Persia's kings and did not understand the letters he was using as sources. But Joseph Blenkinsopp may be right in thinking that the Chronicler did understand his sources but wanted to show the continued opposition of the Jews' opponents during the reigns of several Persian kings.[8] If so, he had a very strange way of doing it.

The Bible's "history"

In looking at these examples from the Chronicler's work, we have seen some of the methods these authors use to write "history." Theology is much more important to them than history. So they change the stories in their sources if they contradict their theological ideas. It is possible that they conclude that their sources must be wrong and need to be altered in line with "correct" theology. But it is also feasible that they believe that their sources are correct but deliberately change them so that they reflect a "more accurate" religious viewpoint. We have seen another method of the Chronicler in the case of Cyrus' two decrees. Here the writer relays information he has received from his sources but feels free to fill in the details from his own imagination. Finally, the example of the letters to the Persian kings in Ezra has revealed another approach of the Chronicler. In this case either the author does not understand his sources, or he incorporates them at the wrong place in history to make a point.

The modern view of history simply did not exist in the ancient world.

How can the Chronicler write history this way? All of these methods would be utterly rejected in a modern historical work. But the fact is that the modern view of history simply did not exist in the ancient world. In our view historians must try to

[8] Blenkinsopp, 106.

present historical facts. They must give substantial evidence for their statements and try to derive accurate details from sources. It is inevitable that historians will show biases in their work, but they must try to be aware of their biases and limit them as much as possible. However, this view of history did not exist before the Enlightenment. Until then none of these expectations were placed on history writers.

In the ancient world historians mixed historical facts with imaginary details. This was not seen as something wrong but as the normal way to write history. No one conceived of any other way to do it. All ancient histories were written this way, both outside of Israel[9] and in Israel. Biblical writers included historical facts in their accounts, but recording history was not their primary goal. They were writing theology, and they could do it by presenting history or imaginary stories. Creating stories was one of their normal ways of conveying religious ideas. And they could do all this without any sense of wrongdoing.

The writers of the Chronicler's work present theology, then, in the same ways as other biblical authors. The goal of the writers of the Chronicler's corpus is to help the Jewish people find meaning and purpose in life as they live in the post-exilic period. They can do this by making peace with the Persians and rallying around the temple as the center of worship life. They can also achieve it by loyally obeying the Torah, and they will more readily do this if they realize that God punishes those who disobey and rewards the obedient.

So the authors of the Chronicler's work tell stories about peaceful coexistence with the Persians, the centrality of the temple, and God's retribution for people's actions. Some of these stories have happened in history, and others have not. According to the standards of the day, whether they have happened or not is not important. These authors believe that God acts in history. They believe that God has acted in past events told in the Scriptures like the exodus and the establishment of the Davidic monarchy. They will achieve their purposes if they tell more stories, some of which have occurred and some of which have not. God has been active in the historical ones, and the imaginary ones show ways in which God is typically active. Both types of stories tell the truth about God and help achieve the writers' purposes.

Preaching truthfully

Let us now return to the concern expressed at the beginning of this article. Since what we have just examined is the nature of history writing in the Bible, how can we honestly reflect that in our preaching? What follows are some approaches I have tried to follow during my years in the ministry. A first commonly known principle which applies here is that congregations must first get to know pastors before they present new ideas. People will be much more ready to accept new ways of seeing the Bible if they first get to know and trust the minister who teaches these ways. Parishioners need to know that their pastors share their faith and love them so that they can feel safe accepting challenging, new ideas which the ministers present.

But while that process is going on, from the beginning of their ministry in a place, pastors should be careful not to preach what they know to be untrue. If we are aware that the story in our preaching text is not historical, we should be careful not to give the impression that it is. If retelling

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[9] E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *Ethnic Myths and Pentateuchal Foundations* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 84.

that story in our sermon leaves people with the feeling that they are hearing history, we should not retell it but find other ways to convey its theological message. There are many ways to proclaim the theology of a passage without either affirming or denying the historicity of the story within it.

However, once the people have begun to trust us, we can slowly and tactfully begin to show them that the stories in the Bible are sometimes historical and sometimes not historical. We can help them to see that the Scriptures' purpose is to teach religion and not history. At this point in our ministry at a place, it would be helpful to set aside the lessons for the day for a couple of Sundays and to preach on these very points. We could teach the people the nature of biblical stories and reassure them that this information is not harmful to their faith.

After that we can begin to identify the types of stories in the texts on which we preach. When doing that, I have discovered that people find it more challenging to learn that certain stories are not historical than other stories. For example, they are less upset about the nonhistoricity of the book of Esther than the story of Adam and Eve or the Christmas account in Luke 2. Even in the case of Esther, hearing something new is usually a little unsettling, and pastors need to be sensitive about the way they present it. But ministers can communicate such an idea in sermons without causing listeners undue trouble.

When they do so, they do not need to go into great detail at this time. The people will be interested to learn that the book of Esther is something like a modern short story or novelette. Most will not care to hear nor is it appropriate now to tell them the scholarly reasons for that conclusion. It is unfortunate that modern Christians know so little about the Bible, but this is one time that it works to our advantage. Many of them have no misinformation about Esther to unlearn and will not be upset about what we say. But we should also provide opportunity in Bible classes for the people who are interested to discuss the reasons for decisions about the literary form of books like Esther.

Biblical writers included historical facts in their accounts, but recording history was not their primary goal.

In addition, I do not believe that pastors should try to keep the truth about texts like Genesis 2–3 and Luke 2 from their parishioners. One way I have found to deal with passages like Genesis 2–3 is to say at the beginning of my sermon that some of us present see this story as historical, and some see it as nonhistorical. However, the most important thing is the message which it presents to us, and then I proceed to proclaim that message. But there are sections of Scripture whose nonhistoricity we would not want to discuss in the pulpit because people would not have a chance to raise their questions about what we say. But then I have not avoided such texts but have truthfully taught what I know about them in settings where people can respond. Sometimes I have provided time for discussion in the service following the sermon. More often I have kept such texts for Bible classes where all of us present can honestly dialogue about all the issues involved.

This is what I would do with Luke 2. I

would not reveal on Christmas that the details of this chapter are not historical. Nor would I say anything in my sermon to lead people to believe that the nonhistorical details are historical. I would not refer to finding no place in the inn, the manger, or the shepherds in the field. But I would accent the statement of the text that "to you is born . . . a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." I would also discuss the literary form of Luke 2 in Bible classes on the Sundays after Christmas.

I have never knowingly tried to keep the truth about any passages in Scripture from the laity. And what has been the result? In parishes of the ELCA and the LCA before it, none of the scenarios I pictured at the beginning of this article took place. I was not forced to leave, and members did not stop contributing or go to other churches. Sometimes they were stirred up by learning challenging new ideas but they were not unduly upset. On the other hand, telling the truth about the Bible has some positive results. Members become more spiritually mature and develop a more sophisticated faith. They are less inclined to leave our churches and go to fundamentalist ones because they see no difference between those groups and us. Also parishioners find sermons and Bible classes more interesting because they are learning something new and growing in their spiritual understanding. Ultimately, members trust us more because they know that we tell them the truth.

A Book Worth Discussing: Craig Gay's *The Way of the (Modern) World*

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The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist. By Craig M. Gay. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. 340 pages. $22.00.

Contemporary North American religious life exists in a strange paradox. On the one hand, popular spirituality, belief in God or a "higher power," and even church attendance seem steady if not actually thriving. On the other hand, our public institutions, especially those of higher education, law, entertainment, business, and mass communications go about their daily work as if there were no God. Indeed, occasionally they even seem to oppose belief in God. It would seem that the secular public realm believes that it is justified in marginalizing God from its life, since it feels it is obliged to uphold a pluralism of beliefs in which no one worldview in particular is favored. It seems that this stance is deemed necessary in order to guarantee a democratic approach to life. However, for many Christians, this bifurcation between a "naked public square" and a private spirituality is not necessarily healthy. After all, much current spirituality may be tantamount to superstition—belief in God in order to help me get what *I* want—rather than genuine reverence for God as such. Furthermore, when the church seeks to engage the wider public, it must do so apologetically. Much of the church's energy is spent making a case for itself. Indeed, sometimes the church fails to evangelize her own members, who might relinquish the quest to live lives defined by the thirst for daily discipleship, since the impact of secularity is both so subtle and pervasive. For many contemporary trendsetters, the church's stand is often ignored not because it is false, but because it is socially unacceptable.

Craig M. Gay, a professor at Regent College in British Columbia, in this recent work describes the social, political, technological, economic, and psychological factors that have helped to create this current bifurcation. He particularly addresses the causes of the erasure of God from public life. This kind of study is important for all church workers who seek their ministries to be public because it accurately deciphers why our culture has so successfully sidelined the message of the church. If clergy

are to know their audience's formative attitudes about life and the world, and how people think faith might fit into their self-perceptions, this book can be helpful. This essay briefly analyzes his book and criticizes its implications for parish ministry.

Spirituality has survived the current disestablishment of religion from public life. Indeed, in a democratized church as it is experienced in the United States, spirituality, religion, and even church membership haven't waned. Consider the statistics: over 90% of the population of the United States claims to believe in God and probably about a quarter of the population worships on a regular basis. Nevertheless, we would be foolish not to acknowledge the entrenched secularity of American public institutions and how this secularity might have an impact, albeit covertly, on the laity as well as the church's public leaders. Gay's work indicates that though the viruses of secularity are quite widespread, they influence our configurations of faith and life in manifold ways that we often take for granted. The purpose of his work is to analyze the assumptions that underlie powerful modern concepts like "freedom, "democracy," "progress," "science," and "nature" in order to provide a mirror in which we can see our own self-image in light of how these concepts mold and shape our identities.

Gay joins a chorus of other thinkers, such as sociologists Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, Jacques Ellul, and theologians Stanley Hauerwas, David Wells, and Marva Dawn, who also show, in their own ways, the corrosive effects of modernity on faith. However, his work is distinctive in that he offers a remarkably compact and succinct presentation of modern "culture viruses." From a Reformation perspective, modernity is markedly anthropocentric and synergistic, so human-centered that little room is left for God in both public and private life. If modernity perceives faith as deleterious to the well being of the human, as affirming God at the expense of the human, clearly modernity, from his perspective, has obtained the opposite relation. He points out this irony, though: modernity is configured on *theological* grounds, even though it may fail to appreciate or understand this fact. The "theology" of modernity is that even if God exists, God is largely irrelevant to the real business of life. As he notes: contemporary society and culture so emphasize human potential, that we are for the most part tempted to go about our daily business of life as though God did not exist, or at least as if God's existence did not practically matter (p. 2). In other words, the very practices of modernity, so focussed as they are not on the *ultimate* good for the cosmos but on the autonomous individual developing his or her own sense of identity by manipulating either the environment or other people, create a horizon of expectations in which God is marginalized. For Gay, we thus become "practical atheists."

Perhaps for many moderns the concept "God" has significance if "God" can be justified as a way to help us achieve our self-perceived well being. However, this ploy of justifying religion proves Gay's very point. If there is a God, then God ought to be honored for God's *own sake*, as the ultimate good. Modernity's erasure of the sense of an *ultimate telos* is exactly what makes "God" such a vacuous concept or symbol. However, with the loss of God there are important ethical repercussions. Gay notes that it was the thought of God which provided an aura of reality to concepts like "truth," "freedom," "justice," and "persons," concepts that give "substance and meaning" to human life (p. 3). When the notion of God evaporates from public life and institutions, these concepts are

"empty or, at best, only convenient fictions" (p. 3). Hence, he concludes: "A completely secular society is, therefore, not simply 'godless,' but impersonal and inhumane as well" (p. 3).

One might assume that Gay, an evangelical, would be ready to chastise mainline or more "liberal" Protestants as apostates who particularly have sold out to the corrosive forces of modernity. What is interesting is that he chastises *both* "liberal" *and* "conservative" religious and political forces as equally accommodating to the culture of modernity. Conservatives focus on sexual immorality as the pivotal indicator of worldliness while "liberals" focus on social injustices as the prime locus of evil. For Gay, both movements have legitimately and appropriately named aspects of evil. However, he believes that we need to acknowledge that both conservatism and liberalism are configured by thoroughly modern assumptions. For instance, both positions assume that political problems can be solved by political solutions, as if there were no social problem that evokes situations that ought to be configured by issues of ultimacy, and thus insolvable by means of human resources alone. Indeed, directly countering a conservative audience, he charges that "while the conservative bid for social mastery is often hidden behind its apparent reverence for the religious past, the conservative vision still tends to be premised upon a simplified understanding of social order, and it promises to recover the past by means of a kind of rational and controlled resurrection of traditional values and relationships" (p. 53). Hence, he concludes that conservatism is an ideology every bit as much as liberalism and radicalism.

For Gay, both conservatives and liberals believe that some political agenda can directly provide a political utopia or paradise, if we could simply act on it. He claims, "while we may lose faith in this or that politician and/or party from time to time, our belief in the potential of the political process tends to be largely unshakable" (p. 31). In this environment, the state itself is vulnerable to being made into an idol, as we have seen repeatedly in this century by various political leaders on both the right and the left. He concludes, "faith in the political process has produced a veritable apotheosis of the modern state" (p. 31). While God has been erased from public life, political ideologies, promising an ideal world, have filled the vacuum. For modern people, politics is liable to take on salvific proportions.

For modern people, politics is liable to take on salvific proportions.

Gay emphasizes repeatedly that modernity has defined the human as a "master," a ruler over nature, one who seeks to manipulate others for one's own self-interest. While he does not reject science and technology, he emphasizes that these forces have deforested the world of mystery and transcendence, enabling our loss of a sense of the sacred, but conversely of humanity as unique, beings who require respect and honor. Science and technology have created an illusion of an unchecked sense of progress, modernity's fundamental "myth." Modern people concede that even if science and technology do in fact engender environmental and possibly some social prob-

lems, they alone would be able to provide humanity the resources by which to ameliorate these problems. With technology, humanity affirms its own creativity and problem-solving capacities. However, with the culture of technology, paradoxically, it is the creator who is re-created. Once science and technology are established and have become socially ubiquitous, they take on a life of their own. They reinvent and reformulate humanity. Configured by technology, humans manipulate and sometimes seriously harm others and the environment and then justify this manipulation in the name of progress. The myth of progress seems to be incapable of being demythologized for moderns.

Ironically, it is Christianity that helped give birth to modern science by desacralizing the world and interpreting the world as an orderly cosmos. In a sense, Galileo Galilei, Francis Bacon, and René Descartes, founders of the modern scientific method, with their emphasis on quantification, induction, and objective detachment, are not merely iconoclasts fighting against church traditionalism, but ironically the faithful carrying out the logical implications of a Christian worldview, which in contrast to pre-Christian mythology sees the world as orderly, predictable, and subservient to human hegemony. However, the new technological outlook on the world also results in a "habit of mind" that is "anti-teleological" (p. 92). Indeed, Gay notes that "it is largely uninterested, and indeed incapable, of appreciating the notions of final causality or ultimate purpose" (p. 92). Since freedom, dignity, and justice are not subject to scientific inquiry, they are relegated to the margins of subjective taste or opinion.

However, not only the "hard science's," but also social science's supposition that there is no *summum bonum* (highest good), as Thomas Hobbes argues in the *Leviathan*, has helped produce a secular basis for social and political order. Without a common good, social order is grounded simply in the common fear of anarchy and of violent death (p. 58). Modern humans think that self-interest and self-preservation alone can motivate humanity. In contrast to Augustine, many moderns believe that there is no restlessness of the heart that can be satiated by God alone. However, the result of such modern assumptions is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Modern economic life is dominated by the calculation of one's personal self-interest, indifferent to and not accountable to God. Indeed, if one were to suggest that economic affairs ought sometimes to be disciplined by or be held accountable to a religious understanding of the world, one could be chided as posing "a somewhat irrational threat to productivity and consumption and thus to the experience of well being" (p. 173). As Gay notes of moderns: "this self-understanding naturally gives rise to a kind of restless activism in which, finally, we imagine ourselves to be the only creative agents in the universe" (p. 91). However, this Promethean tendency results in harm to the human's psychological, inner world. The modern economy creates the consumer self and vice versa. Our consumption is never satiated, though, because it can never address the wider question of meaning that the practices of technology, politics, and the economy evoke, i.e., the question "for what end are we working?" since modernity can offer self-interest alone as good. Hence, "it is the weightlessness of consumer culture that fuels the contemporary demand for real experience and creates a large market for therapies designed to alleviate the nagging problem of meaninglessness" (p. 218).

Why should pastors and church workers reflect on Gay's work? If one is to work effectively in the church, one must know

one's audience well. Gay does a masterful job in describing those social forces that so thoroughly secularize our culture. Preachers and Christian teachers find themselves frustrated when they sense that their authority or office isn't fully respected, or their image is caricatured by the entertainment industry, or they sense that for some people, the roles of therapy or management should seem more pressing for parish pastors than word and sacrament ministry. However, they shouldn't take these encounters too personally. These factors are part and parcel of our culture, the environment in which Christian workers are now called to minister. There are powerful social forces that have long been at work eroding symbols of authority, including that of the office of the clergy, and disengaging people from those traditions that support ministry.

In our current context, clergy need to ask more questions of themselves, their parishioners, and the wider public. "*For what end* do you do what you do?" is a question that can help provoke people to reflect on what is ultimate in life. Obviously, many will respond that they are working for their families. To this response, clergy need to keep pressing questions. "*Why* help one's family or *to what end* should we provide for our families?" Self-fulfillment may appear as a proposed "ultimate" value for many Americans. In the church, we need to ask, "when is the quest for our perceived self-interest counter to our actual self-interest?" Accountability to our family entails accountability to our community. Accountability to our community entails accountability to our world, and finally to God. In addition to such questions, clergy need to reclaim their role of testifying to the sheer transcendence, otherness, and holiness of God, the very divine attributes that evoke human finitude and dependence. If God is to be honored for God's own sake, and not just for what God can offer someone, then one needs to look to God's very divinity as the framework in which to understand God on God's own home ground.

> If one is to work effectively in the church, one must know one's audience well.

Church workers ought not to respond to the social forces of modernity with bitterness or nostalgia. Rather, these forces should be seen as teaching opportunities that can show just how radically different the gospel is from our culture, an alternative to the idols and illusions—such as the "American Dream," entertainment, "progress," and even sometimes therapy—that our culture offers as narcotics to help people cope with the assaults that modern life hurls at their psyches. The gospel ministry has always been challenging. There has never been a golden, problem-free era for ministry. Nevertheless, Christian ministry is sustained by the Spirit, who empowers the church to invite people into God's eschatologically new reality, offering them a sense of what is truly ultimate, the coming kingdom, the hope for which can sustain them as they work in this world.

Book Reviews

Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope. By Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999. ix and 174 pages. Paper. $18.95.

For years I have been looking for a theological reflection on the Psalms and pastoral care, based on the insight from Walter Brueggemann that the Psalms are prayers that focus on pastoral care. I have used the Psalms as my own prayer book for many years. In *Rachel's Cry*, I have found the reflections I have been looking for.

Kathleen Billman is Academic Dean and Professor of Pastoral Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago; Daniel Migliore is Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. Together they have written an interdisciplinary book that brings together theory and practice of prayers of lament for the benefit of the church.

Psalms of lament are underutilized and misunderstood in the churches, especially in traditions where the theology of glory is dominant over the theology of the cross. Throughout this volume, Billman and Migliore argue that lament over loss, violence, and injustice in human experience is a doorway to doxology and hope in human faith. For those engaged in the daily practice of pastoral care, these words ring true. We sit in silence with, listen to, and live in solidarity with those who suffer in order to understand and experience the full depth of God's love and care for human beings and the world.

The volume follows a systematic outline. Chapter one presents the problem of loss of lament in some theological contexts and argues for the recovery of lament. Chapter two discusses the role of lament in the Bible, based on a hermeneutics of hearing many voices. Chapter three discusses lament through key theologians of the church: Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Barth, and Moltmann, as well as contemporary feminist, womanist, and liberation theologians. Chapter four discusses contemporary pastoral theology on loss, grief, violence, and systemic evil with a focus on the pastoral task of empowerment. Chapters five and six develop a constructive theology and practice for prayers of lament dealing with the thorny problems of how to be present with people in the agony of human life while maintaining faith in a living and loving God.

One of the key challenges of the church is the development of empathy in those who provide pastoral care for the deepest agonies of individuals. Being overwhelmed with sorrow or violence creates vulnerabilities that initially take away one's words, numb one's feelings, and shatter one's faith. Caregivers are often terrified to enter into this spiritual space and unable to transcend the inequalities of status and power that separate people from one another. "This inequality is exacerbated when . . . it becomes clear that the minister does not really comprehend the social and cultural world of the sufferer" (p. 94).

Billman and Migliore argue that the biblical psalms of lament can bridge the chasms between people and lead to communal solidarity created by the grace of God. In a compelling story, they describe a pastor who used the psalms of lament and related rituals to free up the grief in a Hispanic community where children are being killed by random gunfire from gang wars (p. 130). Among a people where faith and feelings were frozen by terror and grief, a congregation in worship learned how to weep together, hold one another, and take action to make their community safer in the future. This movement from isolated frozen grief to shared grief to healing and empowering actions is the heart of their argument. As they say in their conclusion:

> An unpredictable but real movement is discernible in these prayers, a movement from lament to praise, from sorrow to joy. This movement is never automatic, never guaranteed, never complete. The struggle continues, as the

proclamation of the cross and resurrection of God will continue, until the purposes of God for the still groaning creation have been completed. (p. 150)

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Mark as Story. An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel. Second Edition. By David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. xiii and 176 pages. Paper. $18.00.

If readers of *Mark as Story* ask, Why a second edition? the authors answer: advances in literary criticism, concerns about the ethics of reading, and influences of postmodernism. Thoroughly rewritten, with the addition of Joanna Dewey to the authorial team, the book pursues its original goal of accenting literary features of Mark. It offers an original translation with chapters on the narrator, settings, plot, and characters. A conclusion examines the ideal reader and turns finally to contemporary readers. There is an afterword on the ethics of reading, and two appendixes contain exercises for literary analysis. In the following I attempt to provide some flavor of how the book facilitates discovery of literary features in Mark. My critical remarks show how it also elicits dialog.

Not since J. B. Phillips's work forty years ago have I read such a vivid, flowing translation of Mark. Whereas the English "Peter" approximates the pronunciation of Petros, this translation approximates the meaning by naming the character "Rock." Thus readers catch a word play on "rocky ground" in the "riddle" (a purposive alternative to parable) of the sower in Mark 4. But the translation raises some questions. For example, 3:22 introduces the *authority* of the ruler of the demons without a Greek equivalent. This combines with the translation of *exousia* elsewhere as "authority" (it may also mean "power") to thematize authority more than the Greek. In another case, *ethnē* is translated "Gentile nations" to the exclusion of the Judean nation even when it quite likely includes Judeans, as in 11:17.

The chapter on the narrator recognizes the rhetorical role of an "unlimited omniscient," reliable storyteller. It notes ways the narrator tells the story including providing an evaluative point of view, leaving gaps that readers fill, and raising questions that help readers to raise and resolve questions. Riddles, citations from biblical writings, prophetic predictions, and irony come in for special treatment. Riddles are taken as allegories in the literary world, and the riddle of the vineyard interprets events in Mark in terms of God's relation to Israel. But the authors speak finally of "the fate of the vineyard" (p. 57) thus sticking with the riddle rather than turning to allegory (Israel). Though everything in Mark may be attributed ultimately to the narrator, readers may associate riddles, citations, predictions, and irony with Jesus more than with the unobtrusive narrator.

The authors' reference to the "unlimited knowledge" of the narrator is misleading. The narrator, like Jesus and everyone except the Father, does not know the time of the coming of the son of humanity. Rather, the omniscient narrator knows everything necessary to tell the story the way it is told. The authors note that readers privilege the narrator, who therefore influences their responses. One such influence leads readers to a negative evaluation of authorities. If, however, Jesus is persuasive, readers need not suppose that authorities remain negative. In keeping with concerns of the authors, I note that the way readers fill in such gaps is a matter of the ethics of reading.

The discussion of settings focuses on the way Mark portrays space and time. Settings create atmosphere and a context of possibilities and limitations that may contrast radically with our worldview. In Mark's world, Israel is the center of the cosmos, and mountains are points of contact between heaven and earth. Major shifts in the story are associated with movement from inside to outside, with a shift from Galilee to gentile territory and to Jerusalem, and with an anticipated return from Jerusalem to Galilee. This chapter also reflects ways in which the social sciences illumine Mark's world. But there is a subtle point to be made: whereas the authors argue for the primacy of the literary world inside the narrative, all their references to that world are

outside constructs.

Twenty-five pages are devoted to plot as the interrelationship of events and their meanings. This discussion centers on Jesus' contests to establish God's rule in his interplay with nonhuman forces, authorities, and disciples, with special attention to conflict and to the raising, revising, and resolution of expectations. Several references are made to Jesus' "attack" on the temple. In Mark, Jesus casts out those who buy and sell, prohibits the carrying of vessels, and makes a claim on the temple as a house of prayer. But does he attack the temple?

Two chapters deal with characterization, first of Jesus and then of the authorities, the disciples, and the people. Patterns of relationships, words, and actions provide the substance from which the characters take shape. Importantly, these characters fit into Mark's world as living either according to or against God's rule, and insofar as they live for or against it, they attract and repel identification from readers. Although the authors note several exceptions, the authorities, disciples, and people are treated as character types. This neglects differentiations that Mark makes among scribes, elders, Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests; among Rock, James, and John; and among distinct crowds. That is, titles of characters, not merely their functions, also have significance.

Mark establishes Jesus as the anointed son of God in whom readers trust. One avenue to his characterization is the reactions of others to him. For example, the centurion is the only human actor to call Jesus "son of God." But this is not as isolated as the authors imply, because the centurion replicates the narrator and demons. Another avenue to characterization is Jesus' reactions to other characters—Satan, authorities, disciples, and God. In spite of my misgivings that the theme of authority is overdone, *Mark as Story* helpfully notes where Jesus has power and where he does not. With people Jesus does not coerce but has a power of persuasion. I also have misgivings about the extent to which, according to the authors, Jesus leads by example. Rather, Jesus leads by persuasion, and he persuades others to live under God's rule. As in Mark's narrative, the authors devote the greatest amount of material on the characterization of Jesus to his tragic execution in which he remains faithful to God and beyond which he is risen. Further, the authors correctly maintain that, for all that readers are privileged to discover about Jesus, he also remains mysterious.

The second chapter on characterization shows how the authorities fare poorly against Mark's evaluative standards. The authors claim that the Judean authorities must control the people in order to stay in favor with Roman authorities. True, they are apprehensive about the people's reaction, but does Mark ever appeal to favor with the Romans as the Judeans' motivation? In spite of noting exceptions to the pejorative characterization of authorities, the authors describe them as "entirely negative" (p. 122) and thus stereotype them more than Mark does.

The discussion of the Twelve indicates how they vacillate between living on God's terms and on human terms. Many readers will be startled to discover that the narrator's inside views of the disciples are almost entirely negative. On the other hand, they are positively characterized by maintaining relationships with Jesus for which they too face opposition. Thus in spite of ambivalent feelings about the Twelve, readers hope for a future beyond their failure, but only from a realistic perspective of what discipleship involves.

The minor characters—usually socially marginal (such as women)—make brief appearances but tend to manifest faith and respond positively to God's rule. But at Jesus' tomb, women also fail because of fear. Similarly, crowds can be supportive but ultimately also fail. According to the authors, minor characters generally play out Jesus' saying that the least will be the most important.

Turning to readers, the authors emphasize the linear process of reading, but they could have noted retrospection as well. This chapter in concerned mostly with how Mark attempts to transform readers: through readers' experience of God's rule, through their acceptance of the rigors and demands of God's rule, and through empowerment to live for the good news. In an effective comment, the authors note that when the disciples fall asleep, readers remain awake. A final rhetorical effect is the open ending of Mark, to which readers may provide their own

ending. The authors attribute much of the power of the narrative to irony, that is, that readers know more than the characters. But to my mind, the authors give insufficient emphasis to another power in Mark, namely, the God who acts beyond the deficiencies of the characters. The authors characterize a God of values, but the raising of Jesus aside (most significant to be sure), they slight the characterization of a God who acts.

The afterword on the ethics of reading appeals to readers to judge the story according to their values just as Mark attempts to influence readers. But in Mark's thematic development of living according to either human terms or God's terms, is such a judgment not also subject to a subsequent judgment from Mark?

This introduction to Mark is theoretically astute without esoteric jargon. In fact, the book displays the results of analysis from literary theory rather than the literary theory itself. It is therefore especially appropriate as an introduction for college and seminary students as well as for pastors and church groups. Specialists also will gain insight into literary features and aspects of Mark's rhetoric. As my comments indicate, the book also evokes discussion. But if I understand the authors correctly, that too is a part of their aspirations.

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Jesus of Nazareth: Millenarian Prophet. By Dale C. Allison. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. xii and 255 pages. Paper. $20.00.

Dale Allison's contribution to scholarship on the historical Jesus is without doubt a return to the right path. This work offers concise responses to well-known modern works on the topic as well as a common-sense approach to the primary sources themselves.

The book is divided into three sections: (1) "The Jesus Tradition and the Jesus of History: How to Find a Millenarian Prophet," (2) "The Eschatology of Jesus: Still *Ratlos* after All These Years," and (3) "Jesus as Millenarian Ascetic: Deleting a Consensus." Section one reviews the criteria which have been used to "assay the extant traditions and determine which inform us about the Jesus of history" (p. 2). Offering the fictional case of a woman named Faustina, "a recent and enthusiastic convert to Peter's preaching" (p. 7) with a profound gift for ecstatic speech, Allison poses the problem: if Faustina's words were believed to be the words of the resurrected Jesus—indeed, often prefaced by "Jesus said"—how could the above-mentioned scholarly criteria, from a modern vantage, ever separate them from the words of the authentic Jesus?

From here the author moves into one of the major contributions of the book: an examination of the method and conclusions of John Dominic Crossan (*The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* [San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991], reviewed in *Currents* 20 (1993): 414–15). With idiosyncratic dating and arbitrary stratigraphic cutoffs, Allison aims to prove that Crossan's "Cynic-like Jewish peasant" is a presupposition of his program. By this critique we are introduced to Allison's underlying concern that historians accept their limitations.

In the wake of his refutation of Crossan, Allison proffers his own approach to the problem. He characterizes his approach as three concentric circles: outermost is "the paradigm of Jesus as eschatological prophet"; the middle circle "contains the facts of all but universally agreed upon as well as an inventory of the major themes and motifs and rhetorical strategies that appear repeatedly in the traditions"; and "the innermost circle . . . encompasses the assorted complexes which do not flunk the various indices of authenticity" (p. 69). Allison argues for Jesus as an eschatological prophet "who sometimes expressed himself as an aphoristic sage" (p. 129), viewing the two interpretations as mutually compatible.

Section three addresses the topic of Jesus' asceticism. Allison shows that "enthusiastic eschatology and the self-discipline of abstinence, including sexual continence, have often gone together" (p. 196). The argument relegates the sayings of Jesus as drunkard and glutton to the rhetoric of adversaries (pp. 172–73) and explains the report in Mark, concerning the ques-

tion posed to Jesus of why his disciples did not fast (2:18 ff.), as not setting aside "fixed days" for fasting (p. 174). The final three pages of the book comprise a provocative comment by the author on his conclusions: Jesus, as millenarian, ascetic prophet of the kingdom of God, had a dream which never came true. But, dreams, Allison says, are "often wiser than waking" (Black Elk). And, Jesus' dream, Allison writes, is still the only dream worth dreaming (p. 219). Thus, the book constitutes a forceful attempt to retrieve and update the positions of J. Weiss, A. Schweitzer, and E. P. Sanders. The burden of proof now rests firmly on the shoulders of those who do not interpret the teaching and mission of Jesus in light of the millenarian and ascetic tendencies of early first century Palestine.

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Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions. By Craig L. Blomberg. New Studies in Biblical Theology. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. 300 pages. Paper. $20.00.

This comprehensive study of possessions in the Bible provides an excellent resource for wrestling with this vital topic. Whether it is the best on the subject as claimed or not, it is a solid and provocative piece of work. The author, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, identifies himself as an "evangelical" scholar; this perspective shapes his judgments on many issues. Yet he has read and absorbed the world of mainstream biblical scholarship, including the social sciences. Moreover, the author engages in a continuing debate with advocates of a *prosperity* gospel within the evangelical tradition. He locates his own stance between the more radical approach of Ron Siders (*Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*) and the religious right.

The study surveys both Testaments. After an introduction underscoring the global urgency of the topic for Christians, two chapters examine the OT historical and wisdom-prophetic writings. The author rightly stresses the need to read this literature with NT eyes. While the prophetic critique against the rich and powerful is lifted up, this theme is counterbalanced with the motif of wealth as a divine blessing and the pragmatism of wisdom literature re neither poverty nor riches. A helpful chapter includes the Jewish literature and social setting between the Testaments.

Chapters 4–7 concentrate on the New Testament: the teaching of Jesus, earliest Christianity (James, Acts), the life and teaching of Paul, the rest of the NT (the Synoptics, other). Here the author's arrangement of material follows his conservative scholarly conclusions (e.g., the parables are interpreted following Aland's synopsis; James and Acts are dated early [60s]; no literature is pseudo-Pauline). Nevertheless, the analysis of the relevant material is well done. Among other things, the author notes that the NT, unlike the OT, does not view wealth as a blessing.

This is an honest and courageous book, which understands wealth as one of the primary temptations to discipleship and the need to transform one's life accordingly. In the final chapter, a biblical summary is offered that recognizes both the struggle and the challenge to be a counter-culture discipleship community.

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Families of Faith: An Introduction to World Religions for Christians. By Paul Varo Martinson. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. v and 258 pages. Paper. $20.00.

In a time of resurgence of world religions and increased interest in the faith of one's neighbor, this is a welcome contribution. The title makes it clear that the book is meant for Christian readers. The author's goal is to provide resources that are "useful in the congregational context" and "interesting for academic settings as well" (Preface). In describing the five neighboring faith traditions (Buddhist, Islam, Confucian, Daoist, and Hindu), Martinson shows some possible connections to the Christian faith (Lutheran theology/tradition of the writer). He uses personal examples of encounters with per-

sons of these faiths and case studies to expound these interfaith connections in an interesting way. I am sure readers will find it enriching. Besides the above-mentioned faith traditions, a section on Indigenous traditions and popular cults helps provide a holistic picture of the religious ethos of the present time.

The presentation of three worldviews (God, self, world) of three families of religions and relating them to major civilizations (Semitic, Indic, Sinic) is a helpful categorization. While recognizing that any categorization/classification has a limited and specific purpose, I see endured primal religions, represented even today by a considerable number of persons, in close connection with the three families of religions. In North America, Native American religious traditions are making such contribution in many neighborhoods across the countries.

A chapter devoted to the detailed discussion of the unique relationship of Christians with Judaism will certainly be of help to those who are newly venturing into interreligious concerns. This chapter will broaden their horizon of discerning the interconnectedness in faith traditions. In the last chapter, discourses on the human knowledge of God, Christian perception of evangelism, dialogue, salvation, and so forth are presented in a way easily grasped by readers with or without much expertise in theology.

Martinson's plea is that a knowledgeable and appreciative encounter/relation with neighbors' faith demands that Christians "think intelligently about their faith." His hope is that the volume will contribute to that process. This book to a large extent fulfills that goal and will certainly be a good resource for coming to grips with one's faith in the context of religious plurality. I am sure it will also be a faith enabling reading. In spite of Martinson's sympathetic presentation of other living faith traditions in this book, these faiths still end up as only backdrops for Christians to appreciate and then reclaim their superiority in the multireligious context. That reaffirms that much work still needs to be done on the theology of religions in spite of the already available works, including that of Martinson.

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The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights. Edited by Hans Ucko. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997. 206 pages. $15.90.

On Sunday Nov. 28, 1999, fifteen hundred international labor union members and Jubilee 2000 activists from "faith communities" gathered in Seattle's St. James Cathedral for a prayer service, an assembly not featured on our television screens when the media covered for us the tumultuous meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in the last weeks of the last year of the old millennium.

Yet the prayer service can be seen as a sign of the progress of the worldwide Jubilee 2000 movement. President Clinton has pledged that the U.S. will forgive 100% of the debt owed to her by the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC countries) of the world. The Pope has urged the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to speed up the alleviation of the debt burdens of impoverished nations. The world bank, the IMF, and the U.S. Congress are working at it with amazing energy thanks in large measure to the pressure of the Jubilee 2000 movement.

The essays published in *The Jubilee Challenge* were presented in May 1996 during a consultation at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, as part of the preparation for the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1998. Though events have moved significantly beyond the fears and hopes expressed at the Bossey consultation, the essays as published continue to press the issues of global economic justice with which we will have to struggle in the next decades.

The eighteen essays explore the relevance of biblical traditions like Leviticus 25 (the Jubilee Year) and Jesus' programmatic sermon in Luke 4:16–30 (the acceptable year of the Lord) for the world economic situation in which we find ourselves.

Is it utopian to believe that faith communities, labor unions, and all types of grass roots organizations can impact the structures of global finance? In the essay, "Economics of the Jubilee," Norman Solomon from the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies warns against

any simplistic use of Leviticus 25. To call for radical revision of the present system could destabilize society, distract people from constructive criticism of the present system, and generate confusion and false hope (p. 158). Solomon nevertheless affirms the thrust of the Jubilee tradition and calls faith communities who preserve this tradition to enter into serious dialogue with economists, sociologists, educators, and experts in the natural sciences, including environmental studies (p. 163).

Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the WCC, opened the Bossey consultation with an address which is now the lead essay in the book, "Utopia and Responsibility." He lays out three uses of the notion "utopia": as a product of human imagination that need not be taken seriously, as a critical test of existing "reality," or as a graphic anticipation of a different reality in the future which can mobilize potential for change (p. 20). In general Raiser and other essayists only suggest what someone like Samir Amin has boldly and convincingly asserted for a long time now, that is, that belief in a free market which regulates the world in balance and justice is itself the height of utopian thinking.

The free market, so-called, is seen as a destructive force in the essay by Carmelita M. Usog of the Institute of Women's Studies of St. Scholastica in the Philippines. She blisters transnational corporations for their exploitation of women in the so-called industrial enclaves and charges the Ramos government's Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) with raping the environment in her native land (p. 191).

On the other hand, Ron Sider in "Evaluating the Triumph of the Market" maintains that, on balance, the free market economy has helped the poor of the world but argues that we must work to rectify the glaring weaknesses of the market economy: one fourth of the world's population lacks the capital to participate significantly in the global market economy; in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union many people are worse off than they were under communism; in wealthy countries like the U.S. and the U.K. the gap between the rich and the poor continues to increase. Sider also calls for new ways of measuring social and economic well-being. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures exchange of money (economic transactions), not production or social health. It should be replaced by something like the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). He challenges the churches to redefine the good life: "unlimited economic growth is an economic Tower of Babel, not a biblical goal" (p. 128).

The essays are rich and varied, ranging from careful biblical work by Norman Gottwald to a fascinating piece by Geraldine Smyth, a feminist from Northern Ireland, and suggest the outlines of a jubilee economics that is much talked about but only just emerging.

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The Threat of Life: Sermons on Pain, Power, and Weakness. By Walter Brueggemann. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 163 pages. Paper. $16.00.

Walter Brueggemann is a powerful preacher. If you've heard him you know that. Part of the power and intrigue of both his preaching and his teaching is that he comes at the matter with a different hermeneutical lens than Lutherans are accustomed to. He says things that Lutherans seldom say. That's both the good news and the bad news of these sermons. It's good to hear preaching from a different perspective. The bad news is that a steady stream of sermons from this different perspective raises serious theological issues. Brueggemann is a teacher/preacher in the Reformed tradition. The agreement between the ELCA and the Reformed/Presbyterian Churches in America puts us in full communion with each other, a full communion that is to be marked by mutual affirmation and admonition. In this spirit I write this brief review.

The dominant issue for Brueggemann in these sermons is the sovereignty and providence of God. God's sovereignty is always under threat from worldly empires and humans who trust far too much in their own powers. If there is anything resembling sin in these pages it is this will to usurp God's power. Pharaoh and Egypt serve Brueggemann as a paradigm for all earthly

powers who threaten the sovereignty of God. In a sermon on a text from Isa 1:21–27 Brueggemann suggests that when we hear Isaiah standing against the city we should understand "that Isaiah gives the long-term story of every major city, and not only Jerusalem." The problem with any city, any empire, is this: "Any self-respecting superpower will require that the subjects 'fall down and worship the statute,' that is, give visible, bodily consent to the imposed order" (p. 123). Brueggemann is a master of this paradigm as he stretches the image of "any city" to include the evil of the American city with its consumer society as it, too, demands ultimate loyalty.

Against whatever prevailing powers, God is always an "odd God" who upsets the way of the world. God's Son, Jesus, lives out of an alternative sense of power. "In the life of Jesus, it is clear that all the raw, abusive power in the world could not prevail. The honesty of Jesus is grounded in his confidence about the *rule* of God" (p. 107). God in Jesus will bring down all who usurp God's sovereignty. Christ is set determinedly against culture. We humans have only to trust in the sovereign promise of God in Christ to get the job done. We can utter forth a prophetic word in echo of our sovereign God. In these sermons, however, humans are seldom if ever called to take up the cause of God's power and become human agents of God's rule. We can trust. We can believe. We can speak prophetically. We can live countercultural lives. But it is God alone who defeats usurpers. It seems to me that in this way Brueggemann undercuts any meaningful theological doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. What believers do on earth is of pitiful penultimate significance. It's hardly worth a "vocation."

Most significantly for this reader is the fact that I come away from these sermons knowing mostly that the sovereign God is set against all pretenders to power. God is against sinners! The saints will be providentially preserved. There is no word of forgiveness, no word of mercy for sinners who claim too much self-sovereignty. In the end, therefore, these sermons left me mightily unsettled. These are sermons through a different hermeneutical lens, to be sure, but this consistent difference in viewpoint left me with many crucial theological questions. I was quite frankly surprised by this. Let the mutual affirmation and admonition begin.

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Jesus at 2000. Edited by Marcus Borg. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998. x and 175 pages. Paper.

Jesus at 2000 is a result of a symposium of the same title convened at Oregon State University, February 8–10, 1996. Both the symposium and this book attempt to "take stock" of Jesus on the 2000th anniversary of his birth, 4 B.C.E. The articles, by the current "who's who" in Jesus studies (at least in the popular mind), are not transcripts of their presentations at the 1996 symposium but revisions, some substantive, of those presentations. A helpful addition to each chapter is a list of questions and responses that were a part of each symposium presentation.

The contributors to this volume are, as earlier stated, the currently most popular and bestselling writers in Jesus studies. These writers, for better or worse, are the ones most often quoted in the national news media. This book is therefore a must for pastors simply keeping up with what parishioners and others are reading and discussing. The article by John Dominic Crossan, for instance, is a cogent summary of his larger (and much more expensive) *Birth of Christianity*. Harvey Cox's "Jesus and Generation X" is a marvelously useful exegetical of one of our evangelism target groups. And Borg's introduction is a useful thumbnail sketch of current Jesus studies. Borg himself suggests, and I concur, that his chapter 8, "The Historical Study of Jesus and Christian Origins," ought to be read first as background for the other articles, for it again brings us up to date with the flow and the state of Jesus studies. One can easily quibble with the conclusions of each of these scholars, but the thought they provoke so that we can quibble is well worth the book's modest cost.

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Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu. By Michael Battle. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1997. xvi and 255 pages. Paper. $19.95.

In this book Michael Battle seeks "not to dissect Tutu's life and work, but to present a spiritual engagement" of Tutu's life and theology (p. xii). With the demise of the apartheid system in South Africa, the question remains: What is humanity? This definition is a decisive factor during and in post-apartheid era. Michael Battle revisits the salient features of Desmond Tutu's provocative human-centered theological critique of apartheid. His assessment of Tutu's Ubuntu theology is a corrective to the conventional wisdom that sees Tutu's role in the South African political arena. Both in political and ecclesiastical circles, Tutu has been conceived as "a politician dressed in religious garb" (p. 11).

Battle attempts to reconcile Tutu's political and theological viewpoint. Though with limited success on this task, Battle has unequivocally managed to make a case against apartheid by using Tutu's appeal to Ubuntu theology. Employing what he calls "vectors in Ubuntu theology," four characteristics stand in clear opposition to the apartheid method of separating people according to their race in South Africa: first, interdependence of human beings dating back to the time of creation; second, recognition of persons as distinctive in their identities; third, Tutu's critique combines the best of European and African cultures to produce a new and distinctive theology; and fourth, Tutu's Ubuntu theology is strong to address and overthrow apartheid (p. 40). At several points (pp. 39, 46, 64), Battle defines Ubuntu (literally "humanity"), but most decisive is when he synthesizes Tutu's conception of humanity as more than nonracial, nonsexist, and nonexploitative. This definition counteracts any possible misinterpretation of Tutu's passionate and clear exoneration of church involvement in the anti-apartheid campaigns.

The issue of "humanity" is a delicate one. Battle's assessment of Tutu's Ubuntu theology has an unavoidable weakness. It is not always clear in this book whether to trace the origin of Ubuntu theology to Tutu, or to Anglicanism, and/or to African philosophy and culture. The biblical support applied on this theology goes far beyond the above standpoints. Instead Tutu's Ubuntu theology can be understood as a "contextual" reaction against the apartheid system which is subject to change both in content and methodology.

The Ubuntu theology is seriously discussed in chapters two and three. In the rest of the chapters there is either disconnection from the theme or an intentional shift to a political documentary of Tutu. Tutu's struggles to balance his political and clerical roles seem to stand above Ubuntu theology itself. The depiction of Tutu as resigning from political struggles after Mandela's release from prison (p. 12) reduces the importance of the theme and of Tutu himself; one would wish this did not happen!

Nevertheless, Battle's book is yet another passionate contribution towards the reconciliation processes going on in Africa today. By comparing Mosala's and Cone's view points against Tutu's (chap. 7), Battle sets them not in opposition but as varied resources to guide Africa's future in the midst of diverse ideas in the search of true human (Ubuntu) dignity. With its broad bibliographical references, this book is a solid and readable account, worthy for junior students in African studies as well as lay people interested in African affairs.

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The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation. By Luke Timothy Johnson. Revised edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. xvi and 694 pages. Paper. $35.00.

The 1999 edition is a revision of Johnson's 1986 work. Johnson, now Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Candler School of Theology, made three types of revisions. The text itself was reedited for purposes of clarification; the bibliography was updated; and an Appendix was added with two Essays: "New Approaches to the New Testament" and "The Historical Jesus."

Johnson's bibliographies cover every book

of the New Testament as well as most pertinent topics in New Testament studies, such as background and methodologies. These updated bibliographies will be invaluable to anyone writing or studying in the field of New Testament. The first additional essay (pp. 621–26) reflects on methodologies that have become popular since the first edition: anthropological/sociological, literary/rhetorical, and ideological (issues regarding race, gender, and other concerns that might involve the response of the present day reader). The second essay (pp. 627–32) is a short update on the new quest for the historical Jesus. Appended to both essays are excellent bibliographies. In the essay on the historical Jesus Johnson obviously thinks of the Jesus Seminar. He makes three criticisms: (1) the criteria used for authenticity are of dubious scientific and historical value; (2) church tradition cannot be eliminated because the early church itself selected the Jesus materials; (3) the Jesus recovered by the Seminar process could be nearly anything. (A more thorough critique of the Jesus Seminar can be found in his *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, reviewed in *Currents* 26 [1999]: 62–63.)

Johnson writes very well, with clarity and congruity. But let the reader beware. Clarity does not necessarily imply correctness. With some thought the reader can see how the Jesus tradition has been inextricably joined with elements of the Mediterranean culture. The reader who does not belong to or adhere to present Western culture, successor to the world of the New Testament, will need to find the Jesus tradition somewhere "between the lines of the canon."

Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago Theological Seminary

My Conversations with Martin Luther. By Timothy F. Lull. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1999. 160 pages. Paper. $6.99.

If you thought all the volumes of Luther's "table talk" had been collected, think again. This creative work by Timothy Lull, President of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, distills the author's years of dedicated scholarship into a book that brings Luther alive for the contemporary reader. With much imagination, "Lull" (as he is addressed by Luther) presents the heritage of Luther in the context of his times as a mirror to examine the dilemmas facing the church in our times.

The book takes the form of a narrative documenting five conversations between Luther and Lull. The first two "visits" of Luther occur in Berkeley and touch upon a variety of topics of current discussion in the church, including women's ordination, ecumenism, sexual misconduct, and homosexuality. While Luther, as one might expect, offers comments on such issues, the clear message is that we are responsible today to develop our own faithful response and cannot rely on Luther to answer such questions for us. This honors the role Luther delegates to reason in addressing ethical problems.

The final three "visits" of Luther take place when Lull was on tour of Luther sites at Eisenach, Wittenberg, and Weimar in Germany. These conversations provide a colorful overview of Luther's biography, touching upon the major events of his life. Fascinating for this reader was Luther's aversion to the Wartburg Castle, due to the trials and temptations experienced there in his time of exile. Also of note is Luther's refusal to solve certain controverted questions of scholarly debate, for example, the date of his "Reformation breakthrough." The most somber portion of the book occurs during the final visit, when Luther encounters Lull at Buchenwald concentration camp. The devastating consequences of Luther's writings against the Jews aim to be repudiated. This intention is reinforced by the inclusion of the 1994 "Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community." This is the most challenging part of the book, where the playful premise of Luther's visitations confronts the horror of the Holocaust.

The book also incorporates a sermon, covering the life of Katherine von Bora, who married Luther in 1525 and testified to Christ by her own faithful discipleship. An appendix points to further resources for encountering the tradition of Luther, not least of which is Lull's own anthology, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Fortress, 1989). This book should do

much to promote new and living conversations with Luther through its use in numerous congregations. May Dr. Luther continue to haunt us as we study his struggles to address the dilemmas of his age and hear again his forceful testimony to the centrality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Craig L. Nessan

Revelation. By Leonard L. Thompson. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. $22.00.

The Book of Revelation. By Robert H. Mounce. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Revised edition. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977. xxxvi and 429 pages. Cloth. $44.00.

The Book of Revelation. By G. K. Beale. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. lxiv and 1,245 pages. Cloth. $75.00.

Revelation. By David E. Aune. 3 vols. Word Biblical Commentary 52a, 52b, 52c. Dallas: Word Books, 1997–1998. ccix and 1,354 pages. Cloth. $34.99 each vol.

"Something for everyone tonight" is a lyric line in *Kiss Me, Kate.* These four commentaries provide something for everyone interested in interpreting the Apocalypse of John. They differ widely in scope, focus, and detail, yet all are worth placing on one's shelf.

Thompson's volume in the Abingdon series carries out the goal of that series well, interpreting this mysterious book for a wide audience in the light of the situation facing the churches of Asia Minor. Christians, unable to participate in the ceremonies that gave meaning to urban life in the province of Asia, provoked opposition. John, a visionary prophet, writes to prevent social accommodation as a way to avoid opposition. I used this book with an ecumenical study group—with universal praise. It has a useful bibliography and an index. Thompson uses the social setting well. This is a good addition to a parish (and pastor's) library.

Mounce updates his 1977 commentary in this well-known series. His basic position remains "premillennial," but with more appreciation of alternative proposals. He now allows that the numbered visions "cover the same period of time" (p. xv). He begins with an appreciation of the nature of apocalyptic literature that informs the rest of the commentary. Though he recognizes the linguistic particularity of the book, he nonetheless regards the authorship by John the apostle as "a reasonable hypothesis" (p. 15). While he argues that the historical situation is significant for the interpretation of the book, he holds that "the predictions of John . . . will find their final and complete fulfillment in the last days of history" (p. 30). The commentary proper is detailed, with much attention to the OT material appropriated by the writer. Even if one is not persuaded by the premillennial position, there is much one can gain from this work. But, in my opinion, it falls behind the other two major commentaries listed here.

Beale's commentary on the Greek text of Revelation is learned, detailed, and comprehensive, only 86 pages shorter than Aune's three volumes. His 177-page introduction dates the book in the nineties, states that the focus of the book is "exhortation to the church community to witness to Christ in the midst of a compromising, idolatrous church and world" (p. 33), hesitantly considers the author a Christian prophet John (not the apostle), and holds that its genre is prophecy in an apocalyptic mode in the form of a letter. His approach stresses that there is a final consummation, but the Apocalypse is not premillennialist. For him the key to understanding the book is analysis of its structure and close attention to its use of the Old Testament. Thus his commentary is in many ways an intertextual study of the book, a useful approach. Structural analysis shows that the center of the book is the struggle between the faithful and their human and demonic opponents. In many ways this is one of the best of the recent commentaries.

Aune's commentary occupies a unique place among recent commentaries. Aune's control of the modern bibliography is awesome. His 210-page introduction is itself an independent monograph on the origins, genre, structure, text and source criticism, and—in detail not seen since Charles' massive commentary in the ICC series—an analysis of the vocabulary and syntax

of the book. It demands a careful reading. The commentary is based on Aune's own translation with extensive philological notes, pays detailed attention to textual parallels in Judaism and in Graeco-Roman literature and religion, discusses the sources, form, and setting of each small section, then gives detailed comment, and sums it all up in a section labelled "Explanation."

One can only admire the industry that Beale and Aune display. It is difficult to chose between them. Both will exhaust the reader long before they exhaust the commentary. Careful use of one of them will enrich one's understanding. Thompson is a marvelous resource for laity, Beale and Aune for clergy. If a pastor could purchase only one, I would urge the reading of either Aune or Beale, not of Mounce. Both stimulate and challenge. In short, the end of the second millennium brought forth much literature on the apocalypse—and these are two of the best.

Edgar Krentz

Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament. Edited by Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998. x and 314 pages. Paper. $22.00.

The twelve papers in this volume were presented at McMaster Divinity College in June 1997 by a distinguished group of evangelical scholars from Australia, Canada, Scotland, and the U.S.A. The volume opens with an introduction by the editor, Richard Longenecker, that surveys contemporary views about resurrection and the afterlife from various religions traditions. Eleven papers follow, divided into four content areas: "Background Perspectives," "Portrayals of Jesus and His Teaching," "The Message of Paul," and "Experiences of the Early Church."

In part one, Edwin Yamauchi traces attitudes toward life, death, and the afterlife in the ancient Near East, highlighting the similarities and the differences from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Ugarit, Persia, and Israel. Even in this brief survey, he marshals significant amounts of data and citations for each culture. His conclusion highlights the unique Hebrew understanding of "faith in a single, all-powerful God, who . . . would maintain fellowship [with humans] beyond the grave, who would vanquish death, and who would raise the dead" (p. 491). Next, Peter Bolt examines the attitudes toward life and death in the Greco-Roman world and ranges widely from social data about specific circumstances of life expectancy and attitudes toward childhood death to evidence from the healing cults, the philosophical schools, traditions of apotheosis, and notions of salvation among the Mystery cults. Bolt's survey illustrates the diversity present within Greco-Roman attitudes. Richard Bauckham offers a final paper on Second Temple Judaism in which he argues that that there was widespread belief in God's power to destroy death itself and to restore the person (body *and* spirit) to life . . . beyond death.

Two papers consider the gospel evidence. The first on the Synoptic Gospels, by Donald Hagner, is disappointing because it fails to wrestle in any way with the difficult historical questions surrounding the resurrection traditions. The second, by Andrew Lincoln, is a superb synthesis of the unique Johannine theology of resurrection and eternal life. The Pauline section offers three papers: "Resurrection and Immortality in the Pauline Corpus," by Murray J. Harris, "Is There Development in Paul's Resurrection Thought?" by Longenecker, and "Resurrection and the Christian Life," by G. Walter Hansen, which deals with the ethical implications of resurrection faith and is the best of the three.

A final set of three papers treat the resurrection traditions in the Acts of the Apostles (by Joel B. Green), Hebrews (by William L. Lane), and the Apocalypse of John (by Allison Trites). Taken as a whole, this volume is a valuable compendium for updating any reader on the theme of resurrection in the NT and early church. Its conclusions are carefully presented, conservative, and cautious.

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Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday. Edited by Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1999. xii and 311 pages. Cloth. $35.00.

This volume honors Gordon D. Fee, a scholar who devoted his life to New Testament text critical and Pauline studies, with essays on Romans, arranged in three sections.

After a brief appreciation of Fee's life and scholarship, eleven exegetical essays discuss aspects of Romans: Rikki Watts, "'For I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel': Romans 1:16–17 and Habakkuk 2:4"; N. T. Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Structure of Romans 3–8"; Ralph Martin, "Reconciliation: Romans 5:1–11"; Richard Longenecker, "The Focus of Romans: The Central Role of 5:1–8:39 in the Argument of the Letter"; J. I. Packer, "The 'Wretched Man' Revisited: Another Look at Romans 7:14–25"; J. D. G. Dunn, "Spirit Speech: Reflections on Romans 8:12–27"; J. Ramsey Michaels, "The Redemption of Our Body: The Riddle of Romans 8:19–22"; Craig Evans, "Paul and the Prophets: Prophetic Criticism in the Epistle to the Romans (with special reference to Romans 9–11)"; Edith M. Humphrey, "Why Bring the Word Down? The Rhetoric of Demonstration and Disclosure in Romans 9:30–10:21"; Philip H. Towner, "Romans 13:1–7 and Paul's Missiological Perspective: A Call to Political Quietism or Transformation?"; and I. Howard Marshall, "Romans 16:25-27—An Apt Conclusion."

Section two presents six "Thematic Essays": Michael Holmes, "Reasoned Eclecticism and the Text of Romans"; Marianne Meye Thompson, "'Mercy upon All': God as Father in the Epistle to the Romans"; L. W. Hurtado, "Jesus' Divine Sonship in Paul's Epistle to the Romans"; R. T. France, "From Romans to the Real World: Biblical Principles and Cultural Change in Relation to Homosexuality and the Ministry of Women"; Robert H. Gundry, "A Breaking of Expectations: The Rhetoric of Surprise in Paul's Letter to the Romans"; and Barbara Aland, "Trustworthy Preaching."

The Festschrift concludes with two "Pastoral/Sermonic Essays": Eugene Peterson, "Pastor Paul," and R. Paul Stevens, "'The Full Blessing of Christ' (Romans 15:29): A Sermon," and a select bibliography of Gordon Fee's own publications. The titles of the essays indicate the broad range of topics. It is a fitting tribute to a distinguished scholar that deserves wide reading.

Edgar Krentz

Bethsaida: Home of the Apostles. By Fred Strickert. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998. x and 187 pages. Paper. $19.95.

Bethsaida is mentioned eight times in the New Testament, more often than any cities except Jerusalem, Capernaum, Nazareth, and Bethany. Jesus heals a blind man in Bethsaida (Mk 8:22–26), the only specific deed reported there. Jesus curses it along with Chorazin and Capernaum (Mt 11:20–24, Lk 10:13–15). Two references are incidental (Mk 6:45, Lk 9:10), two asides identify the city as the birthplace of Philip (Jn 1:44, 12:21) and the home of Peter and Andrew. A manuscript variant identifies it as the site of the healing miracle in Jn 5:2.

Excavation of et-Tell first began in 1987. The first detailed report on these excavations was *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee* (Bethsaida Excavations Project Vol. 1: Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1996), a polygraph volume that included three articles on New Testament texts. In the present volume Fred Strickert, a member of the core staff, combines the interpretation of the New Testament passages with the archaeological data, numismatic evidence, information from Josephus and early Jewish and Christian texts to describe what is known about the city's history, physical features, structures, economy and way of life, and relates it to the New Testament. He gives a useful short account of the physical features of the city, including the presumed temple to Livia, a member of the imperial family, and of Herod Philip, the founder of the Roman era city. The excavation produced evidence of the fishing industry in the form of two

types of net weights.

Strickert briefly examines each of the New Testament passages that mention the city, interpreting them for the light they shed on the history and significance of the city for early Christianity down to its probable destruction by earthquake in A.D. 115. He writes clearly, controls the data, and demonstrates the significance of an often overlooked polis for the New Testament. As the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip, its citizens contributed much to the early life of the church. This treatment of the site is a good one. Strickert's book, together with the excavation report mentioned above, are now the basic bibliography for Bethsaida.

Edgar Krentz

Friendship, Flattery, and Frankness of Speech. Studies on Friendship in the New Testament World. Edited by John T. Fitzgerald. Supplements to Novum Testamentum 82. Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996. xiv and 291 pages. Cloth. 160 NLG = $103.25.

The three Greek terms mentioned in the title (φιλία, κολακεία, παρρησία) are interrelated in the world of the New Testament. Friendship seems such an obvious good that we assume we know just what it means in the New Testament. Friendship may be feigned under flattery; frankness of speech may be a mark of true friendship. The authors of the eleven essays in this volume first presented them to the Hellenistic Moral Philosophy and Early Christianity Group of the Society of Biblical Literature. David Konstan gives a general introduction to friendship in the Graeco-Roman world, followed by Clarence Gadd on these three topics in the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus of Gadara and Troels Engberg-Pedersen discussing Plutarch's treatise written for Prince Philopappus of Commagene on distinguishing a friend from a flatterer. *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, also edited by Prof. Fitzgerald (Society of Biblical Literature, Resources for Biblical Study 34; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1997) gives ten more essays to complement these two, plus a rapid survey of friendship in the New Testament.

Part two, the heart of this volume, presents four essays on friendship language in Philippians by John Reumann, Ken L. Berry, Abraham J. Malherbe, and John T. Fitzgerald. Reumann argues that Philippians uses the vocabulary of a friendship topos but should not be placed in the literary category of "friendship letter." Two essays by Ken Berry and Abraham Malherbe examine Phil 4:10–20 in the light of ancient friendship, while the editor argues that Paul is seeking to correct the Philippians' understanding of friendship. These four essays are richly documented from ancient texts and modern scholarship.

The last four contributions discuss this complex of ideas in other letters of Paul, and in Acts, Hebrews, and the Johannine corpus. They are more cursory overviews of their topics, useful introductions indeed. But it is the essays on Philippians that should most concern New Testament students; no scholar interested in the letter to the Philippians dare overlook this book.

Edgar Krentz

History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts. Edited by Ben Witherington, III. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. xx and 374 pages. Cloth. $59.00.

The title says it well. The essays in this volume discuss highly significant issues in the interpretation of Acts. The five in Part I deal with "Issues of genre and historical method." Is Acts intended to be history? Classicist W. J. McCoy carefully describes Thucydides' *History*, which leads the editor to affirm Acts is history. C. K. Barrett contrasts F. C. Baur and J. B. Lightfoot on Acts as history (giving the palm to Baur!). C. H. Talbert holds that Acts is ancient biography, not history, while Loveday Alexander holds that Luke 1:1–4, in the light of parallels in the ancient world, does not show, *eo ipso*, that Acts is history. (She summarizes her major work on the prologue to Luke.) Jacob Jervell summarizes his well-known view that Acts is salvation history.

Five essayists discuss "Historical and theological difficulties in Acts" in Part II. Craig Hill argues that Acts 6:1–8:4 does not reveal a divi-

sion between strict Hebraic Christians and more open Hellenistic Christian parties, since the early church was much more diverse than such rigid classification suggests. R. Bauckham argues that James' speech in Acts 15:13–21 is based on an exegetically sophisticated and historically accurate source, and then examines M. Dibelius' and C. H. Dodd's analysis of the kerygmatic summaries in Acts in the light of summaries in other texts. David Moesner argues that Luke uses the OT to show that Jesus' death, resurrection, and the proclamation of the risen Christ fulfill God's plan to save the world (the equivalent of fate or necessity in classical historians). Jerome Neyrey describes the social status Acts attributes to Paul as being a member of the elite, "a citizen trained for public duties."

Part III contains four essays on "Issues of literary criticism." Joel Green examines parallelisms within Luke-Acts, while Bill Arnold deals with the use of the Old Testament as an aid to developing characterizations in Acts. Both are exercises in intertextuality. Ben Witherington asks how Luke's use of sources in the Gospel illuminates the use of sources in Acts: his freedom in handling sources illuminates the three accounts of Paul's conversion. Finally, Wm. Brosend, II inquires into the significance of the puzzling ending of Acts to argue that Luke ends because he has brought the story up to date.

No student of Acts should overlook these essays, which contribute much to the study of Acts. Each is documented with copious reference to modern secondary literature. (I wish the editor had either put a bibliography at the end of each article or gathered all the references into a classified bibliography at the end.) While it may be invidious to single out specific essays, I found those by McCoy, Alexander, Moesner, Neyrey, and Green to offer the most new, exciting insights. The editor provides a helpful introduction, which I found even more interesting when read as an "afterword."

Edgar Krentz

Briefly Noted

The Death of Herod: The Narrative and Theological Function of Retribution in Luke-Acts. By O. Wesley Allen, Jr. (Scholars Press, $27.95). This book, published in the SBL Dissertation Series, models a literary approach to NT studies. It focuses on Acts 12:19b–24, the story of the strange death of King Herod at the hand of the angel of the Lord due to his failure to give glory to God. The study then broadens to compare the death of Herod to death of tyrant type-scenes in other biblical and Greco-Roman literature (chap. 2); to interpret the death of Herod within both Acts 12 and Luke-Acts in order to demonstrate its oft-neglected narrative and thematic linkages (chaps. 3-4); to a full-blown discussion of divine retribution in Luke-Acts and in contemporary apologetic historiography (chap. 5). While Allen tends to exaggerate the death of Herod's significance, he does anchor the genre of Luke-Acts in apologetic historiography. *Walter Pilgrim*

Worship and the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honour of John T. Willis. Edited by M. Patrick Graham, Rick R. Marrs, and Steven L. McKenzie (Sheffield Academic Press, $85). The fifteen essays in this volume are written for the 65th birthday of John T. Willis, who has contributed articles on Micah, Samuel, and other biblical books, but is primarily known for his translations from Swedish, German, and other languages. The essays explore aspects of worship in Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Job, Psalms (4), Isaiah (3), Micah, and the apocrypha. J. J. M. Roberts, for example, takes a shot at modern worship on the basis of Isaiah: "The trend to simplify worship—by removing theological complexity, to make it more popular by emphasizing entertainment at the expense of education and to increase its appeal by stressing only happy thoughts and

ignoring the bitter and painful aspects of religious experience—has little in common with the ideal of worship envisioned by Isaiah" (p. 275). Roy F. Melugin argues against the nearly universal attempt to discover the original meaning of Isaiah. Instead, he urges scholars to examine the significance of a text like Isa 9:6–7 (unto us a child is born, a son is given) as presently existing religious communities construe its meaning for shaping their faith and life in their history and social context. In his view, those who shaped the book of Isaiah were concerned with using language performatively, namely, to shape or transform the life of the faith community. *RWK*

Encountering the Old Testament. A Christian Survey. By Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer (Baker, $49.99). Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this conservative introductory textbook to the Old Testament is the CD-Rom tucked in the back cover, which provides video clips of interviews with the authors, video clips and still photos of biblical lands, maps, interactive review questions, and visual organizers. In general, the layout and graphics are outstanding, but Moses is the "source, originator, and authorizer" of the Pentateuch, one person wrote the whole book of Isaiah, and Daniel was written in the 6th century. I wish we had a critical introductory textbook presented with such pizazz. *RWK*

Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey by Walter Elwell and Robert Yarborough (Baker, $44.99) is a very conservative introduction to the books of the New Testament enhanced with excellent color photographs, maps, and a CD-Rom disk containing video clips of biblical sites, still photos, and interviews with the book's authors. Traditional views attractively presented.

Edgar Krentz

Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God In Ancient Israel. By Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger (Fortress, $45). The religion of Israel has been investigated primarily from texts, especially the Hebrew Bible and the texts from Ugarit. K. and U., however, present a magnificent argument in this book that pictures, which can depict several aspects simultaneously, should play a more prominent role in that inquiry. They discuss some 383 pictures, primarily found on amulet seals from Palestine/Israel, that can be dated from MBIIB (the putative time of the patriarchs and matriarchs) to 450 B.C.E., in the midst of Persian, post-exilic Judah. Because almost all of these pictures are uninscribed (lacking any words), it usually cannot be determined whether they come from Israel itself or from her Canaanite neighbors who lived among them. K. and U. have devoted their careers to studying the 8500 such stamp seals that have been discovered in the last century. They can now detect trends, such as increased or diminished Egyptian influence, the retreat or demotion of pictures of the goddess, and the elimination of images in the late seventh century (the time of the Josianic reform). They dedicate extensive space to the study of the controversial pictures and inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud, concluding that the "Asherah" mentioned in these texts is not the divine consort of Yahweh. One can learn an immense amount about the religion and material culture of Palestine from this volume, which has been ably translated by Thomas H. Trapp. *RWK*

1 and 2 Chronicles. Volume 1, **1 Chronicles 1–2 Chronicles 9: Israel's Place Among the Nations;** Volume 2, **2 Chronicles 10–36: Guilt and Atonement.** By William Johnstone (Sheffield Academic Press, $85 each vol.). J.'s division of materials in the two volumes reflects his judgment on the intention of Chronicles. Volume 1 describes Israel's attempt to realize its place among the nations, and volume 2 describes Israel's failure to attain that ideal and the hope that lies beyond that failure. Theologically, the Chronicler is still in exile, waiting for the restoration. While the books of Ezra and Nehemiah depict a realized Zionism, the Chronicler contends for an eschatological Zionism. Israel's destiny is to be vicarious, not in its suffering but in its holiness. By "sacramental theology" J. means that God's cosmic reign is discharged on earth by his representative agent, the Davidic king, who sits on the Lord's own throne in Jerusalem. It is not clear to me why this is "sacramental." He also calls it "pure sacramentalism" when Jahaziel instructs Israel in 2 Chronicles 20 to participate fully in a battle, even though the

real fighting is the Lord's. Life under the Levites, according to J., provides Israel with a realized eschatology under which it can live a life of the practice of holiness now, while awaiting a definite Return in God's future. I think that the Chronicler is trying to get his readers to support the *existing cult* in Jerusalem rather than to wait for some eschatological return. I also suspect J.'s frequent resort to the etymology of personal names (though Abijah does mean "the Lord is my father," I doubt this implies his potential for realizing destiny). J.'s interpretation of Jehoshabeath in 2 Chronicles 22 as meaning "the Lord is abundance" suffers from an incorrect identification of the sibilant in the name). He *assumes* (!) the unity of Chronicles and interprets its function as it now stands in MT. Even more problematic is his decision to study the differences between Samuel-Kings and Chron-icles only on the basis of the MT of each. He apparently does not understand the theological and exegetical significance of the Chronicler using an earlier form of Samuel-Kings. If the Chronicler did in fact employ such a text, many characteristics ascribed to him, also by J, simply disappear. *RWK*

Proverbs. The Old Testament Library. A Commentary by Richard J. Clifford (Westminster John Knox, $38). For a long time we have lacked a contemporary, competent, critical, and helpful commentary on Proverbs, but we need wait no longer. C. focuses on how the instructions and maxims engaged their audience. "By a typical Proverbs paradox, the common accusation against the book—that it is banal—turned out to be a key to understanding it. If a verse seemed banal, I knew I had not understood it, and so I returned to it" (p. vii). The authors of Proverbs were scribes of the royal court. C. notes three assumptions of ancient authors: Wisdom was practical rather than theoretical knowledge; wisdom belongs to the divine world and is mediated through a series of agents to human beings; heavenly wisdom is mediated through such institutions as the king, scribes and the literature scribes write, and heads of families. "Wisdom invites people into a long-term, marriage-like relationship with her. The relationship is founded on her truthfulness, bounty, and closeness to God" (p. 38). This is hands down the best commentary on the book of Proverbs. *RWK*

The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 1–24 and **The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 25–48.** By Daniel I. Block (Eerdmans, $48 and $50). These volumes are part of the New International Commentary on the Old Testament. B.'s work is massive (887 pages on the first 24 chapters and 826 for the second 24) and in many respects magisterial, and is driven by a single passion: to make this prophecy understandable and meaningful for contemporary readers. He provides a fresh translation with textual notes, a discussion of the style and structure of each unit, verse-by-verse commentary, and a summary of the permanent theological lessons of the unit (these are Evangelical in orientation and a bit moralistic; he also evades the problem of the brutal treatment of women in chaps. 16 and 23). For all the solid exegesis in this commentary, I wish B. had struggled more with some of its theological issues. I find the following quite problematic: "The carnal mind struggles with the justice of God in the face of human tragedy, but the eyes of faith will recognize behind all tragedies the hand of God. When all the evidence is in, his people will recognize that he does not operate arbitrarily or without cause. His actions are always according to the immutable principles of justice and righteousness. Accordingly, if people experience his wrath, it is because the wages of sin is death." Block interprets the canonical shape of the text and rightly reacts against the excessive identification of glosses by a previous generation of scholarship. At times, however, such as in 48:30–35, it might be better to entertain the possibility of a secondary reading that has (helpfully?) shifted the sense of the original Ezekiel. Pastors will appreciate his efforts to appropriate Ezekiel for Christian proclamation. *RWK*

Ruth. The Old Testament Library. A Commentary by Kirsten Nielsen (Westminster John Knox, $21.95). This brief and insightful volume (35 pages of introduction and 68 of commentary) focuses on intertextuality, that is, the relationship between Ruth and other biblical texts, especially those that deal with infertility and the

triumph over it. "Just as God chose Tamar to be the ancestress of both Boaz and David, so it is God himself who has chosen David's Moabite ancestress, Ruth, and therefore David himself is chosen" (p. 27). She joins a growing consensus in dating the book to the preexilic period and not to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The author was probably part of the royal court. Naomi and Ruth break contemporary norms and are rewarded for doing just that. "Thus God is presented as being on the side of the marginalized, conducting their case even where the law is inadequate and they must resort to trickery to gain justice" (p. 32). *RWK*

Faith Aloud. By Marcus Paul Bach Felde (Melanesian Institute, Papua New Guinea). In this revised doctoral dissertation done at the University of Chicago, F. does "local theology" in Papua New Guinea by analyzing how the Lutheran Church there proclaims its faith in its hymns. The dominant metaphor for salvation in these hymns is God's "closeness." In the critical part of the book, F. argues that the opposite of good news is not that God is far off, but that God is against us. Hence he urges the Lutheran Church in Papua New Guinea to make more use of the metaphor of divine-human reconciliation in its hymns. *RWK*

Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation. Two volumes. Edited by John H. Hayes (Abingdon, $195). **Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters.** Edited by Donald L. McKim (InterVarsity, $29.99). We so easily forget or underestimate the extent to which we are dependent on interpreters who have gone before us. The Hayes volumes contain three kinds of articles: the history of interpretation of each book of the Bible, the apocrypha, and other ancient non-biblical books (e.g. Enoch); biographies of leading biblical scholars (ancient and modern), including some who are still active and living but born before 1930; essays on methods and movements. It takes 16 pages to list all the contributors. These are volumes suitable for browsing and for learning why we are where we are today in biblical studies. Fifty years from now the list of exegetes would not nearly be so white or so male! Methods discussed include those emphasizing the social location of the interpreter (e.g. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation, Feminist Interpretation, Gay/Lesbian Interpretation, Mujerista Biblical Interpretation, Post-Colonial Biblical Interpretation, and Womanist Biblical Interpretation). Strangely, inexplicably, there are no entries under "Enlightenment," "Historical Criticism," or "Modernism" (though the subdisciplines of historical criticism are discussed and there is the obligatory essay on "Post-Modern Biblical Interpretation"). The McKim volume focuses on individuals from six eras: early church; Middle Ages; 16th and 17th centuries; 18th and 19th centuries; Europe in the 20th century; North America in the 20th century (where Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Phyllis Trible make the honor roll). The articles in the McKim volume tend to be a little longer and the contributors are listed on five pages. Of the thirteen North American scholars of the 20th century discussed in McKim, nine are also discussed in Hayes. In addition to Schüssler Fiorenza and Trible, already mentioned, McKim includes Walter Brueggemann (still very much alive) and George Eldon Ladd (who died in 1982). Both of these volumes would make fine additions to church libraries. *RWK*

Theological Exegesis. Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs. Edited by Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Eerdmans, $38). The nineteen essays in this Festschrift are written to honor the legacy of Childs, who has contributed mightily to Old Testament studies, not only by many philological and historical-critical publications but also and especially by his proposal for "canonical criticism," that privileges the final form of the text and puts stress on its theological message and authority. Roy A. Harrisville speaks of Childs' "passionate commitment to the Scriptures as the instrument of encounter with the living God." We are all C's debtors. *RWK*

Practical books deserve high praise. That is true of **Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts** by K. C. Hanson and Douglas Oakman (Fortress, $20). Their first chapter introduces the reader to the methods of social-scientific criticism. They then describe

clearly and well the agrarian context of Jesus' ministry in four areas: kinship structures (marriage, family, divorce, fictive kinship), political and patronage aspects (provincial administration, Roman domination, the elite and the peasantry), political economy (production and taxation), and political religion (the role of the Herodian temple). All this is done from the perspective of the Galilean peasant; little attention is paid to the relative ease with which Roman rule was accepted elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean.

The book reflects the years of college teaching by both authors. Clear organization, suggestions for use, tables that really clarify, and an extensive glossary of social scientific and social terminology ease the reader's understanding. A parish pastor should read this book with Sunday school teachers and educational staff. It is highly illuminating, making clear the differences between first-century Palestine and postmodern America. It's a good read for pastors and laity; it clarifies much in the gospels. Put it in your parish library. *EK*

John D. Currid's **Doing Archaeology in the Land of the Bible** (Baker, $14.99) introduces the interested student to the goals and methods characteristic of Palestinian archaeology. Clearly written and enhanced with sidebars, illustrations, and bibliography, it is a useful compact summary in 119 pages. Good for a high school or parish library. *EK*

Historical Jesus books are at the moment a growth industry, as the three essays in **The Jesus Controversy: Perspectives in Conflict** (Trinity Press International, $17) make clear. John Dominic Crossan ("Historical Jesus as Risen Lord") and Luke Timothy Johnson ("The Humanity of Jesus: What's at Stake in the Quest for the Historical Jesus") offer brief summaries of their well-known positions: Crossan's a reasoned defense of a radical historical search for the historical Jesus, Johnson's an argument that the Jesus of the canonical gospels, mediated by tradition and one's experience of Jesus, is a more sure guide to the true Jesus. Kelber's essay ("The Quest for the Historical Jesus from the Perspectives of Medieval, Modern and Post-Enlightenment Readings, and in View of Ancient Oral Aesthetics") is the freshest, as he seeks a path through the morass of historical Jesus literature by stressing the variety in the biblical message, somewhat questioning the validity of positivist historical research, and yet affirming its necessity. I appreciate the attempt of both Crossan and Johnson to bring theological concerns to the table. A reading of these three essays will present the issues at stake and two very divergent approaches, and they call the reader to make decisions about the validity of these approaches. It's a good, if at times frustrating, read. *EK*

M. Clayton Croy, Assistant Professor of New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, has written **A Primer of Biblical Greek**, a no-nonsense introductory Greek grammar (Eerdmans, $18). The written text is terse, requiring an experienced instructor, and is graced with numerous Greek-to-English exercises from the Septuagint and the New Testament (but no English-to-Greek!). The thirty-two lessons cover the essentials and probably require either two quarters or semesters of class time. *EK*

A useful paperback edition of St. Augustine's *Enchiridion*, with an introduction by Boniface Ramsey, titled **The Augustine Catechism: The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love** (New City Press) should interest all Lutherans, since Martin Luther was an Augustinian. This text would have been formative in his monastic years. Written between A.D. 419–422, it reflects the pastoral heart of the mature bishop and theologian. Will serve well as a text for seminary and college courses. *EK*

Richard N. Longenecker's second edition of **Biblical Exegesis In the Apostolic Period**, originally published in 1975, is a useful, stimulating survey, with a large bibliography, updated in the 29-page introduction (Eerdmans, $20). After he describes the issues raised in the last 29 years, he discusses early Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament and the use of the OT by Jesus, early Christian proclamation, Paul, the evangelists, Hebrews, Jewish Christian tractates (James through Revelation), concluding with synthetic

statements of themes and methods running through early Christian exegesis of the OT. It's a useful summation of a generation of research. *EK*

Recently interest in Patristic exegesis has burgeoned. One impressive result is Paul M. Blowers' translation and edition of a volume from a major French series in **The Bible in Greek Christian Antiquity** (The Bible Through the Ages, Vol. 1; Notre Dame University Press, $60). The twenty chapters by a series of experts discuss the Bible in earliest Christianity, in the Greek Fathers (Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory Naziansen, Theodoret of Cyrus), early Christian doctrinal controversy, inscriptions and art, and in the piety and liturgical life of the first five centuries.

This significant volume is a welcome addition to a too-sparse English bibliography. (The extensive notes give ample reference to what is there.) Pierre du Bourguet's excellent article on "The First Biblical Scenes Depicted in Christian Art" (pp. 299–326) needs illustrative plates. This is nonetheless an important publication that needs parallel volumes for the early Latin Church, for the Byzantine world, and for Latin Christianity from Augustine to Charlemagne. *EK*

The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period. By Charles E. Carter (Sheffield Academic Press, $85). In this revised dissertation written at Duke, C. attempts to establish a more complete understanding of the material culture of the province of Yehud (Judah) in the Persian period (538–332 B.C.E.). Rather than basing himself exclusively or even primarily on the five lists from Ezra and Nehemiah that provide evidence on the geographical extent and population of Judah, C. extrapolates from archaeological evidence at 22 excavated sites and several extensive surface surveys of recent decades. Judah in his telling comprised only some 680 square miles (half the size of Rhode Island), with a total population of somewhere between 13,000 and 20,000 people. Jerusalem never had a population of more than 1,500 in this period. A final chapter assesses the social situation of Yehud in the Persian period, its type of governance, and its ability to produce the major parts of the Old Testament commonly dated to this period. His estimates of Yehud's size and population are based on cutting-edge new methodologies, but it remains to be seen whether he will be able to reverse previous estimates of population that are as much as ten times greater than his. *RWK*

The Hebrew English Concordance to the Old Testament with the New International Version. Edited by John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson (Zondervan, $99.99). For this 2,192 page book, you pay a penny short of $100 and it's worth every penny. The first 1,720 pages provide Hebrew-English and Aramaic-English concordances. While the Hebrew or Aramaic word is printed at the head of the entry, the verse where each of its occurrences appears is given in the translation of the NIV, with the word itself printed in bold type. Hence one can make original language word studies even if one's knowledge of Hebrew is elementary. For adverbs, conjunctions, etc., only the verse numbers are given, no translation. An English-Hebrew and Aramaic index allows one to trace the method of the NIV translators. The word "slave" occurs 55 times, but renders 25 different Semitic words. Finally the editors provide concise Hebrew-English (100 pages) and Aramaic-English (10 pages) dictionaries. A splendid tool. *RWK*

A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar. By Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze (Sheffield Academic Press, $85 cloth; $29.95 paper). This grammar is intended for translators and exegetes of biblical Hebrew texts who wish to engage critically with existing translations and interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. It systematizes linguistic information contained in introductory courses, drawing most of its information from prose texts (in the index there are 3 pages devoted to passages from the Pentateuch and 2.5 from the Deuteronomistic History, but less than 1 each from the prophets and the writings). Knowledge has been gleaned from older grammars, but an attempt was made to utilize the findings of recent research in Biblical Hebrew. *RWK*

The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew. Volume IV כ-ל. Edited by David J. A. Clines. (Sheffield Academic Press, $123.50). This dictionary is half done, and the 642 pages of this volume, covering only three letters of the Hebrew alphabet, were pulled together in eighteen months. The work is scheduled for completion in 2004. Many of the words in this volume (Yahweh [occurs 7,000 times and the entry consumes 29 pages!], Israel, day, know, sit, take) are among the most common in the Hebrew Bible and every occurrence is still treated. For every verb, all its subjects are considered, and for every noun, every verb with which it is used is shown. The authors are sensitive to issues of inclusivity and both male and female prophets are referred to by the word "prophet." "Prophetess" is now considered archaic. As in previous volumes, the authors give principal attention to the contextual meaning and therefore avoid issues like etymology or meaning in cognate languages. *RWK*

Hebrew-English TANAKH. Edited by Rabbi David E. Sulomm Stein (Jewish Publication Society, $69.95). The translation of the Old Testament by the Jewish Publication Society (JPS), completed in 1985, shows some of the best philological work on the Hebrew Scriptures and a great reluctance to emend the text. It is still one of the best literal translations even if it was made before attention to inclusive language became popular. While sticking close to the original, the translation reads with elegance and power. Consider Ps 51:3, "Have mercy upon me, O God, as befits Your faithfulness; in keeping with Your abundant compassion, blot out my transgressions." The present edition prints the Hebrew Bible in one column and JPS in another on each page. Tanakh is the standard abbreviation for the three parts of the canon in Jewish tradition—Torah, Neviim (Prophets), and Kethubim (Writings). *RWK*

An Index to English Periodical Literature on the Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Volume 7. Compiled and edited by William H. Hupper (Scarecrow, $55). The previous six volumes appeared between 1987 and 1994. The 377 pages of this volume list thousands of publications dealing with ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and other parts of the Ancient Near East, though the connection with the Old Testament in some cases seems remote and, in any case, is not specifically indicated. This volume is a treasure trove if you're looking for the latest studies on the Gilgamesh Epic, the Code of Hammurabi, the Merneptah Inscription (containing the oldest reference to Israel outside the Bible), wisdom literature in many different languages, and the like. *RWK*

An Index to English Periodical Literature on the Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Volume 8. Compiled and Edited by William G. Hupper (Scarecrow, $65). Hupper's bibliographic labor of love continues with major sections in this volume dealing with Theological Studies (pp. 1–349), studies dealing with the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East in Art, Worship and Contemporary Culture (pp. 350–407), and Studies dealing with the Dead Sea Scrolls (pp. 408–83). While the list of periodicals from the last two centuries covers 29 pages, Lutherans will be disappointed that neither *Currents* nor *Word & World* is included. *RWK*

Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, Volume 9. Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Eerdmans, $48). This major reference work for the meaning of Old Testament words is now two thirds complete. The present volume discusses words from מָרַד (rebel) to נָקָה (be innocent) and includes articles on such salient words as "justice," "adultery," "prophet," "vow," "repent," "self, life" [traditionally "soul"], and "female." There are surveys of the word's occurrences in the Bible, but also in other ancient Near Eastern writings. *RWK*

Preaching Helps

The Holy Trinity—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Series B

Bread Enough

Way back in 1827 Heinrich Paulus wrote a life of Jesus in which he offered "explanations" for some of the most stupendous events recorded in Mark's Gospel, events featured from the beginning to the end of this first section of the season of Pentecost. And Paulus' neat and tidy explanations have been repeated breathlessly ever since.

Paulus suggested, for example, that the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000 were wonderful events but not supernatural miracles. We've all heard how it works. Jesus and his disciples began sharing their food with one another and with people sitting close by. Or a lad was there, and as children will do, he began generously handing out some of his meager supply. The crowds saw that and were shamed out of their natural stinginess. Red faced, they sheepishly broke out their picnic baskets or reached under their robes for their parcel of provisions and began to share with those who had come unprepared. Soon all were fed and satisfied.

Dutch exegete Bas van Iersel in his commentary *Reading Mark* comments rather caustically on this sort of "explanation." This way of reading the story "mutilates the underlying meaning of Mark's whole narrative" and it "reduces the two events (the feedings of the 5,000 and 4,000) to the triviality of (the reversal of) the misfortune of a day-tripper who has forgotten to take a packed lunch."

Mark offers a subtle story in which he asks us time and again to think about planting seeds and harvesting crops and winnowing wheat and working with yeast and baking loaves and sitting at table to share bread and wine. He has important stories about the way people think of who they should or should not eat with and whether it is a divine necessity to wash hands carefully before eating and about crumbs falling from the master's table.

Two of Mark's great stories stand side by side in Mark 6. One tells how to give a party and the other how not to. Or to say it better and more evangelically, one tells about a good party-giver and the other describes the way governments

all too often act. Mark 6:14–44 could well be entitled something like "Two Kings, Two Royal Banquets."

First the really bad party. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, is here called "King Herod." That is a historical error, since he was only a tetrarch at the time, but it looks like Mark has kingship on his mind. "Kingship" is after all in Jesus' first announcement in this Gospel (Mark 1:15). Well, King Herod on his birthday promised (very rashly and extravagantly, as kings and big politicians are apt to do) that he would give his stepdaughter anything she wanted, "even half of his kingdom." And he doubtless thought that his kingdom was really something. It was a party fit for a(n earthly) king, and Herod had surrounded himself with what the NRSV calls "his courtiers and officers and the leaders of Galilee." A more literal translation would say "his big people and commanders-of-a-thousand and the first people" (μεγιστανες, χιλιαρχοι, πρωτοι).

The party took a decidedly brutal and nasty turn. It ended with Herod serving up the head of John the Baptist, carried into the dining room on a platter like the main course for the deadly banquet.

The other party was the polar opposite of Herod's. "King" Jesus went out into the wilderness to be alone but was soon surrounded by thousands (χιλιοι). They were not the big shots and first citizens of the land but just a throng of ordinary folks enjoying no status worth mentioning. In fact Jesus in Mark's Gospel has harsh words for people who seek status, who strive to be "big" or "first." See what he has to say in Mark 10:35–45 about the mega-people and the first-people (μεγας and πρωτος, 10:42–44).

We could go on to say that Jesus, like Herod, offers a kingdom, and that Jesus does not hold back but offers all of it, not just half. But most remarkable, most memorable, most significant of all is the food at the two banquets. Herod offered up John's head on a platter. Jesus took and blessed and broke five loaves and two fish, and then he handed them over to the disciples to feed the crowds.

It is early in the gospel, too early to say everything, but Mark is hinting already that Jesus does not offer up the lives of other people in order to establish his kingship. That's what the Herods of the world do. Jesus is no Herod. At the end he will take bread and bless it and break it. And he will not say, "This is what I am going to do to my enemies or to anyone who gets in my way," or "This is how I deal with my subjects, living high at their expense." No! He will say, "This is my body given for you."

Two kings, two banquets, two totally different ways of exercising kingship and building community. That is part, at least, of what is going on in these two stories. And these themes are carried forward in John 6 which occupies so much

of our attention during the summer months, interrupting the reading of Mark but complementing Mark's themes.

Jesus fed the crowds in John 6, and they wanted to make him their king. But what they had in mind was a king like Herod, and Jesus broke away from them, crossed the lake, and then spoke of Bread at Capernaum. In addressing them, Jesus took as his text words of Psalm 78, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat" (John 6:31). Like any good homiletician, Jesus played with the words of the text: Of course it originally meant that "Moses gave the wilderness generation manna to eat." But, says Jesus, "It means more than that. The text is a promise that God (not Moses) is right now (not just in the past) giving you (not just the wilderness generation) heavenly bread to eat."

Jesus speaks all the way down to the beginning of verse 51 about himself as Bread from Heaven. Then in the final verses of his sermon he expounds the last words of the text: "to eat." Those final words are hard. It is the crucified Jesus or Jesus with his cross, with his self-emptying agape, who is Bread for our souls, our spirits, our lives. When we ingest him, let him get into our systems, into our bones and our blood, then we begin to experience quickening into newness of life, into "eternal" life, into the "kingdom of God."

Mark and John are great storytellers. And so is **Jean Lebbert**. She probably won't like my naming her this way in the same breath with Mark and John, but she will have to endure it. She is really one of the best storytellers I have ever had the pleasure of hearing. Last October she attended the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Whole families attend the festival, delighting in hearing and telling stories out loud. The audience gets right into it and works along with the tellers. Little kids step up at open-mic events and hone their skills. She says it was liturgy, it was a faith community. It was a community of the story told out loud. Jean herself got to tell a Bible story to the gathering from the steps of the Jonesborough Town Hall.

Jean loves to tell the story and wants to help other people fall in love with the God of God's word. And that is what she has been working on for some time now. She is currently in her eighth year as Associate Pastor of Emanuel Lutheran Church in Lodi, California. And she has written studies and reflections for Preaching Helps before, more than once. I am delighted and grateful that she accepted the invitation to put some of her words into print in these pages. Thanks to her, and thanks and blessings to all of you who are willing week in and week out to stand up in the company of others and share the Bread of Life.

Peace and Joy!

—Robert H. Smith, Editor of Preaching Helps

The Holy Trinity
June 18, 2000

Isaiah 6:1–8
Psalm 25
Romans 8:12–17
John 3:1–17

Prayer of the Day: Holy, Holy, Holy God, thank you that your goodness and power are with us. Through your Word, enable us to focus our eyes to see you and move our lips to talk about you so that we may live conspicuously as your children in this world.

First Reading

Pentecost opened with the Savior saying, "When the Advocate comes.... You also are to testify.... When he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned." Now, we begin to see how Jesus' vision unfolds and how we do with testifying and with believing.

This week's texts have to do with eyes and lips—two tools for testifying.

Isaiah sees the heavenly throne room. Hey, wait a minute. Isaiah, mighty seer in days of old, is shaking for fear of his life, afraid to testify on Judah's behalf because of the might he sees: "I live among men of unclean lips, yet my eyes have seen the LORD." His eyes and lips aren't working together.

Isaiah sees the glorious court of God and fears that his sin will be the grounds for a judgment of the death sentence. The unrighteous cannot behold God and live to tell about it. The eyes have seen, but the lips quiver to follow. So a seraph swoops down and selects a glowing coal from the altar, and Isaiah becomes mighty seared in days of old, mighty prophet, testifying to God's ultimate victory over this world's ruler.

The Hebrew word for "lips" comes from a word that means "terminal," like a boundary, and probably from a root that means "to scrape together (as in accumulate or increase) or away (as in scatter, remove, ruin)." It's the flapping of the lips, once the eyes have beheld, that makes or breaks our testifying; it's God crossing the boundaries of our eyes, then our minds and hearts, then our lips. But if the heart is dominated by fear, the boundaries shut down. Fear paralyzes belief.

There's a plethora of eyes and lips in the reading from John as well.

Nicodemus comes by night (it's hard to see in the dark; we whisper in the dark). "We know you are a teacher" (v. 2); the word for "know" here is ειδω, a perception kind of knowing, like when you say "I see" when you mean "I understand." Jesus answers (v. 3), "I tell you (λεγω, individual speech), no one can see (ειδω again)...." He also says (v. 11), "We speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen." The victims of snake bites needed eyes to look upon Moses' bronze serpent (v. 14).

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday, the festival of the mystery of God. What does it take for God's mystery to penetrate and convict us enough to testify about it?

Verse 11b is the literal center of Psalm 25. It is a prayer for pardon, the prayer of the guilty who stand before the judge and the only course of redemption the judge can take towards the guilty. It is the prayer for pardon from the only God who, we have seen over and over again, is steadfast in love, so steadfast that "he gave his only Son."

So, how do we take that redeeming act in and let it convict us enough so that we become the witnesses in the world today of God's glory and love and power? Wouldn't

it be startling to serve piping hot bread at the altar today to sear and wake up the tongues of those who can see God in their lives?

Pastoral Reflections

We have a pastoral opportunity in these texts to minister to quivering Isaiahs and wondering Nicodemuses who are afraid to talk to and/or about God.

Isaiah's fear-filled reaction is appropriate for someone under the old covenant. Indeed, according to the law of the old covenant, it *is* hazardous for the imperfect to be in the presence of the Perfect who must pass judgment.

But it is inappropriate—actually, it's faithless—for Christians, who are under the new covenant of grace, to have this reaction. We do not live by give-and-take but by given-for-you. Christians need not fear that the misery of their sinfulness exceeds the mystery of God's redeeming act in the cross and resurrection. We need no seraphs nor searing coals. We can witness by grasping the grace of the gospel, which tells us that God has made us, just as we are, worthy, indeed holy, and then by simply talking about how God works in our lives, even despite our failings and weaknesses. When you really get going in faith, you can even talk about how God works through your failings and weaknesses! The phenomenon of the wounded healer is new covenant. "I know how you feel; I've been there" is a Christ-sanctioned statement for compassionate ministry. Our sins can be tools for ministry, not grounds for execution!

Nicodemus sees the signs. "Jews seek signs." But he sneaks around and stays in the shadows. It's not hard to see that Nicodemus' heart too is dominated by fear; his heart doesn't know what to do with the signs his eyes have seen and the laws he's been raised to live by. His lips flap, but he's muttering to himself.

We cannot let the dictates of law or society inhibit us from approaching the newness of God's grace in our lives. Nicodemus wants to enter into a scholarly, safely distanced debate about the signs and the laws and the teachings about God, and Jesus wants him to die and be reborn into the faith of a baby. We don't need to understand how or why when we see evidence of God working in our lives; Jesus would have us instead have the delight and curiosity of a little one for whom life and the world still hold all its possibilities and potential. When babies grab onto something to get a closer look, which they do constantly, they never stop first to analyze or judge. They stick the thing right into their mouths! They know no fear, and they don't have to because they have parents who are watching closely and keeping them from harm.

Paul writes that as children of God, we need not revert to the fear of slaves but can blurt out, "Da-da!" and crawl right up to suffering and stick it in our mouths!

This Sunday, let's celebrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity by recognizing the mysteriously safe place into which God has graciously set us. We are children of God. *Nothing* can separate us from the love of God; so let's taste it all!

From Jean's Journal: "Through the preaching and the hearing of the Word, God is active, breaks our hearts, and draws us, so that through the preaching of the law we learn to know our sins and the wrath of God and experience genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in our hearts, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ there is kindled in us a spark of faith which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and comforts us with the promise of the Gospel. And in this way the Holy Spirit, who works all of this, is introduced

into our hearts."—Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II, Free Will. Phillip Melanchthon.

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7) June 25, 2000

Job 38:1–11
1 Samuel 17:(1a, 4–11, 19–23), 32–49
1 Samuel 17:57—18:5,10–16
Psalm 107:1–3, 23–32
2 Corinthians 6:1–13
Mark 4:35–41

Prayer of the Day: Gracious God, you provide us with all that we need. Help us, through your Word, to discover and delight in what you have given each of us, so that we may face all of our foes with confidence until the day of Jesus Christ.

First Reading

Last Sunday we were encouraged to grasp God's grace so that our sinfulness wouldn't dissuade us from testifying. This week, our texts dare us to face our fearsome foes with what God has given us. Paul exposes the greatest foe, to "accept the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor 6:1). This living and testifying stuff is getting interesting.

There are three Old Testament options: David facing Goliath, David facing Saul's wrath, or Job facing God in the whirlwind. Choosing one of the first two allows us to deepen the discussion of our covenant relationship with God. The Job text and Psalm response offer opportunity to sound the strains of Hebraic songs that Mark may have been humming when he wrote his Gospel. The David stories come around once every three years, this week only; we get one more crack at the Job 38 pericope on Proper 24. Any of the three will serve to add dimension to the Mark text.

In Mark 1:37, Simon searches out Jesus, who had found a solitary place to pray, and says, "Everyone is searching for you." It seems as if everyone is finding him. There's such a considerable crowd that Jesus has to push out in a boat to teach them.

At the end of the day, Jesus has to be tired after loudly lecturing from a bobbing boat. He directs his sailors to turn the boat around and cross the sea, and, while they follow orders, he supports his head on one of the seat cushions and falls asleep—perfectly natural.

Some readers of this story like to conjecture that Mark may have hummed Psalm 121—"He watching over Israel, slumbers not nor sleeps"—as he set up the suspense of God sleeping as a storm comes up. Is it that the son of God is sleeping or is it simply the natural course of the weather around the Sea of Galilee that stirs up the storm? If it were the first case, I would think Mark would use the opportunity to employ his ευθυς motif again: i.e., the son of God falls asleep in the boat, and suddenly Satan stirs up a storm. However, it's late in the day; it's a perfectly natural time for a sudden storm to come up on these notoriously stormy waters. Perhaps the writer wants us to focus on the disciples in the world instead of Jesus in the world.

The disciples shake Jesus awake, in panic, throwing politeness to the wind. It's not, "Sorry to have to wake you, Jesus, but we've got a problem here," but "Don't you care that we are perishing?"

There are two ways to interpret who the disciples mean by "we." It could be an exclusive "we." Perhaps the disciples think that only they, mere mortals, will drown and Jesus will not, and they obsess on their own safety, thinking that Jesus will somehow miraculously escape and leave them to die. Or it could be an inclusive "we." It could be

that the disciples are thinking that Jesus is so preoccupied with his ministry to the crowds that he is disregarding the impending danger to himself and his own disciples and would let them and himself perish. In either case, the disciples' fear is as loud and fierce as the storm!

When Jesus said, "Let's go across to the other side," "other boats were with him" (v. 36). Who were in the other boats? And what happens to the others in these other boats when the storm comes up? Perhaps Mark has them disappear from the view of the reader just as they disappeared from the view of the scared disciples in Jesus' boat and just the way others disappear when we ourselves turn inward in fear.

Jesus' address to the devilish storm is σιωπα, πεφιμωσο. It's the same command he gave, in 1:25, for an exorcism. We hear the sea chanty in Psalm 107 as the wind ceases. Then Jesus turns to address the stormy fear of his trembling crew, and it is calmed from dread (δεϵλοι in v. 40) to awe (ϵφοβηθησαν in v. 41).

Pastoral Reflections

Didn't the disciples do the right thing calling on Jesus? Isn't that what we teach our children to do? Isn't it an act of faith to turn to Jesus in the thick of a deadly storm?

However, Jesus rebukes his disciples, as he does the storm, for their lack of faith. Perhaps Jesus isn't talking about the disciples' lack of faith in him but about their lack of faith in themselves, in their own abilities. After all, diminutive David dueled gargantuan Goliath gloriously using faith in his ability with a sling and a stone and in his experience protecting sheep against predators. These disciples are professional fishermen. Haven't they mastered a boat against a storm before? Sure they have. But they lose faith in themselves when Jesus is in the boat.

When we come up against a foe or storm or persecution or threat or sadness or change of life or narrow-sighted hope—you know, when we encounter the stuff of life we have our own resources and experiences to muster for the battle. God doesn't want us to discount ourselves and to wait for some paranormal phenomenon to intercede for us or for us to rely on someone else's armor, like Saul dressing David in a too-heavy suit. God wants us to face our storms and weather them with what God has given us. Jesus didn't die on the cross and come to life again so that we would disappear from the picture! Scripture says, "With God nothing is impossible;" it doesn't say, "Without us, nothing is impossible."

Jesus doesn't lecture the disciples over the storm; he calms the storm and then turns to his disciples to teach them. However, we're only in the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel; the disciples are just beginning to learn.

From Jean's Journal: "If you're religiously inclined, you can see why they went even so far as to call him Messiah, the Lord's Anointed, the Son of God, and call him these things still, some of them. And even if you're not religiously inclined, you can see why it is you might give your immortal soul, if you thought you had one to give, to have been the one to raise that head a little from the hard deck and slip a pillow under it." —From Frederick Buechner's piece about Jesus in *Peculiar Treasures.*

Third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8) July 2, 2000

2 Samuel 1:1, 17–27
or Wisdom of Solomon 1:13–15; 2:23–24
or Lamentations 3:23–33
Psalm 30
2 Corinthians 8:7–15
Mark 5:21–43

Prayer of the Day: Creator God, thank you for the witness of your Word today that shows us the healing power of hope and of the will to live. May we cherish our lives as dearly as the woman who reached through the crowd just to touch the Savior. May our worship this morning be a means for us to touch you and give you glory.

First Reading

What jumps out of Mark is the unquenchable hope and lust to live of Jairus for his daughter and of the hemorrhaging woman. Indeed, they hold fast to the faith that God "does not delight in the death of the living" (Wisdom of Solomon 1:13b).

A crowd buzzes around Jesus, but Jairus walks right through and up to Jesus. We are told that he is a leader of the synagogue, but we are not told if he has been to the synagogue to offer any prayers for his ailing daughter. He dispenses with dignity and prostrates himself, begging repeatedly. No crowd nor office nor even dignity is going to get in the way of this loving father who will go to any lengths for the life of his little girl. So Jesus goes with him. No further discussion. No considering if there might be any higher priorities among the masses who are actually present. No assessing the details of the situation. Jesus moves quicker than Mark can say ευθυς! We suspect right away that Jairus' little girl is going to pull through.

While they are on the way, some woman, who has exhausted medical and monetary resources, quite literally hangs onto the thread of hope. We know nothing else about her. How long has she known about Jesus, or did she just catch wind of a healer passing by and go for it? Is she a Jew? A Gentile? A disciple? In any case, she makes her way through the crowd and comes up behind Jesus just in order to touch his clothes. That's hope. That's will to live. That's confession of faith. The power that ran through Jesus must have been God's heart racing with delight. Lub-dub, kapow! she's healed. Jesus serves as the mere conduit; this woman through her hope taps into a direct line with God. Even Jesus seems a little startled.

Most startling is that we don't hear anything more about her. Or do we? In Mark 6:56, people come out of the woodwork, begging to touch Jesus' cloak. Maybe this unnamed, unspeaking woman goes on to become a most effective witness!

Oh, yeah—needless to say, Jairus' daughter pulls through.

Pastoral Reflections

One might think that, after all that Saul had done to threaten David's life, David would be relieved to hear of Saul's death. Instead, he orders the Amalekite who had aided Saul in suicide to be slain, and he tears his clothes and cries in lament. By presuming inevitable death, the Amalekite killed any hope for God's granting redemption for Saul. When one believes in God, one need not choose death over hope.

Hope saw Abraham through to fatherhood, Joseph through prison, and the Hebrews through slavery, through wandering, through unreliable priests and judges and kings, through exile, through the rebuilding of their cities and temple all the way to the Redeemer. Hope restored life to Jairus' daughter and health to a desperate woman in

the crowd.

Maybe God has brought someone to the pews this morning whose hope needs stoking. For them, these Scriptures will be hungrily consumed, and more stories of hope can be shared. Let's not presume that there's no way to reach them; let's not choose death over life. The thing about hope is that a little or a lot goes the whole way.

In the beginning of my seminary internship, my supervising pastor gave me a list of names of people in the congregation to visit. One day, I set out to visit one.

Vilma lived in a complex of senior apartments. As I walked down the driveway of the complex, I saw a woman walking toward me. It was Vilma. She was so eager to tell me her story and share her love of God that she was walking out to meet me!

Vilma grew up in Estonia. When she was a young woman and pregnant, her family had to flee the country in a boat. A storm came up, and it became necessary to lighten the cargo. Vilma had to throw overboard her chest of family treasures, which included the family silver. Vilma shared with me that she trusted in God. She knew, in her trust, as she let go of the chest, that God would provide for her.

You silly Amalekite, you silly hurting ones, if this woman could be so anxious to share her love of God with me, a perfect stranger, how much more so do you think God is anxious to share his love with you? Jesus went immediately with Jairus. God healed this woman at the mere act of her touching Jesus' clothes. It doesn't take much faith at all on our part for God to eagerly respond and show us all that love.

From Jean's Journal: The only ones who care that God answers prayer are those who believe. (from my thoughts during a sermon at a synod assembly)

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9) July 9, 2000

2 Samuel 5:1–5, 9–10
Ezekiel 2:1–5
Psalm 123
2 Corinthians 12:2–10
Mark 6:1–13

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, you are the Creator of every day. Forgive us for not trusting that you are in the everyday.

First Reading

In disheartening contrast to the powerful acts of healing we witnessed last week, this week we watch Jesus' wielding of wisdom and wonder wane for want of welcome from the folks in his hometown. When they hear the wisdom of his teaching, they are bowled over (ἐκπλήσσομαι), apparently because he was one of them! He grew up with them. They knew his parent(s) and siblings. They'd probably heard Mary tell stories about toddler Jesus. Maybe Jesus' babysitters were in the crowd: "I used to change his swaddling cloths, and now he's a miracle worker? Yeah, sure. We live in insignificant, old Nazareth. Do you expect me to believe that a kid I used to babysit is significant enough to possess God's wisdom and power?"

Jesus reasons, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." Why? Why is it that we are scandalized to accept that the powerful can spring from our own midst?

Jesus could do no marvels there except to marvel at their unbelief. Are we seeing a version of "With God nothing is impossible," that is, "With God plus your faith nothing is impossible"? Is this new covenant? Sounds like old covenant.

Jesus sends the Twelve equipped with little more than faith to stay only where they are accepted. Jesus' family is changing to those who have faith; we met one of his "daughters" last week. His hometown dissolves; his new home is wherever there's belief. Relationship in Christ is thickened not by blood but by trust.

Pastoral Reflections
Like Nicodemus, we credit God when we see paranormal signs. Like the disciples, we cry to Jesus in a storm. Like Jairus and the desperate woman, we plead to God for healing. We may even, in faith, be like Paul who writes, "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong." In times of calamity or crisis, many of us can flex enough faith muscles to hope there's a God who will help us. But do we believe that that same, mighty, miracle-working God is with us every day and in the everyday, that with God, who created the heavens and the earth, nothing is insignificant?

If someone you grew up with claimed to be called by God, would you accept her calling? If someone carrying a stick and wearing sandals were to knock on your door and claim that Jesus sent him, would you invite him in? Today's Gospel confronts us with the omnipresence of God's love. If God sent Jesus so that neither sin nor death would separate us from his love, can't we jump to the conclusion that God doesn't want our estimation of our insignificance to separate us from his love either?

From Jean's Journal: "The outside of Poverello House was old and kind of torn up. On the inside, it was clean. I bet it felt weird to go from a dirty outside to a clean inside. There was a painted picture of God on the wall inside. I like it, but didn't expect to see a picture like that up there." —Shauna, in a quote from the February 1991 newsletter of Poverello House.

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 10) July 16, 2000

2 Samuel 6:1–5, 12b–19
Amos 7:7–15
Psalm 85:8–13
Ephesians 1:3–14
Mark 6:14–29

Prayer of the Day: Holy and Mighty God, help us to repent of actions that have torn us from giving you glory always and in all ways. In Jesus' name we pray.

First Reading
In the 2 Samuel option for the Old Testament reading, the new Israeli king, David, dances before the ark of the covenant on the event of its return to Israel. It had been captured by the Philistines back in the battle in which Eli's sons, despicable priests, were killed. The Psalm response, a liturgy possibly for processing the ark into the sanctuary, asks, "Who is the king of glory?" These texts are nice leads into the Mark pericope. Indeed, who is the king of glory? And what kind of glory?

Rather than acknowledge the error of his ways and repent, Herod chooses to fear that the prophet he had beheaded—the one he had imprisoned for calling him on his errant, dysfunctional use of power—has come back from the dead to give him a little hell on earth!

What kind of glory is it to behead a religious ascetic because of a public promise you made to your dancing stepdaughter? Herod doesn't even want to go through with

the request. He knows John is a righteous and holy man; he even likes to listen to him. But his wife, Herodias, has grabbed the opportunity she has been waiting for, and he has to save face among his guests. His guests are members of the government, the military, and the leading citizens. How impressed could they be by Herod's impulsive oath? Yet, when he makes it in front of them, he puts himself between the proverbial rock and hard place: he must see the oath through or confess to mockery of the binding nature of an oath—not a wise loophole to create in the presence of professionals who know how to use loopholes. He is exceedingly sad. (In 14:34, Jesus uses the same word to describe his soul, "My soul is very sorrowful, even unto death.")

Herod's name means "heroic." He certainly isn't living up to his name, nor are his glory or power assets we covet at this point.

There only two birthdays in the Bible—this one, when Herod calls for John's head, and the Pharoah's (Gen 40:20), when he calls for the heads of the baker and the cupbearer who are in prison with Joseph. Can you believe it? On the two birthdays mentioned in God's word we have death; when the Word was born, babies died by the hand of another Herod scared about his grip on glory, and, through the Word's gasp of death then life, God graciously grants us death and birth.

Pastoral Reflections

Herod went to the banquet hall to be alone for a few minutes.

As soon as he entered the cold, dark room, he remembered when he'd come back later that night. Servants were scrubbing the table, and when Herod waved his hand to dismiss them, he hadn't missed the subtle glances they shot to each other as they turned and left the room. He could have reprimanded them for such impertinence, except they were right. And he'd had enough of being the judge of right.

Great, mighty judge. Great, powerful Herod. He can command anything. "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it."

His head ached, and as he rubbed his head, trying to get the blood to flow to the pain, all at once all the events of that night raced back to him: the music, the blur of the scarves, the goblets raised high when he swore to grant her any wish, the sloshy puddle of blood surrounding the severed head, little Herodias' little hands taking hold of the platter, his wife's steel expression.

Herod remembered sitting at his esteemed place at the head of the table that night, alone, staring at the flame of the candle he'd relit. Well, he wasn't really staring at the candle. He was staring past it to the past, through the past, to the thick darkness of his own fate. He had sat and stared that night until the candle burned all the way down and and the flame sizzled out in the pool of wax.

Herod sat down at the opposite end of the table this time. Voices kept turning over and over in his head, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead. It is Elijah. It is a prophet, like the prophets of old. They are casting out demons. They are healing the sick. They say that all should repent."

His shoulders slumped and his back ached. Once again, oh, once again, he couldn't shake that gnawing emptiness that came over him every time he wished he could just go down into the prison and listen to John. He had so liked to listen to him.

Herod caught his breath suddenly. John often said, "Repent." Repent, thought Herod. Repent. What would that do? It can't undo. Can it?

From Jean's Journal: "The only thing worth writing about is the human heart in conflict with itself." —William Faulkner

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11) July 23, 2000

2 Samuel 7:1–14a
Jeremiah 23:1–6
Psalm 23
Ephesians 2:11–22
Mark 6:30–34, 53–56

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, many walls divide us between the way we live our life and the abundant life you built for us in your kingdom. Through your Word, give us compassion to break down the walls and know your peace.

First Reading

On first reading, we notice a twenty-verse gap in the Gospel pericope. Why? We look to what the Lectionary, not the Gospel writer, is helping us see in God's Word.

Nicodemus stays in the shadows; Jairus apparently got what he came for; the Pharisees and priests are commencing their plot to kill him; his hometown is offended at him; his disciples are restless. So much for everyone you think Jesus would use as foundation to build God's kingdom.

However, there's this ubiquitous crowd. They run around a lake to meet Jesus in a lonely place. They rush around wherever he goes, carrying their sick on mats. They lay their sick in marketplaces, like tempting baubles for a miracle healer to stop and work a miracle on. They beg to touch the fringe of his cloak.

And Jesus comes to them with compassion and teaches them. He teaches them! They come for physical healing, and Jesus treats them, physically, mentally, and spiritually, to make them whole.

The Lectionary gives two options for Old Testament readings: God's response to David's prophet about David's desire to build God's house or Jeremiah's prophecy of a good shepherd who will restore to the fold those scattered by woeful shepherds. The Epistle speaks of uniting those scattered by dividing walls of hostility and building one new humanity, one new household of God.

We have brick and building terms. We have an image of Jesus building his kingdom not from the religious elite or well-connected but from the needy. Jesus breaks down the dividing wall of the law that scatters the infirm and broken. Under the old law, riches and health are the rewards from God; under Jesus' new law, need is compensated with compassion.

We have kingly terms. Jesus sees the crowd and has compassion for them. They were scattered sheep, and Jesus gathers them; except that Jesus is gathering the needy, not the "religious." There seems to be an end to the faithful, in the Old Testament and in Jesus' story, but there's never an end to the needy—they are as numerous as the stars in the sky. Are we seeing the huge family promised to Abraham coming to be?

Pastoral Reflections

Is God building the kingdom through our needs, not our religion? If so, and if there is indeed no end to our needs, then God is building the kingdom with most effective brick! God breaks down the dividing wall. Walls fall down when need flares up.

We need to be cautious today not to preach to those who are not in the pews but to open the hearts of the faithful to the missional compassion of our Savior and to open their eyes to see that God is building a kingdom, even outside of church walls.

I was driving home one late afternoon. I stopped and was waiting for the light to change. Suddenly, two cars collided in the intersection. One car swerved but hit the other and flew up in the air, hit the traffic

light pole, and crashed down. Immediately, commuters got out of their cars to help. Pedestrians left their paths and ran to help. Crisis created compassion. Commuters became community. No religions or denominations or doctrines divided. Someone needed help, and people helped, people who, before the accident, were barely aware of each other's existence. Was this Christ's kingdom? It wasn't an unusual scene for an accident, but would it have happened were there no Christ who built a kingdom on compassion toward need? We can't know, of course. It's not helpful to dwell in hypotheticals; let's stick with what our Scriptures tell us.

Our Scriptures tell us that God doesn't want to be confined inside walls and breaks dividing walls down. Our Scriptures tell us that Jesus healed and taught the sick and needy while the well and religious turned away. Maybe the pastoral thing to do today would be to send our folks out of the church to see the kingdom!

From Jean' Journal: "I gave up fire for form, until I was cold" (Robert Frost). "The church exists for those who aren't its members" (notes from Discipling the Parish class, January 1991).

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 12) July 30, 2000

2 Samuel 11:1–15
2 Kings 4:42–44
Psalm 145:10–18
Ephesians 3:14–21
John 6:1–21

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, feed our hungry hearts on your Word today, that we may find the inner strength to always come to you for whatever we need.

First Reading

Why, in the year of Mark and when we are right at the story, do we leave Mark's Gospel and get John's version of the feeding of the 5,000? We skipped over the story in Mark last week. Once again, the Lectionary speaks over the Gospel.

Unique to John's telling is the kid with the lunch box. The word John uses, παιδαριον, occurs only here in the entire New Testament. It occurs twice in the Septuagint. Reuben utters it, in Gen 37:30, when he reports to his brothers that Joseph is no longer in the pit, and it occurs in reference to Gehazi, Elisha's servant, in 2 Kgs 4:12—a few verses before the second Old Testament option for this week. It's a derogatory word, a slave word. Was John thinking of the Elisha-feeding-a-crowd story when he used this word? Or had he hit the Greek thesaurus to find an apt diminutive?

It is a great word considering the put-down crowd we have been focusing on and the notion that Jesus is building a kingdom out of this crowd. This little scrap of an insignificant has all that is needed—barley bread (grain of the poor, not elite wheat) and fish jerky (not ιχθυς, but οψαριον, also unique to John's Gospel, occurring only here

and in chapter 21, in Jesus' post-resurrection beach breakfast). We see a new version of David vs. Goliath: Insignificant Ration vs. Massive Hunger.

We are shown here that, in God's kingdom, there is no too insignificant. It's hard to claim, however. The crowd sees the sign, but instead of letting themselves be empowered by it, they clamor to give all the power to Jesus. Jesus withdraws. And then we see the disciples, again in a boat, again in a storm. This time, however, they are rowing! Jesus appears to them. He calms their fears, but he doesn't calm the storm; he doesn't even get into the boat with them. They want him to, but suddenly they find they've rowed themselves ashore.

Pastoral Reflections

The hunger that our texts address is not of the stomach, which is easily dispelled, but of the heart. The crowds weren't coming to Jesus to be fed food, but for healing and wholeness. Jesus knows it. In verse 6, we are told that Jesus already knows what he is going to do to satisfy the crowd. For all we know, he had caught the child's rations out of the corner of his eye as the crowd approached and waited until the child was within eyeshot of the disciples before he asked them where they could buy bread. Jesus allows the disciples to be resourceful and the crowds to be fed well on what they already have.

Paul talks about strengthening our inner beings, about feeding our hearts with faith, rooted and grounded in love, so that, when need be, we will have the resources to ask of the God who can accomplish abundantly far more than we can even conceive.

Sometimes, we pray too timidly. We stop at our limited knowledge, feeding our starving hearts a skimpy ration of hope. Our God created everything in heaven and earth. Our Christ is the incarnation of God's unfathomable love. We can trust God to give us whatever we need. We cannot ask for something that God cannot provide. The fools say in their hearts, "There is no God." The wise say, "Let us pray."

An amazing thing happens to our needs with Jesus. Our needs become the means by which we come to Jesus and by which our hearts come to trust in God. When we are weak, we do become strong!

From Jean's Journal: "Belief in God is putting all your eggs under one chicken" (a thought while taking notes in Systematics). "Evil is that I want to limit where grace comes from" (note from R. Goeser class, 3/19/92).

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 13) August 6, 2000

2 Samuel 11:26–12:13a
Exodus 16:2–4, 9–15
Psalm 78:23–29
Ephesians 4:1–16
John 6:24–35

Prayer of the Day: Holy Jesus, perfect king, in your mercy, turn our hearts to you, so that, when our faith fails, we may continue in the strength of yours. Lead us, glorious Savior, to put our trust in God.

First Reading

Jesus is become curiously evasive.

He has compassion on them because they are like sheep without a shepherd, but when he sees that the crowd wants to make him king, their shepherd, he withdraws. He performs a sign to feed the people on what they need, but when he sees that they are beginning to say that he is the prophet they've been waiting for, he withdraws. His dis-

ciples invite him to get into their boat with them—this time they are using their resources to survive the sea storm—but he doesn't. This week, the people crowd into boats looking for Jesus. Forget Waldo. Where's Jesus?

If it's hard to believe that Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fish, think about 5,000 people boarding boats to cross the lake! If 100 people could fit in each boat, it would take at least 50 boats. If only 50 could fit, then at least 100 boats. If 25 . . . well, let's not dwell on the math. How is it that such a sizeable fleet just happens to come from Tiberius?

Instead of trying to fathom the incredible, literal picture John is painting, let's play with the idea of the kingdom Jesus is building with this crowd. After all, the crowd and the Lectionary recall the ancestors wandering in the wilderness, where God shaped them into a nation. Let's see what kind of a kingdom Jesus is shaping and what kind of shepherd Jesus is. Let's see what Jesus would have us do.

Jesus answers the crowd, "You're not looking to me as a prophet, but as a meal ticket." His rebuke to tempter Satan is muzak to our ears, "Man cannot live by bread alone." His bottom line, "Believe." Hmmm. Same bottom line for Israel in the wilderness. Hmmm. First rule in the book!

Our good king is leading the people to be ruled by their hearts, to find their inner strength, which is significant strength. Our good king is building a strong kingdom, not a strong king-dom. Above all—above every sign, every action, every move Jesus makes—he is leading our hearts to trust in God for everything, just as he has.

Pastoral Reflections

It is hard to lead people to trust in God above everything else. It is the greatest foe that Paul talked about, to "accept the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor 6:1).

We know that this is the First Commandment; we know that God is good and God is love and God is Most High and God is Judge. We see signs of God's goodness and love and power and justice, but we continue to be children, tossed to and fro, putting our trust in whatever we come across. We are still babies crawling around sticking everything into our mouths.

We can't keep the first rule in the book. And, under the old law, if you can't keep the first rule, you will break all the other rules. Under the new law of Jesus Christ, through grace, God has given us a Savior. Jesus is indeed the bread of life. He took on our inability to keep the first rule in the book and restored our right relationship with God. Our king is not merely a role model; he is our savior.

Martin Luther, in "The Freedom of a Christian," sums it up:

> Therefore, if we recognize the great and precious things which are given us, as Paul says, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us," our hearts will be filled by the Holy Spirit with the love which makes us free, joyful, almighty workers and conquerors over all tribulations, servants of our neighbors, and yet lords of all. For those who do not recognize the gifts bestowed upon them through Christ, however, Christ has been born in vain; they go their way with their works and shall never come to taste or feel those things. Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked God's mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.

As God's kingdom in Christ, we can undertake Christ's saving work in the world and live lives "worthy of the calling to which [we] have been called," and we can trust that this is the most glorious of callings. Now we know who is the king of glory. Through the reign of our king, the Advocate has indeed "prove[d] the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment."

From Jean's Journal:

Batter my heart, three personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine,
and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand; o'erthrow me
and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn
and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love You and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

—*John Donne*

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