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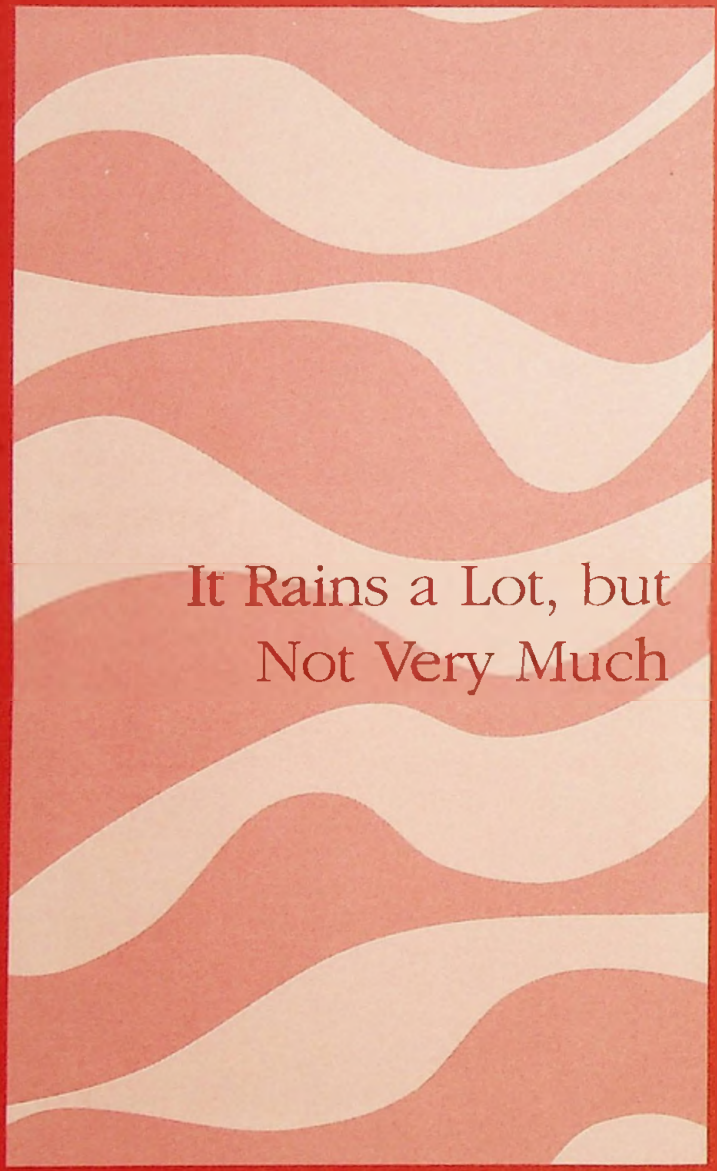

It Rains a Lot, but Not Very Much

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Drawings by Jack Eldredge

It Rains a Lot, but Not Very Much

I write from Cambridge, England, where I am on a sabbatical leave, working on a commentary on the Books of Chronicles. Thanks to the Gulf Stream, almost every day it clouds up, rains briefly, then the sun comes out, it clouds up again, and on it goes. But despite its frequency, I have never experienced a downpour, and Cambridge currently suffers from what locals call a minor drought.

I work at Tyndale House, a wonderful biblical library sponsored by Evangelicals and home for about twenty-five scholars from around the world who work on some aspect of biblical studies. At eleven and four we stop for tea, but the rest of the day each has his or her niche, with no book more than seventy-five feet from our desks. Tyndale himself was the first to translate the Bible from the original languages into English, for which he was burned at the stake, with his last words being "Lord, open the eyes of the king of England." As I bike to work I cross Cranmer Avenue. Cranmer was responsible for the *Book of Common Prayer* and was later tortured to recant his Protestant errors. But when he was burned at the stake, he held his offending right hand in the fire first, thus recovering his dignity and undoing the efforts to thwart the Protestant cause. These were giants in the land.

John Rosenberg examines the significance for the church of the current quest for the historical Jesus. The seminar has moved out into the public realm a conversation that has been taking place in the halls of academe for more than one hundred fifty years. What appears to distinguish the different proponents of various approaches to the historical Jesus from one another is their attitude toward the church. Marcus Borg, cited here as a positive example, believes that a greater awareness of contemporary biblical scholarship can provide a way for people to be both thoughtful and Christian, and he is also interested in how Christians understand and live out their faith. For him the historical Jesus is a model for discipleship. Borg's belief in the ongoing reality of the Risen Christ in the life of the Christian community results in a fresh understanding of the authority of Scripture. That authority lies in its ability to be a means of the Risen Christ's ongoing presence in the community, calling forth and shaping the lives of contemporary disciples. The ongoing quest for the pre-Easter Jesus helps keep the subversive memory of Jesus alive in the church.

Ralph W. Klein explores the significance of the biblical passages that stand behind the lyrics of Canticle 16 in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Psalm 89 affirms God's loyalty and faithfulness at a time when Israel had lost everyone and when her enemies were taunting the heels of God's anointed one. The worshipping community needs the memorable refrain of Canticle 16 ("I will sing the story of your love, O Lord"), based on Ps 89:1, but it also needs the other fifty-one verses of Psalm 89, which enable suffering children of God to tell God what exactly is on their minds. The quotations from Jeremiah 33 in this canticle affirm that God's promises will come true within my lifetime, in this world, within my space, and that the proper place for praise and thanksgiving for God's goodness is in the public assembly, in the presence of fellow believers. Finally, Psalm 100's affirmation of God's goodness, loyalty, and faithfulness makes it a fitting final word in the canticle. We sing such a canticle off key if we sing only solo and not in community, if our story of God's love does not lead to transformation, if we do not acknowledge the jarring tensions between the harsh realities of life and the truths we say about God, if we do not hold God to his promises, and if we do not see ourselves as agents called to implement the divine promise.

O. E. Alana uses an analysis of the healing miracles of Jesus to gain insight about healers and healing in Africa today. In four of the healing miracles recorded in Mark Jesus directed that they be kept secret, and this is related to the whole idea of the "messianic secret." In John, however, Jesus publicly declared himself to be the Messiah almost everywhere he went. The historical Jesus sought to dissociate himself from the military connotations of the messianic hope or any idea of overthrowing Roman suzerainty. Healers today in the church of Yorubaland, Nigeria, give maximum publicity to the healing activities of the church. Assurances of deliverance from all forces of evil are promised to the masses. Emphasis on testimonies by those who have been cured suggests a kind of self-glorification on the part of those involved in Christian healing. Healing activities have become opportunities for the evangelists or prophets to boost their own egos. Healing deserves adequate attention in the church, and news about this must be shared. Such publicity, however, must be Christ-centered.

Kristin Johnston Sutton comments on a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins that has a profound message about where God's beauty is embodied in the physical world. Hopkins praises God for the very imperfections that usually decrease the worth of a creature. He sees the glory of God's perfection in the humility of creaturely imperfection. In our culture the gods we worship are youth and beauty; many strive to achieve the epitome of those characteristics without deviation. Much of what we see as imperfections or flaws in our bodies are actually quite beautiful in God's sight. And for that we ought to praise God.

Donald Flatt tells the stories of great, common saints he has known and asks what is behind the self-giving lifestyle and heartwarming grace of such people. The answer comes in their wisdom, righteousness, and deep experience of the love of God. Life comes to all believers through baptism and through the daily renewal of the sacramental presence of the indwelling Christ. Grace brings us salvation and also growth in the knowledge of Christ. God consummates his work by Incarnation, not just in Bethlehem but in the converted lives and ministries of all his people. Almost without exception faith came into our lives through the loving ministry of a human servant of the Lord. We too are freed not just for our own benefit but to help many others to freedom and new life. The church's primary outreach is through the witness in the whole lives of the followers of Christ.

Jeff Drake examines Luther's concept of God's Word and illustrates how he uses this in a Christmas sermon. Luther's concept of the Word is always alive and full of power at the same time. When God comes to us we are confronted with a dialectical Word, not two Words, but one coherent Word of law and gospel. For Luther the concept of the Word as promise incorporates also the concepts of faith and fulfillment. What is of utmost importance for Luther's understanding of the Word is that it must be verbalized, said out loud. Too often what passes as preaching fails to understand what Scripture is, fails to address the gathered assembly which is there to hear the Word, and presumes that because the Bible is used the speaker possesses the authority of God. If one equates the Word of God with Scripture, one confuses heavenly things with things historical. God's Word is self-authenticating and acts when it is spoken out loud and received in faith.

Someone once said that England and the United States are two countries separated by a common language. My favorite example is an announcement in a church bulletin here inviting us to a slap-up buffet. What might one expect—a potluck, last-minute cooking, something thrown together? No, slap-up means "first class." During the same service the priest announced the forthcoming marriage of a man designated as a bachelor and the woman as a spinster. Such language, I learned later, is only used even here in church. While England is far down the road toward secularism, I have been impressed by the vigor and hospitality of the Anglican churches I have attended, and, of course, by the breadth of liturgical style and theological emphasis within this church. Not to mention the one Lord, one faith, and one baptism that holds us all together, including you and me.

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

"But, Pastor . . .*": The Jesus Seminar Comes to Church

John Rosenberg
Vancouver, Washington

**"But Pastor, if Jesus didn't really say the Lord's Prayer, where did it come from?"*

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

Since the beginning of the Enlightenment, the church has been called upon to articulate its understanding of how the Bible continues to be authoritative for its faith and life in a culture that, at least in its European and North American expressions, operates with a radically different worldview from the one reflected in the Bible. Some of the more celebrated events in this ongoing crisis have involved the confrontation between literal readings of the Genesis creation accounts and the evolutionary understanding of life reflected in the work of Darwin, Huxley, and others. Yet despite this celebrated focus on origins, the so-called "quest for the historical Jesus" has generated at least as much controversy within the church. While no event in the ongoing discussion regarding the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" has captured the popular imagination to quite the extent of the infamous Scopes "Monkey Trial," there are signs that this may be changing. Jesus is big news these days, and suddenly the arcane world of biblical scholarship has become a media event.

Much of the credit (or blame, depending upon your perspective) for this turn of events belongs to New Testament scholar Robert W. Funk and several hundred other colleagues known collectively as the "Jesus Seminar." Funk and his cohorts have made it a goal to generate public (not simply scholarly or churchly) interest in questions regarding the origin and historical value of the New Testament picture of Jesus. Using controversial methodologies to reach fresh conclusions, Funk and his colleagues have generated a great deal of interest both inside and outside the church in what Jesus "really said" and "really did." Because a good deal of their work now reaches the religion pages of many local newspapers, it is not at all uncommon for pastors to find themselves confronted with questions like the one in the title.[1] Jesus is big news, and more people are reading more books and asking more questions about him than ever before.

Pastors are faced with several options. They can take the outraged, confrontational stance of most conservative, evangelical Christians, pointing out the biases of the Jesus Seminar and the flaws in its method-

[1] Robert Marquand, "Did Jesus say the Lord's Prayer?" *Christian Science Monitor* (October 27, 1988). Gustav Niebuhr, "The Jesus Seminar Courts Notoriety," *The Christian Century* (November 23, 1988), 1060–61.

Jesus is big news, and more people are reading more books and asking more questions about him than ever before.

ology and claims, and defend the church's traditional, orthodox Christological claims. Or they can make an effort to try to avoid the topic altogether, thereby continuing the conspiracy of silence that has reigned in most churches regarding biblical authority for many years. Or, like Gameliel, they can critically examine the discussion taking place in the media to see what, if anything, might be "of God."

Ultimately, the Jesus Seminar raises questions in which all of us have more than a passing interest: Is it possible to maintain the authority of Scripture without bracketing out the modern or postmodern world? Can one be, in Van Harvey's phrase, both a historian and a believer? And how can one defend the church's traditional christological claims when the metaphysical understandings that undergird them are no longer shared by the vast majority of people in North America, including most Christians?

Like it or not, the work of the Jesus Seminar provides us with the occasion to continue a conversation in our congregations about contemporary critical biblical studies and how they represent both a challenge and a contribution to the life of the church and its ongoing theological reflection. This is the strategy I recommend as both the most honest and the most helpful.

A new understanding of faith

There are good reasons for choosing this course. Lay people are hungry for opportunities to think and converse theologically and critically about their faith. In the past eight years, my Sunday morning adult class has engaged in at least one "historical Jesus" study every year, usually during Lent. Over the years, we've made reference to and utilized the popular work of such people as Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, N. T. Wright, and others. Since their works are readily available at bookstores and the local library, people have been free to pursue the study on their own, and I've tried to keep the conversation open in order to answer questions and make suggestions as many of them "meet Jesus again for the first time."

Taking advantage of the Jesus Seminar's penchant for publicity ("Love me or hate me—just don't forget my name!"), last year we cooperated with a local Episcopal parish and invited the public to join us in a series of videotaped presentations and discussions entitled *Jesus @ 2000*. Meeting every Friday noon during Lent to accommodate downtown workers on their lunch hour, the series culminated on Good Friday, when a "standing room only" crowd of community members heard Jesus scholar and local celebrity Marcus Borg give a public talk on the historical and theological meaning of the death of Jesus. A handful came back for the Easter Vigil the next night, and several are now enrolled in the catechumenate program of our church as candidates for baptism.

Discussing the Jesus Seminar also provides pastors and religious educators with the opportunity to introduce interested members of the congregation to contemporary historical-critical biblical studies. This can have a salutary effect on the congregation in at least two ways. For one thing, it is one

way to address the latent fundamentalist heresy that simmers just beneath the surface in most congregations, fueled by television evangelists and direct-mail appeals. Second, it provides a liberating alternative for lay people whose "natural literalism"[2] has made it necessary for them to bracket out their beliefs (or suspicions) about the Bible from their day-to-day view of how the world actually works. When this happens, it is possible for Christian faith to be transformed from simple intellectual assent to a series of more or less believable propositional truths about God into a living relationship with the Risen Christ that results in a life of just and compassionate discipleship.[3]

The Jesus Seminar and its critics

By now, most pastors are familiar with the Jesus Seminar. Begun in 1985 by famed but controversial New Testament scholar Robert Funk along with John Dominic Crossan, the Jesus Seminar is most famous for its well-publicized technique of using colored marbles to "vote" on the historicity of the sayings and deeds attributed to Jesus in the four canonical Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas. The results have been published in two volumes, *The Five Gospels* and *The Acts of Jesus*.[4] Like most entrepreneurial ventures in the late twentieth century, this one is compete with newsletter (*The Fourth R*), catalog, regular gatherings, and a web page (http://westarinstitute.org/).

Several things can be said at the outset about the Jesus Seminar. In the first place, for those who don't know Robert Funk, any doubt about where he is coming from can be erased by simply reading the dedication pages of the two volumes in question. *The Five Gospels* is dedicated to Galileo Galilei ("who altered our view of the heavens forever"), Thomas Jefferson ("who took scissors and paste to the gospels"), and David Friederich Strauss ("who pioneered the quest for the historical Jesus"). *The Acts of Jesus* is dedicated "to all those who have wrestled patiently with their doubts through a long, dark night of discontent anxiously awaiting a glimmer of honest illumination and to those who have dared to pioneer the way across a minefield of theological issues." Robert Funk is no friend of the institutional church, nor does he claim to be.

What he and his colleagues have managed to do, however, is to move out into the public realm a conversation that has been taking place in the musty halls of academe for more than 150 years regarding biblical authority and the nature of historical truth. It is a patronizing insult to the intelligence of most lay persons to assume that they don't have questions about how to understand the Bible in a post-Enlightenment world. Fundamentalists have made it very clear where they stand in this conversation. The rest of us, I fear, have yet to come clean. Robert Funk has begun a conversation that we should have joined with the laity a long time ago. Indeed, if my own experience is any indication, our laity are longing for just such a conversation. Thanks to Funk's colored marbles, there is no way to avoid it now.

Funk is not without his critics. One of the most trenchant is Duke New Testament

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[2] *Jesus at 2000*, ed. Marcus J. Borg (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 122ff.

[3] Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 17.

[4] *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, ed. Robert W. Funk and Roy W. Hoover (New York: Macmillan, 1993), and *The Acts of Jesus: What Did Jesus Really Do?* ed. Robert W. Funk (San Francisco: Harper, 1998).

scholar Richard B. Hays. In an extended and much celebrated review essay on *The Five Gospels*, Hays concludes:

> The critical study of the historical Jesus is an important task—perhaps important for reasons theological as well as historical—but *The Five Gospels* does not advance that task significantly, nor does it represent a fair picture of the current state on this problem. Some of its purported revelations are old news, and many of its novel claims are at best dubious.[5]

Another critic is Luke Timothy Johnson of Emory University, who summarizes the main line of his argument in the title of his 1996 book, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels.*[6] In an epilogue on critical scholarship and the church, Johnson alludes to the declared animosity of the Jesus Seminar to the Jesus of the televangelists as "too much shaped in the direction of the divine by later doctrine" and "too much a figure of eschatology." While the critique may be germane, the strategy is wrong, writes Johnson. "But what the Seminar failed to understand was that these images—if they are, indeed, seen as negative—would best be criticized from within the Gospel narratives themselves, not by constructing an 'alternative fiction,' or an image of Jesus recoverable only by dismantling the texts."[7]

Making distinctions: Marcus Borg

When thinking about the arguments and claims of the Jesus Seminar and other contemporary critics of the "traditional" picture of Jesus, distinctions are helpful. For example, many of the critical assumptions that guide the thinking of the members of the Jesus Seminar are shared by scholars like Hays and Johnson, as both of their critiques make clear. What appears to distinguish the different proponents of various approaches to New Testament scholarship and the historical Jesus from one another is their attitude toward the church. Scholars like Funk and Burton Mack are bent on undercutting "Christianity's claim to be the religion of Jesus of Nazareth."[8] Their agenda includes separating Jesus from the early Christian movement that grew up in response to his death and the belief in his resurrection and imminent return.

On the other hand, Marcus Borg, along with John Dominic Crossan perhaps the most celebrated member of the Jesus Seminar, has a very different agenda that, at least on the face of it, is not so different from Johnson's. Borg believes that a greater awareness of contemporary biblical scholarship can "provide a way for people to be both thoughtful and Christian, rather than having to choose between the two. It can help to make the Bible an open book again."[9]

But Borg's agenda is even more basic. He believes that taking the historical Jesus seriously "can shape the church's discipleship today."[10] As a professing Christian and member of an Episcopal parish (as he often

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[5] Richard B. Hays, "The Corrected Jesus," *First Things*, no. 43 (May 1994), 48.

[6] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996). A good summary of his main arguments can be found in Johnson's "The Jesus Seminar's misguided quest for the historical Jesus," *The Christian Century* (January 3–10, 1996), 16–22.

[7] Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, 176.

[8] Charlotte Allen, "The Search for a No-frills Jesus," *The Atlantic Monthly* (December 1996).

[9] Marcus J. Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Church," *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 178–79.

states publicly, "I don't cross my fingers when I recite the Nicene Creed each Sunday morning"), Borg is interested in how Christians understand and live out their faith. For him, the historical Jesus is a model for discipleship:

> What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus? It means to take seriously what he took seriously, to be *like him* in some sense. It is what St. Paul meant when he said, "Be imitators of Christ." What Jesus was like as a figure of history becomes a model for discipleship, illuminating and incarnating the vision of life to which he called his followers.[11]

Borg's commitment to the church and especially to the renewal of the laity is well known. He is a popular and frequent speaker at churches throughout the country. By his own admission, his favorite part of these "talks," as he calls them, is the question-and-answer period. What is remarkable is how respectfully Borg treats even his most critical questioners and how seriously he takes their questions, especially with regard to the life of faith.

Borg is also in regular conversation with his critics. In February 1996, he participated in a well-publicized debate via the Internet with Johnson. He has also responded to Will Willimon[12] as well as to other critics.[13] His latest effort at keeping the conversation on the historical Jesus alive in the church is a volume entitled *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*, which he coauthored with British New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, both a friend and a critic of some of Borg's ideas.[14] If they've done nothing else, by coauthoring this volume, Borg and Wright have proven that it is possible for two committed Christians to have profoundly different notions regarding the historical Jesus and the authority of Scripture and still maintain a lively, respectful, and civil relationship with one another. That in itself is a worthy accomplishment.

The post-Easter Jesus and the authority of Scripture

At the heart of Borg's work is the distinction he makes between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus. Borg prefers this terminology as being more precise and illuminating than the old scholarly distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith.[15] By the pre-Easter Jesus, Borg simply means Jesus as a figure of history before his death. Borg attempts to create a credible picture of what this Jesus may have been like. This is mostly a historical task,

[10] Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 200.

[11] Borg, *Jesus A New Vision*, 193.

[12] "Encountering Jesus: An Exchange," *The Christian Century* (November 5, 1997), 1009–13.

[13] "Jesus and the Crisis in Contemporary Christology," *Dialog* 37 (Winter 1998).

[14] Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999).

[15] Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again*, 15.

although it certainly has theological implications. Perhaps the reason for the popularity of his work in the highly unchurched Pacific Northwest is that "it addresses both the interested inquirer who may well be outside the church, even as it also addresses the Christian who wants to reflect about what it means to follow Jesus."[16]

But what is unique about Borg's approach is his definition of the post-Easter Jesus as the Jesus of Christian tradition and experience. Thus the post-Easter Jesus is not just the product of early Christian belief but an ongoing element of Christian experience.

> Indeed, this seems to me to be the central meaning of Easter. Beginning with Jesus, the early movement continued to experience Jesus as a living reality after his death, *but in a radically new way.* After Easter, his followers experienced him as a spiritual reality, no longer as a person of flesh and blood, limited in time and space, as Jesus of Nazareth had been. Rather, Jesus as the living Christ could be experienced anywhere and everywhere. Increasingly he was spoken of as having all of the qualities of God. . . . In short, his early followers experienced the risen Christ and addressed the risen Christ as the functional equivalent of God, as "one with God."
>
> So it has been ever since. The living risen Christ of the New Testament has been an experiential reality (and not just an article of belief) from the days of Easter to the present. Thus, in the experience, worship, and devotion of Christians throughout the centuries, the post-Easter Jesus is real.[17]

Borg's belief in the ongoing, experiential reality of the Risen Christ in the life of the Christian community results in a fresh understanding of the authority of Scripture that can assist contemporary Christians in clarifying its role. As most mainline clergy and scholars would agree, the Gospels are not straightforward historical accounts of the life of Jesus. They are instead, according to Borg and others, the developing traditions of the early Christian movement. According to Borg,

> the early Christians not only adapted the traditions about Jesus to new circumstances, but also continued to experience Jesus as a living reality after his death. The gospels contain both their memories of Jesus of Nazareth and their ongoing experience of the post-Easter Jesus.[18]

As he states elsewhere, such an understanding of the nature of the gospels is true of the Bible as a whole:

> It is the developing tradition of two ancient communities, ancient Israel and the early Christian movement. As such, the Bible is not a divine product that is to be believed no matter how incredible, but a human cultural product that is to be understood.[19]

This leads to the possibility of a transformed understanding of the authority of the Bible. Rather than an infallibly true, divine product, it is "ancient Israel's and the early church's witness to their life with God." The significance of the biblical canon is that it "affirms that these are the ancient documents with which Christians are to be in continuing conversation and dialogue. To take the Bible seriously is to seek to understand what our ancestors in the tradition knew of God."[20]

But in Borg's view, there is more to Scripture than simply an opportunity to be in dialogue with the tradition, important as

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[16] Borg, *Jesus A New Vision*, iii.

[17] Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again*, 16.

[18] Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again*, 20.

[19] Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Church," 178.

[20] Borg, "The Jesus Seminar and the Church," 178.

that is. Because he takes seriously the experiential reality of the Risen Christ in the ongoing life of the Christian community, there is a sense in which Scripture and the tradition play a sacramental role in shaping the Christian imagination.

> Shaping and reshaping the imagination is one of the central functions of the public reading of Scripture as sacred story. These are the stories of our tribe, and they are also stories about God and us. . . . Understood this way, Scripture as sacred story is not something to be believed in but a means of mediating the sacred. That is, Scripture is not to be treated as an object of belief but is to be lived within. It becomes the lens through which we "see" God, life, and ourselves and a means by which our imaginations are shaped by the sacred.[21]

Gerard Fourez makes a similar link between people's behavior, i.e., what we might call their discipleship, and the stories they hear and tell. "What produces meaning is the stories and, therefore, the people who recount their lives. But these stories are not invented out of nothing; on the contrary people use literary forms, older stories, and myths carried by the culture."[22] As the church's sacred story, Scripture is one of the "means of grace" by which the post-Easter Jesus is present in the life of the community and Christian imagination is shaped for discipleship.

This, it seems to me, is where the authority of Scripture lies: in its ability, together with the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, to be a means of the Risen Christ's ongoing presence in the community, and to call forth and shape the lives of contemporary disciples. This understanding of biblical authority is captured well by John Dominic Crossan in his commentary on the Road to Emmaus story in Luke 24:

> Jesus joined them on the road and, unknown and unrecognized, explained how the Hebrew scriptures should have prepared them for his fate. Later that evening they invited him to join them for their evening meal, and finally they recognized him when once again, in female fashion, he served the meal to them as of old beside the lake. And then, only then, they started back to Jerusalem in high spirits. The symbolism is obvious, as is the metaphoric condensation of the first years of Christian thought and practice into one parabolic afternoon. Emmaus never happened. Emmaus always happens.[23]

Jesus and the authority of Scripture

The authority of Scripture is finally a derivative authority. It derives from Scripture's ability to mediate the presence of the Risen Christ—the post-Easter Jesus, to use Borg's term—in the ongoing life of the Christian community as that community seeks to call individuals and shape their imagination for a life of discipleship. In this sense it is not unlike the water of Baptism or the bread and wine of the Eucharist. I see this understanding of biblical authority as similar to the Lutheran notion that it is the gospel that finally gives authority to Scripture rather than the other way around.

Furthermore, the concept of "biblical authority" is a rather abstract one that doesn't mean very much if people are unfamiliar with the Bible and its central narrative, what

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[21] Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), 117.

[22] Gerard Fourez, *Liberation Ethics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 45–46.

[23] John Dominic Crossan, "The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant," *The Christian Century* (December 18–25, 1991), 1200.

> The authority of Scripture is finally a derivative authority. It derives from Scripture's ability to mediate the presence of the Risen Christ.

Dan Erlander calls "God's unfolding promise to mend the entire universe." This is where the crisis really lies, in my estimation. If, as Borg contends, we can assist people to see that the Bible is something to be understood and to be in conversation with rather than simply "believed in," we will have gone a long way toward making such familiarity possible for postmodern inquirers and disciples.

Of what importance is the historical or pre-Easter Jesus in all of this? In response to a similar question, I once heard Borg reply, "The ongoing quest for the pre-Easter Jesus helps keep the subversive memory of Jesus alive in the church." By this I understand him to mean that the effort to understand the historical Jesus as distinct from the church's portrait of him in the canonical gospels, even as we use the canonical gospels to try to help form that picture, offers a counterpoint to the church's tendency to try to domesticate Jesus. The quest for the historical Jesus can help us get clearer about the nature and authority of the biblical witness. But, most important, it can keep us from falling into a casual Docetism which robs the life of discipleship of its content and meaning.

Let Me Not Sing the Story of Your Love Off Key

Ralph W. Klein
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Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
Editor, Currents in Theology and Mission

This article was originally the plenary address at the National Conference of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians at Valparaiso University, July 20, 1997.

The *Lutheran Book of Worship* and the *Hymnal Companion to the LBW* inform us that Canticle 16, "I Will Sing the Story of Your Love," is based on parts of Psalm 89 and Jeremiah 33, not noting that a quotation from Psalm 100 also appears in the canticle. Five times the leader or the congregation sings, "I will sing the story of your love, O Lord, and proclaim your faithfulness forever." After the leader and the congregation exchange this refrain at the beginning of the canticle, the congregation repeats it like a great Amen after two quotations from Jeremiah 33 and one from Psalm 100. The overall effect of the canticle is a celebration of the enduring story of the love and fidelity of the Lord, which brings joy in the place of sadness. The Lord is good and the bestower of everlasting love and fidelity. Our everlasting praise is the only fitting response to divine love and faithfulness that are without end. The fivefold repetition of the refrain and the inclusio formed by its use at the beginning and end of the canticle paint a picture of stability, normalcy, and expectedness about the availability of God's love and fidelity. The Westminster Confession of 1648 has it right: The chief duty of humankind is to praise and magnify God forever. Small wonder then that the National Conference of the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians made the first line of Canticle 16 the theme of its 1997 conference. When all is said and done, church music in the evangelical tradition deals with the A-C-T-S of worship: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. One can only hope that many a worshiper will store this memorable refrain from Canticle 16 in her memory bank so that in good times and bad, in living and in dying, she may rely on the story of God's love and the record of God's faithfulness. As Luther said in his explanations to the three articles of the creed, this *is* most certainly true. Walter Brueggemann has called poems like this canticle in the Bible "Psalms of Orientation." They affirm central verities of the faith, what is true always, everywhere, and for everyone.

I want to hold up alongside this eternal truth other truths contained in Scripture, embedded in fact in the very passages noted as the basis for this canticle. Daniel Moe, the composer of Canticle 16, included only

Fidelity is part of God's incomparable character, setting God above every other divine being.

the first verse from Psalm 89, but I would like to think through with you the message contained in all of its fifty-two verses, not at all to correct Moe but to look at theological reality from another angle, another social location, from a time when divine love and fidelity were very much in question, very much in doubt—from Israel's exile, when this psalm was given its present shape. Dozens of examples in the church's musical literature could be cited that deal with similar moments of consternation and dismay at the apparent contradiction between the goodness of God and the realities of individual and communal history.

Canticle 16 and Psalm 89

Psalm 89 indeed focuses on the faithfulness of the Lord, using that word faithfulness exactly seven times. Fidelity is part of God's incomparable character, setting God above every other divine being (vv. 5–6). This faithfulness is bound up inextricably with God's matchless power (v. 8). Such fidelity with power enabled God at the beginning to create the world and defeat the powers of chaos, and now this mixture of faithfulness and power gives credibility to his promise to destroy Israel's enemies (v. 10). The same divine fidelity surrounds and embraces Israel's king and enables him to preside over a wide empire (vv. 24–25). Fidelity means God's pledging to stick with the king through thick and thin, punishing the royal descendants when they err, to be sure, but never violating God's everlasting obligation to the line of David (v. 33). But by the end of the psalm an honest look at contemporary history forces the psalmist to call God's fidelity into question as he comes to the seventh use of the faithfulness in the poem. As the psalmist surveys a land in ruins, he concludes that God has clearly now become furious with his anointed king, defiled the king's crown in the dust, cut short his days, and wrapped him in shame (vv. 38-45). How do these present realities square with the notion that God swore to David to be faithful? (v. 49). The psalmist leaves that startling question unanswered. A psalm that starts so positively ends in despair.

Psalm 89 consists of three kinds of material. In vv. 1–2 and 5–18, the anonymous poet outdoes himself in offering hymnic praise. God is awesome and incomparable. The Lord is God of the heavenly armies (which is the way I translate the traditional "Lord of hosts," v. 8), with both heaven and earth completely in his control. God gives strength to the people. The psalmist exclaims: The God Yahweh is our ruler; the holy one of Israel is our king! (v. 18). Someone "holy" in the biblical culture is separate or transcendent, but Israel's God is paradoxically the separate or transcendent one of Israel. The expression "holy one *of* Israel" blends two incompatible ideas—God is separate and aloof, *and* God has chosen Israel—in that freedom, and in that connectedness lies the real depth of Israel's theology. The holy God has chosen Israel and turned Israel into a people who walk in God's light. The seal of Valparaiso University has it right: In your light we see light!

The second kind of material in Psalm 89 appears in vv. 3–4 and 19–37. It is precisely this dazzling and incomparable God, so lavishly praised in vv. 1–2 and 5–18, who chose David and his dynasty and entered into a covenant relationship with him (vv. 3–4). God's strength becomes the king's strength (v. 21), and God strikes down, for and through the king, all his foes. God gives the king worldwide dominion, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Tigris and Euphrates, the vast majority of the then known world (v. 25). The king or royal child knows and acknowledges the divine parent: *my* father, *my* God, the rock or mountain who saves *me* (v. 26). Promises made to David are valid and extend also to all his descendants forever (v. 29) with one significant proviso. If the royal children should ever go astray, God would punish their rebellious iniquities with rods and clubs, but without breaking the link of faithfulness and love (v. 33). All of these good things about David are given in a first-person oracle of God: "I swore to David my servant . . . I have exalted one chosen from the people."

The word *love* seems just right in Canticle 16—"the story of your love"—and the word love, or at least the somewhat more closely defined equivalent "steadfast love," is also used conventionally in English translations of Psalm 89. But love is a dangerous noun or verb to use with God and is not used in the oldest writings of the Old Testament. Hosea, in the 8th century B.C.E, is the first biblical writer to dare to speak of God's (unrequited) love for humankind, but he never speaks of humanity's love for God. Only the Deuteronomist, writing a century after Hosea, in the last generation before the end of the southern kingdom, dares to say that human beings ought to love God. This reticence in the Old Testament to use love in connection with God or our relationship to God is never explained, but scholars have speculated that Israel found love-talk dangerous because God's love might be taken for granted, or might be manipulated, or might be confused with the magical powers unleashed in the neighbors' fertility cults. Therefore we should not be not surprised that the common noun for love (אהבה) is not used in Psalm 89. Instead the Psalmist really talks about the steadfast love (חסד) of the Lord or, perhaps better, of God's loyalty to human followers (v. 1). If only it would fit the meter, we should sing in Canticle 16, "I will sing the story of your *loyalty*, O Lord, and proclaim your faithfulness forever." Hence it is God's loyalty and faithfulness that are built into the structure of the mighty cosmos (v. 2). And it is this loyalty and faithfulness that God promises never to remove (v. 33). As a result of this loyalty and faithfulness the king's throne will last as long as the sun (36) or be as dependable as the moon (v. 37).

So far in vv. 1–37 the psalmist seems to have taken the generic message about the story of God's loyalty and faithfulness and applied it to a specific, central, and crucial institution of his nation, the royal line of David. The king—David and all his descendants—are recipients and beneficiaries of God's loyalty and faithfulness. The psalmist so far is still within the contours of the theology of Canticle 16 as he engages in hymnic praise and in a recitation of a divine oracle to David that demonstrates God's loyalty and faithfulness.

But it is with the third type of material that the poet breaks through to express his own sad experience when people, temple, land, and king have long since ceased to be important and perhaps have even ceased to exist at all. The psalm is written in the wake of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. and in bitter reaction to the arrest and blinding of the final king, Zede-

kiah. Verses 38–45 are conventionally called a "complaint" by biblical scholars, but they might more honestly be called an accusation against God. The psalmist's words slash out at God: You God have spurned and rejected us; You God have become furious; You God have abhorred your covenant; You God have breached our walls and destroyed all our fortifications. In particular, God seems to be picking on the king himself, the recipient of God's promise mediated through Nathan the prophet. The king now has lost battles because God fights for the enemies. Instead of ruling as long as the sun, the king misses out on the glory days of youth. Shame has become his daily apparel (v. 45).

Where, oh where have God's loyalty and fidelity gone? Whatever happened to the "story of your love"? The bitter sense of loss and disillusionment in v. 46 is unmistakable:

> How long will you hide yourself,
> Yahweh—forever?
> How long will your wrath burn like fire?

The psalmist calls upon God to remember how short life is, and how meaningless, since no one—however strong—ever gets out of this world alive (v. 48). The psalmist also calls upon God to remember the taunts enemies fling at the people. For the first time since the first line of the poem the psalmist speaks for herself with the pronoun *I* and gives personal witness to the harm done by this pain-filled turn of events: "I bear in my body all the attacks of the peoples" (v. 50). But these same enemies in their taunting of Israel really taunt God, whose virtues and accomplishments were so clear in vv. 1–2 and 5–18, and they taunt the anointed king, the recipient of God's rich and apparently powerful promises in vv. 3–4, 19–37.

How does one reconcile the opening line of Psalm 89, "I will sing forever of the loyal acts of the Lord," with the closing line, "How your foes, O Lord, taunt, how they taunt the heels of your anointed one"? Let me propose a number of ways to effect such a reconciliation, some perhaps more helpful than others.

1. The worshiper can sing the psalm again and again, each time beginning with the opening line that hails the everlasting loyal acts of the Lord and tracing the story of God's incomparable loyalty and fidelity throughout the cosmos and in his promise to the royal family in vv. 1–37, only to be shattered each time by the complaints and accusations of the psalmist, generated by the devastation of foreign invasion, in vv. 38–52. The bad news of the psalm is trumped by the good news at the beginning over and over again.

2. The worshiper can follow the lead of one of the great sermons in Deuteronomy 29, which seeks the cause of the land's devastation and the divine anger in human guilt and culpability. Why, asks Moses, has the Lord done thus to this land? What caused this great display of anger? Answer: "It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt" (v. 25). In the light of our sinfulness, God's breaking off of his goodness to the king does not seem that inappropriate.

3. Or one can take the opposite tack and place the blame for the present misery on someone else, like one's parents. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel cite some of their contemporaries who thought they were being punished only because of what their parents had done: It was because our parents ate sour grapes that our teeth are now set on edge (Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2). Don't blame me for the Holocaust! we cry. Don't blame me for bad racial relationships! Don't

blame me when the shoe companies exploit people in sweatshops in Asia. Don't blame me for global warming. Don't blame me for the unequal distribution of wealth within our country and for the great disparity between the living standards of the United States and almost every other country in the world. But of course our actions and attitudes *are* part of the problem, and/or we profit from the misdeeds of others. Jeremiah countered this cop-out of his contemporaries by declaring that the children's evil is more abundant than that of their parents (16:12). Blaming our troubles on the sinfulness of others seems like a desperate and hopeless alternative.

4. The painful contradiction between the first and final lines of Psalm 89 can be resolved by finding new recipients for the promises made to David in the middle section of the psalm. The Book of Isaiah said that the promises once made to David would be redirected to all God's people (Isa 55:3): I will make with each one of you "an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David." There is an appropriate time for the royal priesthood of all believers to share in the promises once made to the king alone. But this approach hardly works with Psalm 89, where the psalmist has experienced in her own body the attacks of the peoples; there is no way that she and her fellow servants feel themselves graced by the promises to David. The other possible alternate recipient for the promise to David is more helpful, for it is our Christian conviction that what was once promised to David and all his descendants has become true in strange new ways in the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He bore all our taunts and underwent all the attacks directed at us without complaint or accusation. So firm was Christ's faith in God during his final moments that when the centurion saw *how* he died—with living trust in God—he confessed, "Truly this person was God's Son (Mark 15:39).

5. A fifth way to solve the problem of Psalm 89 is to look to its immediate context in Pss 88 and 90. There was a time, earlier in my career, when the order of psalms in the Psalter was considered a matter of complete indifference, if not irrelevance. The Psalter had about as much plot as the phone book! But then scholars began to notice that the Psalter begins with a poem that calls happy those on meditate on God's law or instruction day and night, and it suddenly dawned on them that these ideal meditators were those who meditated on the following 149 psalms of instruction day and night. Hence it was important that Psalm 1 was Psalm 1. Or that Psalm 22 with its piercing cry "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" is followed immediately by that most idyllic of all Psalms that confesses, "The Lord is my shepherd and therefore I will never be in want." Things are often not as bad as Psalm 22 nor as good as 23, but in reading these two psalms together one comes closer to the truth. In the case of Psalm 89, the preceding psalm depicts an individual and not the community in the Pit or in the pits. It concludes with these words:

"You [God] have caused friend and neighbor to shun me; my companions are in darkness." Hence the psalmist in Psalm 88 challenges God's treatment of the individual speaker just as Psalm 89 challenges God's treatment of the nation and its king. There is no closure in either psalm. Psalm 90, however, is a whole other story, for it goes way back before the time of nation and king to the time of Moses, who confesses: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations . . . from everlasting to everlasting you are God." This is the Scripture text lying behind the hymn, "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" (*LBW* #320). Do we discover the truth about God somehow by reading Psalms 88 and 89 in the context of Psalm 90 and vice versa?

6. But perhaps the whole point of reading this shattering psalm and meditating on the contrast with the positive message of Canticle 16 is to retain the contrast. In the long run this tension may be a greater source of strength and comfort. Elie Wiesel tells the story of a young man who praises one of his teacher's dazzling explanations. "That was beautiful!" he exclaims. The teacher rebukes him: "When will you understand that a beautiful answer is nothing?" People define themselves by what disturbs them and not by what reassures them. In times of trouble our theology and hymnody are deeper than in times of success. In facing honestly the tough questions of life we may learn to understand the beauty of life's complexity. Psalms 88 and 89 do not give beautiful answers to life's questions but only lament, more questions, accusations against God, and cries. But they also do presuppose a God who listens attentively to such psalmists and who remembers not only how short and problematic life is and how severe the taunts are against his people, but a God who also ties a rainbow around his finger so that he will never forget his people or his commitment to them. The worshipping community needs Canticle 16, which by its memorable refrain and easy-to-sing tune creates a universe of meaning in which divine love and faithfulness are constant realities. But we also need the other fifty-one verses of Psalm 89, which enable us to do what suffering children of God must always be able to do—that is, tell God what exactly is on their minds. If we can trust God enough to listen to our problems, we have rediscovered what faith is, namely, the ability to trust the Promiser when he promises. Which is the greater evidence for faith—"The Lord is my shepherd; I will not want," or "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" In the latter case, the psalmist trusted God enough to tell God what he really thought of him.

Canticle 16 and Jeremiah 33

The next two biblical citations in Canticle 16 come from Jeremiah 33. In these two cases the canticle and the Scripture text are not so much in tension or contradiction, but a closer look at the Scripture text can enrich our appreciation of the canticle. The leader in Canticle 16 sings: "In this place . . . shall be heard again the sounds of joy and gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the bride" (Jer 33:10–11). The canticle presupposes hard times without describing them. The ambiguity or vagueness about hard times allows almost everyone to participate in the canticle, everyone who has ever felt "I'll never be happy again." It might be someone who has experienced the death of a spouse, parent, child, or close friend. It might be someone who has failed in a romantic relationship or at work or in school. It might be someone who has just been diagnosed as terminally ill. Many of us in the 1960s felt we would never be young again after Kennedy and King were shot.

"In this place" might refer to my nation, my town, my congregation, my family, my own life. It refers implicitly to the here and now, to a reversal that will take place within my lifetime, in this world, within my space. Other hymns and canticles can sing the joys of heaven; Canticle 16 promises a very earthy, tangible salvation that affirms creation, that accepts the human body, that has the capacity to appreciate music and art, good food and drink, and the Incarnation. The sounds of joy and gladness will echo in this place.

Jeremiah 32–33 describes the prophet expressing confident hope precisely when the times were at their very worst. In these chapters Jeremiah was in prison for prophesying that Jerusalem would fall to Babylon and that king Zedekiah would become a prisoner of war. The Babylonian armies were already besieging Jerusalem when Jeremiah's cousin Hanamel visited him in prison and asked him to purchase his family's farm. Jeremiah not only accepted the invitation but made elaborate efforts to record the transaction and make it both public and permanent. Though the Babylonians were knocking at the gates and would soon storm through them, he knew that in God's own time and through God's own promise normal times of commerce would someday return when houses, fields, and vineyards would again be bought and sold in Jerusalem. The conventional doctrine of retribution held that, just as all the good promises of God had been fulfilled in the past, as in the giving of the land through Joshua, so God would in the future bring all his curses upon Israel in response to their disobedience (Josh 23:15). The book of Jeremiah reverses the direction of the doctrine of retribution. Now the fidelity of the judging word of God, which had become so evident in the destruction of the whole land, is the basis for believing the promises of good fortune that Jeremiah is making (32:42) and knowing they are reliable.

Canticle 16 promises a very earthy, tangible salvation that affirms creation.

In this place is given a very specific meaning in Jeremiah. It is the land of Israel that is a waste without human beings or animals, it is the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants human or animal. It is in this very place that happy sounds would reappear, including those of newly married couples. There may be a deeper meaning here than the proverbial joy of the ever-smiling, happy bride that is a cliche in our society. (Grooms are characterized among us as either timid or scared!). Weddings are not only occasions of joy, but they are signs that the life of the community is always being renewed and that new generations are replacing the old. Weddings are acts of faith in the community's future and a promise that new families and new generations will carry on life. In the ancient kingdom of Judah, a place devoid of human and animal life, Jeremiah promises that the basic institution of reproduction and continuity will once more be operational and in place. "Mirth and gladness" may not be tired, generic references to happiness but specific allusions to the institution of marriage as well. Since Jeremiah had earlier prophesied that the sounds of marriage would come to an end (7:34, 16:9, 25:10), his

promise of their restoration is another example that the promises of the future are as sure as the devastation evident to even the casual observer.

The lead singer in our canticle next intones, also with indebtedness to Jeremiah 33, "Here they offer praise and thanksgiving in the house of the Lord, and we hear their voices shouting, 'Praise the LORD of hosts, for he is good, for his love endures forever!'" (Jer 33:11). "Here" is somewhat ambiguous in the canticle, presumably referring back to "in this place," but it is important to notice that the location of the praise-giving is in the temple, the place for the assembling of the whole community. Jeremiah envisions the restoration of normal worship, when those bringing thank-offerings offer a common table/altar prayer —"Praise the Lord of hosts, for he is good, for his love endures forever." This simple prayer occurs about eleven times in the Old Testament—and two zillion times in Lutheran table prayers—and it is perhaps worth pausing to consider the statement affirming that the Lord is *good*.

> Justice and fidelity to God are inseparable, and they constitute that which is good.

To speak of God as good is to affirm that the Lord of Israel is the source of all that makes life possible and worthwhile. "Goodness" is an all-encompassing attribute that catches up everything positive that human beings receive in life. It is often experienced specifically in God's deliverance of persons from distress. The Lord is good because he does good things—gives life, delivers from evil, empowers.

The goodness of the Lord appears in creation. Note that seven times in Genesis 1 we are told that one created thing or another is "good," or indeed "very good." The goodness of the Lord is also demonstrated in the formation and care of God's people. Since God is good and upright, he instructs sinners in his ways and guides the humble in what is right (Ps 25:8–10). Consequently, God also expects goodness from all his people and indeed from every human being. Micah writes: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to practice a loyal life style rather than to multiply sacrifices, and to walk humbly with your God?" Justice and fidelity to God are inseparable, and they constitute that which is good.

God's loyalty lasts forever and connotes the action of the powerful God on behalf of his weaker people. This loyalty results in God sending out his word and healing people who were sick, unable to eat, and at death's door (Ps 107:17–21). This loyalty also results in God saving people caught in a stormy sea and bringing them safely to harbor (107:23–31). God's creation of the world (136:5–9), his deliverance from Egypt (136:10–15), his preservation of people in the wilderness (136:16), and his gift of the land (136:17–22) result from God's goodness and loyalty.

Canticle 16 and Psalm 100

The lead singer introduces the final exchange in Canticle 16 with a quotation from Ps 100:4–5: "Give thanks to him and bless his name; the Lord is good, his love is

everlasting, and his faithfulness endures to all generations." Psalm 100 is the only place in the Psalter that brings together God's goodness, God's loyalty, and God's faithfulness. This comprehensive description of God makes it a fitting final affirmation by the lead singer in the canticle. Psalm 100 itself is a ringing invitation for the whole earth to praise God.

Do not sing Canticle 16 off key!

I know enough about music to know that I should not speak about music to musicians. In warning you not to sing this canticle off key I am not concerned whether you are flat or sharp or whether you come in a half beat too late. Rather, I am concerned that we all recognize Canticle 16 for the good music and good theology it is *and* that we also recognize that a one-sided appropriation of its worldview would be harmful theologically and ecclesiologically.

We sing Canticle 16 *off key* if God's deeds proclaimed in this canticle do not lead us to offer praise ourselves. While "thanks" can be done only out of legal compulsion and in one or two words, "praise" is something the believer offers spontaneously, and often in a sentence, and almost always before others. In his explanation to the First Article of the creed, Luther rehearses all the things God creates and preserves—body, soul, limbs, senses, reason, food, clothing, house, family, property, and on and on. For all of this, Luther notes, I am bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. God's deeds are always announced with the hope that they will effect change.

We sing Canticle 16 *off key* if we sing only solo and not in community. The story of God's love creates a new people and not just new persons. The praise takes place in the temple, and the command to praise is surely addressed to fellow believers.

We sing Canticle 16 *off key* if the story of God's love and our song in response to it does not result in personal and corporate transformation. A current theological slogan holds that God loves us unconditionally. Lutherans appreciate that divine love is "without any merit or worthiness on our part," but we must always add at the same time that God loves us with the hope and expectation that the faith kindled in us will lead to an ever more sanctified life. In our mission statement at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago we announce that we prepare students who are able to work for the revitalization of the church as it seeks to transform the world. The church is always called to be reformed, and the church exists primarily for those who are not yet part of it. We Lutherans have been dreadfully slow in understanding and implementing the social implications of the gospel.

We sing Canticle 16 *off key* if we do not acknowledge the depth and unexplained character of human pain or the often jarring tensions between the harsh realities of life and the truths we say about God. Job's friends thought they could calculate everything perfectly—great sin leads to great personal trouble—but Job is a person of unquestioned integrity, as even God admits. Job suffered for reasons that are "explained" only by a bet between God and Satan. Somewhere in the interface between Job's pain, Job's piety, and God's infinite control and care for the universe lies a creative balance that may be all we get in this life. Canticle 16 is true, but as the entirety of Psalm 89 makes clear, it is not the only truth nor even the whole truth.

We sing Canticle 16 *off key* if we do not hold God to his promises. If the greatest story ever told is about God's loyal love, God's faithfulness, God's promises, and

God's goodness, then when trouble develops, as it surely will, we need to remind God of his own loyalty and faithfulness. Where are your former acts of loyalty? is a legitimate and even a necessary question. If we can't talk frankly with God, what's the point in claiming a special relationship with him? Through baptism we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We ask as dear children ask their dear parent. We hold God to God's promises.

And, finally, we sing Canticle 16 *off key* if we don't see ourselves as agents called to implement the divine promises. To passively wait as mere spectators for God to act is to deny our calling and to make God into a wonder worker. The only way most people will ever experience the effects of God's love and faithfulness is our acting for them in God's name and in God's stead. We have been created in God's image for the singular purpose of extending God's dominion over the whole of the created order.

It would be a terrible tragedy if we were so concerned about singing off key that we never sang at all. As each of us sings "I will sing the story of your love," we do it in the company of our fellow believers. Each of us sings "I" to express our own belief, but ever since God created the world God knew that it is not good for men and women to be alone. So sing boldly, and sing together, and even more boldly grab hold of the goodness, loyalty, and faithfulness that is God's name, God's character, and God's special and unique identity. Where do we find out what God is really up to? Christians answer: on the cross and in the empty tomb. If you had asked an ancient Israelite, Where do you find God's real identity? Where do you learn God's name? they would answer: Moses learned God's name in the course of the Exodus from Egypt (Exod 3:13–15).

The only way most people will ever experience the effects of God's love and faithfulness is our acting for them in God's stead.

There we learned about the name Yahweh, but more important, in that deliverance from slavery in Egypt, we learned about God's central agenda. That is God's agenda. That is God's priority. That is God's name! Bless that special name!

Praise that special name—on or off key.

Jesus' Requests to Keep Healings Secret

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Healers of all cultures are known to be fond of giving an enumeration of the patients whose illnesses they have cured, especially to new patients, partly as a way of encouraging their faith in them as healers and in the efficacy of the therapeutics to be administered and partly as a way of boosting their own egos.[1] The synoptic narratives, however, show that Jesus insisted on some of his healings being kept secret.

It is almost unimaginable that Jesus, who performed more than twenty-five recorded healing miracles, would have directed that his healings be kept secret. But the synoptic writers say that Jesus so instructed. Why did he do so? And how do we relate his practice to the healing convention of modern times, in which open testimonies are *required* of all who are healed, especially during mass healing? It is the aim of this paper to provide answers to these questions. Our focus will be on the church in Yorubaland of Nigeria.

The Synoptic evidence

Jesus' directive that his healings should be kept secret is reported in four of Mark's healing stories. These include the healing of the leper in which Jesus warns: "Listen, don't tell anyone about this" (Mark 1:14); the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:43); the cure of the deaf-mute (7:36); and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida when Jesus also orders: "Don't go back into the village" (8:26). Two of these are paralleled in the other Synoptic Gospels—the healing of the leper (Matthew 8:4; Luke 5:16) and the raising of Jairus' daughter (Matthew 9:25–26; Luke 8:56). It would also appear that Jesus never allowed the demons he exorcized to disclose his messianic identity to the public (Mark 1:34, 3:12; Luke 4:41).

The impression given is that Jesus' requests to keep his healings secret and his reproofs to the demons that his messianic identity should not be disclosed are interrelated. Another interrelated incident is that in which Jesus expressly instructed his disciples not to tell anybody that he was the Messiah (Matthew 16:20; Mark 8:30; Luke 9:21). Luke makes it clear that healing miracles were expected of the Messiah (Luke 4:17–18; 7:22).[2] So, public healing miracles

[1] O. E. Alana, The Impact of the Healing Miracles of Jesus on the Methods of Aladura Churches in Yorubaland (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Ilorin, Nigeria, 1992), 226.

[2] O. E. Alana, "Reconsidering the poor by Gospel Norms," *AFER* 32 (August 1990), 193–94.

would easily attract the attention of the people as a whole to the fact of his messiahship. Hence, the requests to keep his healings secret.

It is, however, striking to note that while Mark's Gospel has a preponderance of such events, popularly called the "messianic secret" by modern scholars, the fourth Gospel is free of such ideas.

The Johannine perspective

In the fourth Gospel, Jesus makes no attempts to conceal his messiahship. Rather, he declares himself publicly as the Messiah almost everywhere he goes. And, unlike in Mark, where the crowds and even the disciples display an incredible obtuseness with regard to what they hear and see (Mark 8:17–18),[3] many people in John's Gospel readily recognize and identify Jesus as the Messiah. It would appear that a harmony of both the Synoptic and the Johannine positions could be arrived at by supposing that both were true in the ministry of Jesus. There were probably some occasions when Jesus identified himself as the Messiah or described himself in images pointing to him as the Messiah, as correctly reported by the fourth evangelist. There may also have been some occasions when Jesus chose to hide his identity as the Messiah, as claimed by Mark and the Synoptic Gospels.

Possible explanation

Jesus probably gave instructions to keep his cures secret on some occasions so that his messiahship would not be misunderstood. The messianic hope among the Jews, according to the evidence in Luke, involved the expectation that the Messiah would cure people of their ailments. So, if Jesus' healings were given maximum publicity, the possibility of his being identified as the Messiah of the Jewish expectation would have been high. Jesus' emphatic desire to reduce the publicity of his healings to the barest minimum was, indeed, a concerted effort to conceal his messiahship.

He sought to conceal his identity as the Messiah because the concept at that time suggested to people a military, nationalistic leadership. The Jewish expectation was that the Messiah would work for the regaining of political freedom by overthrowing the Roman suzerainty and establishing Jewish rule over the Gentiles.[4] Jesus' understanding of the Messianic role was different; he considered the basic need of his people to be spiritual and moral renewal. In the words of E. J. Tinsley, "Jesus came to seek and save all lost sinners, to serve men in their need, and to establish a spiritual, heavenly Kingdom."[5] Jesus rejected the political role which the Jews expected the Messiah to perform. He refused to be a military or political Messiah. Cornelis Vanderwaal is correct when he says:

> If Jesus were to reveal Himself at the very outset as the Messiah and Son of God, that knowledge would be opened to misunderstanding and misuse. Jesus did not want the people to regard Him as a miraculous healer or a national hero or a freedom fighter.[6]

Jesus longed for the kingdom of God where love and integrity are the order of the day

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[3] D. E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*. The Pelican New Testament Commentaries (London: Cox and Wyman, 1963), 31–32.

[4] F. V. Filson, *A New Testament History*. Study Edition (London: SCM Press, 1975), 121.

[5] E. J. Tinsley, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 67.

[6] Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Search the Scriptures* (Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978), 65.

rather than a worldly kingdom where avarice and self-centeredness are the chief articles of faith.

The Yorubaland experience

The practice of healing in the Yorubaland of Nigeria seems to have made a wide departure from what took place at the time of Jesus. Jesus' practice of allowing only a minimum publicity of his healings appears to have been replaced with a penchant for heavy or even maximum publicity of the healing activities of the church.

A prominent feature of the practice of healing in the church today is mass healing, especially during crusade rallies. Crusade rallies are often organized by churches in Yorubaland at strategic locations such as market places, parks, stadia, and streets. The holding of crusade rallies is usually heavily publicized. Posters announcing and advertising crusade rallies are pasted in every conspicuous place or location in the streets. Handbills for the same purpose are also distributed in the streets, in motor parks, at homes, in the market places, and at places of work. Radio as well as television advertisements are used. Announcements are made in various churches to invite people to such rallies.[7] Sometimes the posters, handbills, and television advertisements carry photographs of people who have been healed in some earlier sessions. Advertisements often continue while the deliverance meetings are in progress, depending on the financial capacity of the organizers.

A few hours before the commencement of each deliverance session, vans with public address systems mounted on them are dispatched to the streets, to serve as a last-minute reminder to the public. Again and again, assurances of deliverance from all forces of evil are promised. The heavier the publicity is, the heavier the turnout of

the people at the crusade rallies.

At such rallies, Christian songs are sung, the evangelists or prophets leading the rallies are introduced, sermons are delivered, and healing prayers are said—all leading to mass healing. Then, testimonies are given by those miraculously healed, and a prayer is said at the end of the rallies.[8]

Testimonies on such occasions are very important. In fact, the crusaders or evangelists are emphatic that failure to give testimonies might result in the diseases reoccurring and in the exorcized evil spirits returning to their human carriers. People cured in earlier rallies are brought in to give testimonies anew.

Emphasis on open testimonies by those who have been healed tends to suggest a sort of self-glorification on the part of those involved in Christian healing. It seems to be an opportunity for the evangelists/prophets to blow their own trumpets and announce that they are messengers of Jesus Christ and that they are accomplished healers. Chris-

[7] Alana, The Impact of the Healing Miracles, 391.

[8] Alana, The Impact of the Healing Miracles, 400–402.

tian healings which should be theocentric and christocentric have become opportunities for the evangelists/prophets to boost their own egos.

Christian healers, however, believe that the practice of giving testimonies of healings received is quite in order and very biblical. They often cite Luke 8:39 and Mark 5:19 as biblical grounds for such a practice. They believe, too, that testimonies are given for the purpose of glorifying the exalted Lord of the Christian faith, Jesus, and his Father, God, the Absolute Healer of the universe. That is why each testimony is usually greeted with the shouts, "Praise the Lord!" "Praise Jesus!" "Hallelujah!"[9] But how justifiable is the practice of giving testimonies publicly on account of healing?

We can recall that Jesus did not allow publicity of his healings during his earthly ministry because he feared being widely identified as the Messiah of the Jewish expectation in an age when that concept was ill-conceived. Are we still under the same environment? Certainly not! Jesus had completed that first stage of his earthly ministry. He succeeded in his mission as he did not promote political-military activities but rather, by his death on the cross and his resurrection on the third day, uniquely inaugurated the kingdom of God, which will be fully actualized at the Parousia. Today, Christians believe that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world. So, it is apparent that there is no more need to keep the identity of Jesus as the Messiah secret. Before his earthly ministry came to an end, Jesus commissioned his disciples, and indeed all Christians, to proclaim his gospel to all nooks and crannies of the world (Matthew 28:19).

The proclamation of the gospel of Christ includes both preaching and healing (Matthew 10:7–8; Luke 9:1–2). In the church's witness today, the two arms of the ministry must not only be painstakingly attended to but pursued with utmost caution. Healing deserves adequate attention in the church, and news about this must be shared. In fact, it is a way of keeping alive the spirit of evangelism, which the church must pursue till the end of this age. Such publicity must, however, be Christ-centered.

Concluding remarks

The foregoing discussion pointed to the fact that both the synoptists' and the fourth evangelist's portraits of Jesus' attitude toward publicity about his cures are correct. He sought minimum publicity of his cures so that he might not be widely identified as the Messiah. This was because the messianic hope, among the Jews of his day, was ill-conceived and had been wrongly clothed in military garb.

We also considered the world of divine healing among the Yoruba people, where the healing ministry of the church is accorded maximum publicity, in contrast to what the Synoptic Gospels present as Jesus' attitude to the publicity of his healings. As the church faithfully carries out the apostolic commission of spreading the gospel to all nooks and crannies of the earth, while faithfully awaiting the Second Coming of Jesus, publicity of the healings of the church could be vigorously pursued, but they must center not on the personality of any healer or on his church but on Christ, the head of the church.

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[9] Alana, The Impact of the Healing Miracles, 402.

A Celebration of Uniqueness; A Celebration of Ourselves

Kristin Johnston Sutton
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"Pied Beauty"

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
and all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.[1]

This grand, lush poem has a profound message about where God's beauty is embodied in the physical world. I say "profound" because, in light of the prevailing notions about beauty and its embodiment, it says something radically different about what glorifies God in this world, and what can and should be called "beautiful."

The author of this poem, Gerard Manley Hopkins, was a poet and theologian deeply committed to the theological importance of the individual. Influenced by the metaphysics of Duns Scotus, he held that God's presence is most awesomely revealed in specific, singular beings in nature, creatures both majestic and mundane. His poetry crackles with the power of his praise, embodied in rich, dramatic language that almost seems to leap with joy right off the page.

In "Pied Beauty," Hopkins celebrates the offbeat and the unusual and praises God for their presence in the world. Such an attitude flows directly out of the Christian message of universal love and acceptance for all creation, and originates in God's gracious action in Jesus Christ. The reader is reminded of God's free and loving choice to become incarnate in an imperfect, limited human body.

In her recent book, *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture*, Judith Berling writes, "The

[1] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur and Other Poems* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 18–19.

Hopkins challenges our assumption that only the pristine and the unblemished are worthy of praise.

doctrine of Word made flesh, God in human form, puts the embodiment of truth, its living out in an actual human life, at the very center of Christianity."[2] She observes that Christians have a unique, though not exclusive, insight into the theme of embodiment, grounded as it is on the doctrine of the Incarnation. It is important to remember that, indeed, in the early Christian tradition, this connection was understood and widely discussed. The idea of embodiment has lost currency since then in some parts of the church, and it is time to bring it back. This idea frees us to accept God's presence as dwelling in our own "clay vessels." We too, with all our frailties, embody God's Spirit.

"Glory be to God for dappled things."

The opening line of the poem makes a radical claim. "Dappled" means "mottled," or "blotched in coloring"—not perfectly white, or black, or brown, or anything, for that matter. Something that is dappled has an uneven tone, or a random assortment of variously colored spots—something like the old t-shirt you wear to paint the living room. Or think instead of your own complexion, age spots, sun spots, scars: if your face is anything like mine, it is dappled for sure.

Hopkins' statement is radical. In the opening stanza of his poem he praises God for the very "imperfections" that usually decrease the worth of a creature. If you know anything about animal breeding, you know how important markings are, and stray bits of color that don't belong are judged to be serious infractions against the beauty of that animal. In a similar way, we usually do not think a beautiful landscape is "plotted and pieced."

Hopkins challenges our assumption that only the pristine and the unblemished are worthy of praise. He contests our notions of beauty by daring to bring together God's perfection and creaturely imperfection in a way that sees the glory of the former in the humility of the latter. Peter Milward writes, "It is as if [Hopkins] feels himself unable to appreciate the rich simplicity of the Creator, until he has fully delighted in the complexity of [God's] creatures."[3]

Hopkins' poem forces us to rethink our notions about how we understand God's beauty to be embodied in the world. Do we celebrate God's grandeur in both the sequoia and the thornbush? Do we see the traces of God's handiwork in both the hummingbird and the crow? It is easy to fall prey to the temptation to arrange the worth of creatures in a hierarchy—ourselves included.

We easily forget that God became incarnate in the world in order to infuse the entire creation with God's love and comeli-

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[2] Judith Berling, *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 127.

[3] Peter Milward, S.J., *Landscape and Inscape: Vision and Inspiration in Hopkins' Poetry* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 41.

ness. No one is overlooked, nothing, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, is excluded from participation in God's beauty. The incarnate God is present to all of creation, uniquely and individually, embracing us in God's overwhelming love and tenderness. Jeffrey Loomis argues that in "Pied Beauty" Hopkins is saying that "the things of the world are loved (despite whatever flaws they have) because they are [God's]."[4] And God has made us God's own in the Incarnation.

"Whatever is fickle, freckled, (who knows how?)"

This idea that God's beauty is embodied in each one of us is something we should readily acknowledge, but we do not. And why is that? I believe it is because there are other words we hear about embodiment, other messages that bombard us daily, from all sides. Those messages completely reverse all that Hopkins is trying to tell us.

The gods we worship in our culture are youth and beauty, and many strive to achieve the epitome of those characteristics without deviation. Every aspect of our bodies is judged by an ironclad criterion of "good" and "bad": weight, breast size, hairstyle, shape of the nose, size of the thighs. There are standards for everything, and those standards draw an unequivocal boundary between "the beautiful people" and "the others." Contrast all that with what, according to Hopkins, embodies the glory of God: the slow as well as the swift, the sweet as well as the sour, the dim as well as the "adazzle."

We live in a society that constantly threatens to strip us of the opportunity to take delight in our own bodies and our own selves. We are given rigid standards of "embodied" beauty, and woe to those who dare to deviate from them! This path leads to full-fledged idolatry. What Hopkins reminds us is that God's beauty and glory take many shapes and sizes in the world. No one form is privileged, and, in fact, we are touched by God's grace exactly in those places where we have come to expect it the least. Norman MacKenzie writes of "Pied Beauty" that "what public opinion condemns as bad or inferior is defiantly recognized as equally divine with the unblemished and radiant."[5]

"All things counter, original, spare, strange"

Hopkins begins the second stanza of his poem with the line "All things counter, original, spare, strange." I find these to be perfect words to describe the Christian gospel. What is more *counter* than immortal, almighty God choosing to dwell in a human form and suffer the indignities of human suffering and death? What is more counter than Jesus' message of equality, justice, and peace, or his sermons of judgment against the Pharisees? What is more *original* than choosing a poor, unmarried virgin to carry the Son of God? And what is more original than her faithful response and praise to God for God's wisdom and providential care? What is more *spare* (modest) than the birth of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem? What is sparser than the shepherds on the hill, hearing the chorus of angels, and hovering around the manger with the animals in the stable? And finally, what is *stranger* than the death of the savior of the world on the cross? What is stranger than the Messiah being crucified for his revolutionary message of

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[4] Jeffrey B. Loomis, *Dayspring in Darkness* (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 91.

[5] Norman H. MacKenzie, *A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 86.

God's unconditional love and grace? What is stranger than reconciliation for the whole world being brought about in the cry of Jesus on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me"? God chose to be embodied in the world through a poor peasant girl and in an itinerant carpenter, who died a criminal's death on the cross. These are God's traces in the world!

So what does that mean for us, and for our embodiment? The fact that God meets us and greets us where we are compels us to conclude that much of what we see as imperfections, flaws in our bodies are actually quite beautiful in God's sight—so beautiful that God took them on in the Incarnation. I don't know exactly what Jesus looked like, but I do know that nowhere in the Bible do we get a record of his broad shoulders, imposing figure, chiseled chin, or winning smile. I doubt that Jesus was much of a looker. He was simply an ordinary human being, and that was enough to bear the Spirit of God.

Here is the Christian message "Pied Beauty" conveys to us: God's glory dwells in you, and in me; being too tall or too short, too young or too old, too fat or too skinny, does not change that. The light of the Incarnation reveals to us that our bodies, whatever condition they are in, are vessels for God's Spirit; in our bodies, Christ dwells.

Praise God!

Paul Tillich writes, "The infinite is present in everything finite, in the stone as well as in the genius."[6] Looking around the world, there is so much that is wondrous, so much that is miraculous, but most of it is overlooked. The Christian belief in God's choosing to appear incarnate in one human being bestows sacred significance not only on the worth of all humanity but also on the worth of all creation. And for that, Hopkins says, we ought to give thanks. Praise God!

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[6] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 263.

Reflections on the Incarnation of Christ

Donald Flatt
Dubuque, Iowa

There was a man brought up in a big city, who for health reasons could not finish high school and who was rejected for military service, but who learned to farm and to love nature. He started his professional life as a county extension agent, with expertise in the management of poultry and other livestock, later moving to a technical post in the national department of agriculture. All his life he was a keen and accomplished gardener. He loved his family and taught them all he knew about country life and various animals, birds, and insects, including the art of raising butterflies and moths from egg stage to maturity. He never owned a motor vehicle but used rail, horse-drawn vehicles, and a bicycle for transportation. He was a good listener and a great companion on bicycle rides and on vacations. Raised in the church, he had a lifelong loyalty to it. With his wife he shared in table prayers and bedtime prayer with his three children, whenever he was home. In a life full of difficulties he was endlessly patient, kind, and thoughtful to his family and to all with whom he had contact.

There was a woman whose family called her "Lovely," with good reason. Her husband was killed in an ill-conceived and poorly executed military campaign in Macedonia in World War I, and she was left with the entire responsibility of raising three small daughters—a responsibility she managed admirably. The family was devoted to church, and each of them was gifted musically. The girls grew up to sing in the church choirs and to play in various orchestras, as well as forming a trio of their own. In due course they all married. Their husbands might not have been their mother's first choice for each of them, but she was unfailingly gracious to her sons-in-law, even after the premature and devastating deaths of two of her daughters.

"The Bishop" was not a bishop, just a humble minister of the gospel who, in the eyes of his students at a boys' boarding school where he was the school chaplain and taught the "classics," looked like a bishop and in some ways acted like one. My first encounter with him was unforgettable. Barely fourteen years old, I was on my first Sunday away from home, waiting outside the chapel on a chilly early fall night. Suddenly I was thumped on the back, and a deep voice said with a hearty chuckle: "Ho, ho, you must be my new boy!" What a heartwarming welcome, duplicated many times subsequently in the course of teacher-student contacts! He had been a good scholar but was a little past normal retirement age and beginning to become a little rusty. When he needed to go out and have a smoke while his students wrestled with the interpretation

of an especially difficult passage in an ancient language, we understood and forgave him. He more than compensated with invitations for extra sessions in his home, with warm beverages and cookies! He was a lifelong bachelor and always wore a shiny brown suit. Only after we had left school did we learn that he had been the sole support of one sibling and had partially supported another.

To complete the constellation we come to another war widow, a devout Baptist, whose naval officer husband had been lost with his ship in a battle in the Mediterranean, and who became godmother to two little boys. She was utterly consistent in her lifestyle, always hospitable and generous, never complaining, conveying love and inspiration, a woman of much prayer. She was completely loyal to her godchildren, continuing to pray for them even long after one had become a pastor of a denomination quite different from hers.

Sources of greatness

Clearly these very different folks all had something in common. One of Job's counselors said to him, "Agree with God, and be at peace, and light will shine upon your ways." Is that a clue to what made them great, or is that only an inadequate if not superficial diagnosis of the motivation that shaped the lives of these people? What is behind their self-giving lifestyle and their heartwarming grace that reaches out to all around them in various uplifting ways?

The Old Testament offers many helpful hints. "Who is like the wise man?" asks the writer of Ecclesiastes, and answers: "Wisdom makes the face shine" (Eccl 8:1). Daniel, speaking of the resurrection of the dead at the end time, says, "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky" (Dan 12:3). In the New Testament, Matthew (13:43) picks up on this thought: "The righteous shall shine like the sun." We are reminded of Jesus' transfiguration and of the Aaronic benediction used in our worship, "The Lord bless you . . . and make his face shine on you." So behind that gracious, welcoming smile is apt to be wisdom, righteousness, and deep experience of the love of God.

Wisdom and light are closely related, and the Christ who was active in creating and bringing light into the world is still active in recreating light and life to overcome darkness and death. John speaks of Christ as the "light which shines in the darkness . . . the true light which enlightens everyone" (John 1:5, 9, cf. 1 John 2:8). Paul speaks of the "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" and believes that "God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:4, 6). And he prays that the Philippian Christians might "shine like stars in the world" (Phil 2:14).

Water and life

Another series of metaphors of the life of the faithful believer is expressed through the imagery of water. In John's Gospel Jesus is reported as saying, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink . . . out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water' (John 7:37–38). And again, Jesus speaks of "living water . . . a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:1–14). The divine giver is again vividly imaged in the book of Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. . . . Let everyone who is thirsty come" (Rev 21:6, 7; 22:17).

I think of another outstanding Christian, a dedicated missionary evangelist, witnessing to his Lord in East Africa. He

was a talented musician as well as a preacher, and he conveyed and reinforced much of his message through his violin which, like the wandering minstrel he often was, he used very expressively. He was well received in beer drinking spots, where the average evangelist did not venture. So where life was being dulled, even destroyed, by alcohol, he poured out the living water of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not only in word and music but above all by his gracious person and presence.

The water of the gospel reminds us of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism and that came upon his disciples after his ascension, in fulfillment of his promise that he would not leave them alone. This is the gift that comes to all believers "by water and the Spirit," as Jesus emphasized in his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:5). Jesus' baptism marked the transition to a new order, from baptism as a cleansing and new membership ritual to a transition to a new life, expressed by John the Baptist with the words, "I baptize you with water . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Mt 3:11). For Paul, baptism is both burial and resurrection. We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, "so that . . . we too might walk in newness of life . . . united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rom 6:3–5, 6:6–11, cf. Col 2:12–13). Again, Christian believers are described as "children of God . . . baptized into Christ . . . clothed with Christ" (Gal 3:27). The indwelling of the Spirit in the believer is repeatedly emphasized by Paul, as we read in Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:16, and other letters.

Luther observes that it is not enough just to have been baptized once. A spiritual rebirth through the renewal of the sacramental presence of the indwelling Christ is a daily need for dedicated Christian living. We all know and meet folks who are churched but in whom the indwelling Spirit has no outward manifestation. But there are others whose lives witness to that presence consistently and joyously. I think of a deeply dedicated missionary pastor and evangelist in East Africa. This large man, with a ready smile and a winning outreach, daily renewed himself and his family by biblically based devotional discipline. He would greet strangers with normal words, but many times he asked, "Do you know the Lord?" They would take no offense, and even respond warmly to the friendly and genial approach. An African medical assistant, in charge of a leper colony, created and sustained a community by bonds of compassion and mutual caring.

> Behind that gracious, welcoming smile is apt to be wisdom, righteousness, and deep experience of the love of God.

Grace at work

"By grace [we] have been saved by faith . . . it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8). This statement of belief expresses the irreplaceable initiative of God for our salvation and has freed many Christians from overwhelming guilt so that they could live joyful lives

Almost without exception, faith came into our lives through the living ministry of a servant of the Lord.

of witness and service. This great and radical insight is mediated through the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is also at work conferring another aspect of grace on the disciple. We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The body may be weak and the mind troubled, but Christ's grace is "sufficient" for the struggling Christian (2 Cor 12:9). Where the Spirit is at work, the believer is "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2:1).

Incarnation

In the beginning God said, "Let there be light." That was just the beginning of God's activity in the world's history. John's opening chapter at once turns, beyond the creation, to God's amazing redemptive intervention: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Too often the gospel seems to have been reduced to the intellectual acceptance of, or moral obedience to, a formula of words. But the gospel links us to the creative and redeeming Spirit of God, embodied in the life of Jesus Christ, and active through his dynamic presence in our lives.

God became human for the sake of all God's children. In Christ's entry into the world the heavenly Father decided to consummate his work by Incarnation, not just in Bethlehem but in the converted lives and ministries of all his people (Phil 2:5–13). If we can grasp that, then Jesus' words reported in John 14:12 will not astound us: "The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and will do greater works than these" (John 14:12).

Almost without exception, faith came into our lives through the living ministry of a servant of the Lord—a parent, baptismal sponsor, pastor, teacher, spouse, or dear friend. We are thankful that the divine Word still leaves the glory of heaven and suffers the pain of humankind, in order that reborn children of God may be means for bringing salvation and restoration to fellow men and women around the world.

We know well the ancient doctrine of the Atonement. We are sinners, Christ took the burden of human sinfulness upon himself in his death on the cross, and by faith in his vicarious sacrifice we are set free. Charged in the heavenly court of justice for crimes for which we cannot offer expiation, we are discharged and exonerated by the grace of the presiding Justice, who has provided a substitute to take our place in the dock. We do not, and cannot, earn our release; we only must trust the giver and the gift. That is good news, but it is by no means the whole of the divine plan. We are freed not just for our own benefit but to help many others to freedom and new life.

Growing up in the Anglican Church, sometimes in parishes that were strongly "Anglo-Catholic," I used to wonder at the deep genuflections that marked the words "born of the Virgin Mary." For a long time I had the impression that they were in exaltation of Mary. It was only much later that I realized that the special reverence was for

the self-emptying act of God in becoming incarnate in our world for the sake of all creation. The Incarnation is too easily regarded as a single phenomenon, which we celebrate in honor of Christ's birth. Yet it is no isolated incident but the explicit entrance of the active Spirit of the Creator and Redeemer in a new way into human history, with outstanding manifestations through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and on into the birth and development of the church.

The risen Christ promised his ongoing presence to all his disciples. This presence is the great theme in the life of the early Christian community, as the various letters to the young churches and the Acts of the Apostles eloquently attest. One branch of the church today sees all this activity as part of the Incarnation, the ongoing creative activity of God, deriving from our relationship to God through the Holy Spirit's moving in our lives. That church is the Greek Orthodox Church. It makes a strong distinction between the "essence" and the "energies" of God. God's essence is a mystery and incomprehensible, but we are privileged through Christ and the Holy Spirit to know and participate in God's energies, as God works in the world. The Orthodox believe, with the apostle Paul, that we are "raised with Christ." It is the God incarnate who is at work in the world, the divine become human that the human might become divine.[1]

Christ "emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a slave." Incarnation and redemption belong to God's one, ongoing, creative act. God reaches out in grace, and we are caught up in a radical transformation, to become participants in the restoration and renewal of the whole creation. The church's outreach cannot be solely, or even mainly, through the verbal messages conveyed through preaching and teaching but rather through the witness in the whole lives of the followers of Christ. New Christians are most often won through the loving ministries and examples of already committed disciples.

What we think and say may be significant, but the ultimate winning or repelling witness is in who we are and how that reality is expressed in our lives. There is no substitute for the living Word, incarnate in dedicated, caring Christian men and women, like the great, common saints I have met in my life.

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[1] For the reflections on the understanding of the Orthodox Church of the Incarnation and its crucial role in witness and evangelism, I am indebted to Jay C. Rochelle, "Majesty, Mystery, and Mercy: An Introduction to Eastern Orthodoxy," *Currents* 26:3 (June 1999), 171–82.

Beyond Bleak Biblicism: Restating Luther's Doctrine of the Word

Jeff Drake
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"We Are Getting to the End"

We are getting to the end of visioning
The impossible within the universe,
Such as that better whiles may follow worse,
And that our race may mend by reasoning.

We know that even as larks in cages sing
Unthoughtful of deliverance from the curse
That holds them lifelong in a latticed hearse,
We ply spasmodically our pleasuring.

And that when nations set them to lay waste
Their neighbors' heritage by foot and horse,
And hack their pleasant plains in festering seams,
They may again ,—not warely, or from taste,
But tickled mad by some demonic force.—
Yes. We are getting to the end of dreams![1]

It is not difficult to agree with the English novelist and poet Thomas Hardy when he asserts, "We are getting to the end of visioning the impossible in the universe. . . . We are getting to the end of dreams!" The literary critic Harold Bloom says this poem by Hardy "may be the bleakest sonnet in the language."[2] Yet what can counter such bleakness? The church has always boldly put forth the claim that all hope is not lost. Instead of living in despair, say proponents of Christianity, the person of faith may inhabit a world of hope. A world—though still imperfect—restored to a place where dreams are once again possible: a world predicated upon and redeemed through the "Word of God."

[1] Thomas Hardy, *Poems*, Selected by Peter Washington (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 237.

[2] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 23.

And yet the Word of God—as a doctrine—may seem so frail and brittle that the slightest breath would blow it away, leaving one again with nothing but the end of dreams. With the decline in biblical literacy, the rise of science, the emergence of new biblical criticisms and a myriad of new theologies attacking each other and the world for attention, is it possible to see the Bible as anything more than another example of Near Eastern literature? Is it possible to piece together the shredded words that the differing criticisms and theologies have left behind?

I propose that Martin Luther's doctrine of the Word of God offers a bold, innovative and fresh understanding of the Bible. By examining Luther's concept of God's Word and highlighting how he uses this in one of his own sermons, we will see that the Word of God is powerfully alive, the fulfillment of God's promise, and the pinnacle of freedom. It is the Holy Spirit who activates the Word of God. It is God's acting, and not human will, that supplies the content for evangelical proclamation.

Background and methodology

The era of the Protestant Reformation had an ethos similar to ours today. Many people, then as now, were living with anxiety and despair. In such troubling times, Martin Luther proposed a new way of looking at the world—when that world seemed to be "getting to the end of dreams." His doctrine of the Word gives shape to his entire theology and shines forth from all of his writings.

Timothy F. Lull states that "the deepest obstacle to hearing Luther in today's theological discussions is that his theology is so rich, complex and dialectical that he seems unreliable both as an opponent and as an ally. There is always with Luther the element of surprise."[3] Thus, this doctrine of Luther's must be culled from numerous sources, written at many different points and circumstances in the Reformer's career.

The conceptual framework used for defending and elaborating this premise will be based on the sixth meaning of the Word of God as found in the first volume of Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology*.

> The message of the church as proclaimed in her preaching and teaching is called the Word. In so far as Word means the objective message which is given to the church and which should be spoken to her, it is the Word in the same sense in which the biblical revelation or any other revelation is the Word. But in so far as Word means the actual preaching of the church, it might be only words and not the Word at all, mere human speech without divine manifestation in it. The Word depends not only on the meaning of the words of preaching alone but also on the power with which they are spoken. And it depends not only on the understanding of the listener alone but also on his existential reception of the content. Nor does the Word depend on the preacher or the listener alone, but on both in correlation. These four factors and their interdependence constitute the "constellation" in which human words may become the Word, divine self manifestation.[4]

Tillich goes on to warn that the preacher must not assume that what is being preached is the Word, however theologically correct, and that one might encounter the Word in theologically incorrect ways or simply "in someone whom we meet and whose words become the Word for us in a special constel-

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[3] Timothy F. Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 2.

[4] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 159.

lation."[5] It is on the concept of externalizing the Word through preaching that attention will focus.

The living power of the Word

Luther's concept of the Word is always alive and full of power at the same time. For Luther, that power is always God. When life and power are absent, the Word is held in bondage and becomes devoid of meaning. That is to say, it is no longer *the* Word, which is never at the beck and call of human desires and wishes, but only a *human* word masquerading as the Word of God.

In holding fast to an understanding of the Word as a living substance, Martin Luther has provided a theological anchor that enables him to invest the Word of God with various meanings and ideas which a static concept simply cannot support. As Joseph Sittler notes:

> Luther's constant emphasis was upon the livingness of the Word of God. It was precisely because Luther believed that oral preaching suggested, and in a singular way, due to the inherent vivacity of the spoken word, communicated this quality of livingness that the Reformer lay such stress on the role of the preacher and the power of the preached word. The Word of God is not a *then*; it is a *now*. Its content is not an ancient address of God to a vanished people and a past situation; its burden is God's speech and ready action to each person in every situation."[6]

As the contemporary world becomes more and more complex, it is crucial that the theology that addresses it be able to expand and adapt as the need arises. Luther provides such a theology. As he explains in the Large Catechism, "When we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, it always awakens new understanding, new pleasure, and a new spirit of devotion. . . . For these words are not idle or dead, but effective and living."[7]

What is difficult for contemporary people to accept is the idea that simply saying something causes something to happen. Words have power and are living. At the very beginning of this discussion, therefore, Luther appears to have struck out. How can a pre-Enlightenment thinker provide any sort of insight for the modern world? What Luther does, however, is rediscover an understanding of the power of the Word that is a continuation of the Old Testament or Jewish understanding. This understanding, for Luther, finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus the Christ. The Old Testament understanding is that when God speaks *something happens*—a creative force is unleashed which is more than our English concept of "word" can contain. The world is dependent on this Word for existence. Rudolph Bultmann explains:

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[5] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 159.

[6] Joseph Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 23.

[7] *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 379.

> For the Old Testament use of "word of God," two points are significant: 1. "God's word" can be equivalent to God's action or God's acts. 2. "God's word" can mean God's counsel, God's command. Both meanings can be traced back to a primitive conception of "*word*." *The word possesses power*; and like the word of a [human being] who holds power, the word of God is effective merely by being spoken. "By the breath of his mouth" God brings all things to life.[8]

Some people think that the Word of God exists only in the pages of the Bible, or they limit the Word of God to one aspect of the Trinity. They fail to see that the spoken Word of God—actively present in Creation, the Incarnation, Pentecost, and by extension the church—is always one action of God, one Word of God. Luther did not find the Trinity overly problematic. For Luther, the living power of the Word is found in all aspects of the Trinity. "No human wisdom," comments Luther, "can comprehend the Creed; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone."[9] Luther uses the lens of grace to interpret all of God's activity. In short, Luther ascribes a personality to this power, making it not so much a *what* but a *who*—Jesus the Christ.

According to Bultmann, the older idea of the Word is law exerting power.[10] For Luther this is not enough. As he said in the first thesis of his *Heidelberg Disputation*, the law of God, though the "most salutary doctrine of life," cannot help make people right before God, but stands in their way.[11] What is needed then is the gospel or "a preaching of the incarnate Son of God, given to us without any merit on our part for salvation and peace. It is a word of salvation, a word of grace, a word of comfort, a word of joy . . . a good word, a word of peace."[12]

For Luther, the function of the law is to draw people to the gospel. As he interprets it in the *Heidelberg Disputation*, "It is certain that human beings must utterly despair of their own ability before they are prepared to receive the grace of Christ."[13] What causes one to utterly despair of one's own ability is the law; but the Word of God, powerfully alive as witnessed in Jesus the Christ—the fullest and ultimate revelation of God—never stops with the law but always finishes with grace. It must here be stated that God's Word is not plural, but singular. There are not two Words, one labeled Gospel and the other Law, but one coherent Word. "When God comes to us," explains Kurt Hendel, "we are confronted with a dialectical Word—not two Words, but God's Word—two aspects of the same Word."[14] For Luther, the Word of God was gospel. Sittler explains:

> Luther's equation of the Gospel with the Word of God is the central point from which his scriptural teaching must be understood. When, for the Reformer, an informing theme, a major motif was perceived as the basic content of revelation, an old biblical view was broken. The Scriptures are no longer regarded as a holy plateau of equal relevancy free from all mortal and historical conditioning.[15]

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[8] Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 286–87.

[9] *The Book of Concord*, 420.

[10] Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 290.

[11] *Luther's Works*, gen. ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957–1966), 31:39.

[12] *Luther's Works* 31:231.

[13] *Luther's Works* 31:40.

[14] Lecture notes from the course "The Theology of Martin Luther," taught by Prof. Kurt Hendel (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago), October 12, 1998.

[15] Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word*, 18.

What is of utmost importance for Luther's understanding of the Word is that it must be verbalized, said out loud.

Just as there is only one Word, so there is only one gospel. "One should thus realize," begins Luther in his treatise "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels," "that there is only one gospel, but that it is described by many apostles . . . Gospel is and should be nothing less than a discourse or story about Christ."[16] Moreover, this Good News is the fulfillment of the promise of God. It is not human words that are transforming, but the Word of God that works through them. Nevertheless, God does use human agency to proclaim the Word.

The Word as promise

For Luther, the concept of the Word as "promise" incorporates also the concepts of faith and fulfillment. Luther maintains that God always deals with a word of promise, and humanity must deal with God through faith in this promise.[17] The complement to the Word being promise is that faith must always accompany the promise for it to be effective. "For everyone can easily see that these two," says Luther, "promise and faith must necessarily go together. For without the promise there is nothing to be believed; while without faith the promise is useless, since it is established and fulfilled through faith."[18] Again, as with the living power of the Word, it is the action of the Holy Spirit that activates and accomplishes faith in the promise.

What is of utmost importance for Luther's understanding of the Word is that it must be verbalized, said out loud. Jesus the Christ, as the fulfillment of all of God's promises, is the "saying out loud" of God's commitment to be true to God's Word. "God makes promises, keeps promises, and the New Testament shows the fulfillment of these promises in Jesus the Christ."[19] For this reason, it is possible for Luther to see Christ throughout the Old Testament. For Luther, there are not two promises of God, but one promise—a promise begun in the Hebrew Bible and completed in the New Testament.

The character of the one making the promise is also important for Luther. God must be completely trustworthy or the nature of the promise is called into question. This is why, in works such as *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther emphasizes God's immutability and foreknowledge. This is also one of the reasons why it is important for Luther that human beings not have free will. If human beings play a part in their own salvation, then what is the use of the divine promise, and how is Christ thus the entire fulfillment of that promise? For Luther, the promise must not be conditional or it is untrustworthy. For Luther, the Word of God is "deliverance from the curse," and human effort can neither enhance nor abrogate this glorious promise. In reference to administering the Sacraments, Luther remarks, even "a wicked priest may baptize,

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[16] Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. 104.

[17] *Luther's Works* 36:42.

[18] *Luther's Works* 36:42.

[19] Lecture notes, October 12, 1998.

that is, apply the word of promise and the sign of water. . . . It still remains the same sacrament and testament."[20] What is always foremost is the power of God's promise, not the people who are the bearers of this promise.

The sacraments

For Luther a sacrament must be instituted by Christ, have an outward sign, and be attached to the Word. As Luther declares in the *Large Catechism*, "What is Baptism? It is not simply common water, but water comprehended in God's Word and commandment and sanctified by them . . . not that the water in itself is nobler than other water but that God's Word and commandment are added to it."[21] Further, these two, the water and the Word, must not be separated from each other, or the water becomes just water. In the same way, bread and wine apart from the Word are merely bread and wine. But why is this understanding important to an understanding of the Word as promise? The sacraments, like proclaiming the Word of God through preaching, are external symbols of the living power of the promise of God. When the proclaimed Word of God fails to be seen as promise, it is no longer an effective vehicle for the divine, and it does not even profit the one entrusted with sharing God's Word with the community, much less the community.

The bondage of the Word

In the light of God's Word having the characteristics of being alive, possessing power, being activated by the Spirit, and reminding hearers of the fulfilled promise of God, what happens in some churches is not proclamation of the Word of God, but a bondage of the Word of God. Too often what passes for preaching fails to understand what Scripture is (erring on the side of either biblicism or academic obfuscation), fails to address the gathered assembly which is there to hear the Word, and presumes that because the Bible is used the speaker possesses the authority of God—indeed is speaking the Word of God.

Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* clearly states that for the unity of the church the gospel should be preached in conformity with a true understanding of it.[22] This is not to suggest that rubrics be established whereby a sermon might be rubber stamped "correct," or that a pastor should submit a sermon and wait for a "Nihil Obstat" or "Imprimatur" before stepping into the pulpit on Sunday morning. Rather, the same care and attention given to an understanding of the sacraments should also be given to the office of preaching of the Word. Additionally, it should be made explicit, as in the sacraments, that God is the One who is transforming and creating and recreating through the Word.

If one were to "equate the Word of God with the Scripture," according to Sittler, one would be "confusing things heavenly with things historical."[23] As Luther puts it, "God and the Scripture of God are two things, no less than the Creator and the creature are two things."[24] Hence, when one limits the Good News to the pages of a book, one is confusing the created with the Creator.

The Word is alive and the very "writing down" of this Word has, in a very real sense, diminished its power. For Luther and also for Calvin, the writing down of the books of the Bible means that they will not be free

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[20] *Luther's Works* 36:56.
[21] *The Book of Concord*, 438.
[22] *The Book of Concord*, 32.
[23] Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word*, 11.
[24] *Luther's Works* 33:25.

from error or mistake. Indeed, Sittler quotes Luther as saying that the writing down of books "is already a great deterioration and a limitation of the spirit which has been dictated by necessity."[25] Luther goes on to say that things were written down because "heretics" and "false teachers" among the preachers were distorting the message of the New Testament; in an effort to protect the sheep from the wolves the oral word was written down.[26]

In the *Formula of Concord* of 1580, one can see a fossilization, "deadening," or "literalizing" of the Word creeping in: "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged."[27] Sittler explains that this occurred because both Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy gradually lost a "dynamic understanding of the Word of God. . . . It is the peculiar tragedy of Lutheran theology that an attempt was made, and provisional success achieved, to pour the new wine of the sixteenth century apprehension of the Gospel into venerable scholastic bottles."[28]

When preaching relies more on books about the gospel than on the gospel itself, the whole enterprise runs aground before getting underway. As Luther expresses it, "What a sin and shame it is that we Christians have come to be so neglectful of the gospel that we not only fail to understand it, but even have to be shown by other books and commentaries what to look for and what to expect in it."[29] This is not to belittle the advances in exegesis, nor is it to suggest that the accumulated knowledge of generations of scholars is worthless. Rather, preaching should be scriptural in that it urges Christ and puts exegesis in service to the gospel and not the gospel in service to exegesis. According to Sittler, "The Bible," in Luther's estimation, "is the carrier of a concrete and special content. In the whole of Scripture and in every part the intent is to portray one single object, Christ—'the great fire of the love of God for us.'"[30] What is necessary for real preaching to occur is the Word of God.

Another bondage occurs when people believe that by reading the Bible they possess the Word of God. While by no means diminishing the importance of daily devotional reading, of paramount importance for Luther is that the Word be said out loud, externalized, preached. As he remarks in his treatise *On the Councils of the Church*:

> Now, wherever you hear or see this word preached, believed, professed and lived, do not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, "a Christian holy people" must be there, even though their number is very small. . . . And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's word cannot be without God's people, and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's word. Otherwise, who would preach or hear it preached, if there were no people of God? And what could or would God's people believe, if there were no word of God?[31]

With this understanding, Luther effectively undercuts the belief that it is enough to read the Word. No, the Word must also be embodied. The Incarnation suggests that the Word must be presented from one person to

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[25] Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word*, 20.
[26] Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word*, 20.
[27] *The Book of Concord*, 464.
[28] Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word*, 35–36.
[29] Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 109.
[30] Sittler, *The Doctrine of the Word*, 24.
[31] *Luther's Works* 41:150.

another, and that for it to be the Word it must be preached, believed, professed and lived: it must be heard.[32] As Bultmann observes, "Everything depends on hearing this Word. . . . Humans encounter the will of God in God's Word, and to accept this will is the only way to understand it. Nothing else establishes a relation to the Word, nothing guarantees its authority other than the Word itself as it is spoken."[33] Thus, God's Word is self-authenticating and acts when it is spoken out loud and received in faith.

Use of the Word in preaching

An evangelical sermon in the Reformation tradition should point to the living power of the Word as the fulfilled promise of God incarnate in Jesus the Christ. Moreover, the sermon should not hold this message in bondage by worshiping the Scripture, or by failing to distinguish between the Scripture as something created and God as the Creator. Additionally, care should be taken to base the sermon on Scripture, insofar as Scripture points to the Christ. Further, exegesis, while important, should not overpower the message. The preacher's "erudite learning" should not attempt to overpower or conceal the simple message of the Good News.

What then, does a sermon written with this framework in mind look like? Martin Luther's "Sermon on the Afternoon of Christmas Day (1530)"[34] is an example. Luther believed profoundly in the power of God's Word—not just in the abstract, but in a concrete way. Evidence of this rests on the fact that, as pointed out by Roland Bainton, "Luther delivered between a hundred and fifty and two hundred sermons a year. He preached from two to four times on a Sunday and several times during the week at the university or in the household composed of children, servants, relatives, and student boarders."[35] This Christmas sermon was chosen for study because it is representative and readily accessible to readers. Further, as pointed out by Lull, "Luther loved Christmas and preached extensively on it, for it was another way in which the story of God's love for humanity could be brought home to the listener in its radically gracious form."[36]

This sermon is solidly based on Scripture. Luther is not preaching on *Reader's Digest* or *The Wall Street Journal*. He bases his words on Luke 2:1–14. That this Word of God has power is shown throughout the sermon, as this portion illustrates:

> [Some people] receive the Word only as a piece of paper, as the cup and corporal receive the body and blood of Christ. The paper does no more than contain something and pass it on to others, but yet it remains paper. Thus you copy something from one paper on another paper; from my tongue the Word sounds in your ear, but it does not go to the heart. So they receive this greatest of treasures to their great harm and still think they are Christians, just as though the paper were to say: I certainly have in me the written words, "to you is born this day the Savior"; therefore I shall be saved. But then the fire comes and burns up the paper.[37]

Luther wants the hearer to "accept the fact that he is your Lord and Savior, that you may be able to boast in your heart: I hear the Word that sounds from heaven . . . he was

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[32] Cf. *The Book of Concord*, 471.

[33] Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 291.

[34] Lull, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 227–34.

[35] Roland Bainton, *The Martin Luther Christmas Book* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), 13.

[36] Lull, 154.

[37] Lull, 230–31.

born for me, for the angel said, 'To you' is born the Savior."[38]

In this excerpt, one is able to see almost all of the hallmarks that constitute evangelical preaching. The power of the Word is transforming; one hears it and accepts it into the heart. Nowhere is one asked to attest to the inerrancy of the biblical record. What is important is not the written word on paper which can be burned up by fire, but the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, "for me." Nor does Luther refer in the sermon to "what the Greek says" or how a certain theology is inherent in the message. Luther uses exegesis to lift up Christ and not detract from the gospel message. As he mentions later on in the same sermon, "And for a sign he sent the angel from heaven to proclaim him, in order that nothing should be preached except that this child is the Savior and far better than heaven and earth."[39]

Luther does hold true to the principles that informed his understanding of the gospel. His doctrine of the Word, as manifested pervasively in his writings and sermons, offers a suitable challenge to the idea that we are getting to the end of visioning the impossible in the universe—that we are getting to the end of dreams.

The Word as freedom

Finally, the Word of God, for Luther, means freedom. Here one need only look at his treatise "The Freedom of a Christian" to apprehend where hearing and believing the Word of God leads: "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[40] It is within this dialectical balance that a Christian, by faith, must live. That is why the external preaching of the Word becomes so important, that one not err on one side or the other of Christian freedom. This freedom rests in knowing whose we are, as Luther affirms, "If I set up any savior except this child, no matter who or what it is or is called, then he is not the Savior. But the text says that he is the Savior. And if this is true—and it is the truth—then let everything else go."[41]

A beautiful passage from the Book of Isaiah may help to counter the bleak picture that the world is at an end of dreams.

Thus says the LORD, the God,
Who created the heavens,
  and stretched them out,
Who made the earth and its products,
Who gives breath to the people upon it,
And spirit to those who walk in it:
"I the LORD have called you in righteousness,
And have grasped you by the hand;
I have kept you,
  and made you a pledge to the people,
A light to the nations;
In opening blind eyes,
In bringing prisoners out of the dungeon,
Those who sit in the darkness of the prison.
I am the LORD, that is my name;
And my glory will I not give to another,
Nor my praise to carved images.
The former things, lo! they have come to pass,
And new things I foretell;
Before they spring into being,
I announce them to you.
(Isa 42:5–9, trans. J. M. Powers Smith)

God's powerfully living promise has come to pass in Jesus the Christ. As Martin Luther wrote in his Christmas sermon, "For if it is true that the child was born of the virgin and is mine, then I have no angry God and I must know and feel that there is nothing but laughter and joy in the heart of the Father and no sadness in my heart.[42] The world desperately needs to hear this Word of God.

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[38] Lull, 231.
[39] Lull, 234.
[40] *Luther's Works* 31:344.
[41] Lull, 233.
[42] Lull, 232.

Book Reviews

A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. By Craig S. Keener. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999. xxi and 1040 pages. Cloth. $60.00.

Craig S. Keener, professor of New Testament at Eastern Baptist Seminary, has produced a prodigious, if not incredible, resource for readers of the Gospel of Matthew. His intent is to describe the Gospel as it must have impacted those who first heard it or read it. He does not attempt to analyze Matthew as gospel literature, nor does he apply Matthew to our time. He simply wishes to present Matthew as it must have sounded to people attached to the Matthean community (p. 3). In order to achieve that end he describes each verse in light of Jewish and Hellenistic literary parallels as well as its social milieu.

The result is a remarkable volume. The voluminous references to Greco-Roman literature, rabbinic material, and the Hebrew Scriptures can be nearly overwhelming. His referrals to secondary literature are equally massive. As a result, of the 1,080 pages, 358 pages are indices and bibliography.

One might suppose such an ambitious undertaking would be intended strictly for scholars. To be sure, many of the references are obscure for the average reader and unavailable to those not near a sizeable library. But the commentary is not intended for a few academicians. In the first place, the commentary is based on an unprinted English text rather than the Greek, and very little Greek is used directly in the text. Second, the outline for each passage proceeds more in a homiletical or pedagogical fashion than by standard content rubrics (p. 5).

The author presents a traditional interpretation of Matthew. There are few if any structural surprises, though the collected background data may shed new light on a phrase or an action. Keener is not rigid, but he consistently defends the authenticity of Jesus' words and actions (p. 70). Sometimes he almost ignores a conflict: he does not explain easily how the same Jesus could limit the mission to Israel (p. 316) and still give the Great Commission (pp. 718–21. Sometimes differences are simply literary preferences: Mark (and so Luke) knew the tradition about the blessing of Peter as the Rock but chose to omit it. Matthew retained it (p. 425). Occasionally Keener admits an irreconcilable conflict: Matthew has the correct date for the Passover, while John has altered it for theological purposes (p. 623).

One other benefit for the reader is that Keener refers frequently, but not at all exclusively, to conservative scholarship, material often not cited in other commentaries.

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Paul: A Critical Life. By Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 416 pages. Paper. $19.95.

True to its title, the book follows an essentially chronological format. It begins with Paul's upbringing and ends with his final years, the two periods of Paul's life for which we possess the least data. First, however, Murphy-O'Connor introduces his methodological stance, which is to begin with Paul's letters and cautiously to supplement from Acts (now standard methodology in life-of-Paul research).

Correspondingly, Murphy-O'Connor makes a strong case for the date of Paul's conversion (A.D. 33) based on gleanings from the letters alone, adding by inference from Jewish sources that Paul would have been in his late thirties at the time. He determines that this date is consistent with Paul encountering Gallio (from Acts) in the summer of A.D. 51. For the rest of his dates, Murphy-O'Connor calculates forward and backward from A.D. 33. One wonders, when all is said and done, whether he has relied more on Acts than his stated methodology implies. Here

is a bare-bones synopsis of Murphy-O'Connor's chronology:

Date	Paul's location or activity	Writing
c. 6 BC	Birth	
AD 15	to Jerusalem	
33	Conversion	
34	Arabia	
34–37	Damascus	
37	Jerusalem (first visit)	
37–?	Syria and Cilicia	
winter 45–46	Antioch	
April 46	departure	
April–September 46	journey to Galatia	
Sept 46–May 48	Galatia	
summer 48	journey to Macedonia	
Sept 48–April 50	Macedonia	
April 50	journey to Corinth	
April 50–September 51	Corinth	
spring 50		*1 Thessalonians letter A*
summer 50		*1 Thessalonians letter B*
late summer/autumn 50		*2 Thessalonians*
September/October 51	Jerusalem (second visit; Conference)	
winter 51–52	Antioch	
April–July 52	journey to Ephesus	
summer 52	Paul in Galatia (Apollos to Corinth)	
August/September 52	Paul arrives in Ephesus (Judaizers arrive in Galatia)	
Aug/Sept 52–Oct 54	Paul in Ephesus	
spring 53		*Galatians*
summer 53		*Philippians letter A*
summer 53	Paul arrested	*Philippians letter B* *Colossians* *Philemon* *"Previous Letter" to Corinth*
autumn 53	Lycus valley?	
winter 53–54	Ephesus	*Philippians letter C*
May 54		*1 Corinthians*
July/August 54		*"Painful Letter" to Corinth*
winter 54–55	Macedonia	
spring 55		*2 Corinthians 1–9*
summer 55	Illyricum	*2 Corinthians 10–13*
winter 55–56	Corinth	*Romans*
summer 56	journey to Jerusalem (third visit)	
57?–61?	Jerusalem–Caesarea	
September 61–spring 62	journey to Rome	
spring 62–spring 64	Rome	
early summer 64	Spain	
64–66?	leaves Spain and travels from Italy around the Aegean from Illyricum to Miletus	
65–67?	voluntarily returns to Rome; second Roman imprisonment; death in Rome	*2 Timothy*

Perhaps the most apt way to characterize this study is to paraphrase and apply to Murphy-O'Connor his own description of Luke's authorial activity: with marvelous literary skill, he puts flesh on this skeleton (cf. p. 348). Murphy-O'Connor has a novelist's flare for constructing engaging narrative. Much of the genius of this book lies in Murphy-O'Connor's meticulous and comprehensive attention to detail. But even more worthy of note is Murphy-O'Connor's hermeneutical posture. He asserts that in the actual experience of people—ancient and modern—theology develops "by historically conditioned insights rather than by logical deduction from a deposit of faith" (p. v). He consistently pursues Paul's theology from this perspective, and this effort is where his insight and creativity will most benefit those who teach and preach on Pauline texts.

Pastors will find chapters 8–13 to be particularly valuable. Each chapter charts Paul's relationship with a particular Christian community, with the minor exception that Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church spans chapters 11 and 12. This format creates some organizational disjunction, e.g., we go from Paul's release from prison in summer A.D. 52 (pp. 250–51) to his trip to Corinth in spring A.D. 50 (p. 252). But this departure from a woodenly chronological framework enables readers to become immersed in the ebb and flow of Paul's relations with individual churches.

Readers are doubly rewarded with a concise rehearsal of significant issues that perplex scholars, and with preachable theological and ethical insights. I recommend in particular, as evidence of this double reward, Murphy-O'Connor's discussion of "body of Christ" (pp. 286–89).

When Murphy-O'Connor is most thought-provoking, he is also most conjectural. For example, this comment caused this pastor to smile: speaking of Paul, "No doubt as his experience as a pastor increased, the generosity of his assumptions regarding human nature diminished" (p. 247). Especially in his psychologizing of Paul and of others, Murphy-O'Connor skates on thin ice. But the psychologizing adds to the delight of the reading, and it stimulates the imagination and curiosity of the reader.

I found it best to read this book with a map of the Mediterranean area alongside. I highly commend it to *Currents* readers for benefits I have mentioned above. It is destined to become a classic. Yet I also advise that it not be used as one's first or only encounter with Pauline scholarship. Murphy-O'Connor's imagination appears occasionally to push too far beyond the available evidence. To take an extreme example, the supposition that Paul learned of "male homosexuals presiding at the liturgy" in Corinth (p. 279; see also p. 289) defies credibility. Nevertheless, *Paul: A Critical Life* is a book that I will gladly return to often.

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Characterization in the Gospels: Reconceiving Narrative Criticism. Edited by David Rhoads and Kari Syreeni. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 184. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999. 298 pages. Cloth. $85.00.

This book presents a collection of essays that were commissioned as part of a project funded by the University of Helsinki. It brings the work of significant Finnish Scandinavian scholars to the attention of English readers and adds their distinctive voice to hermeneutical and methodological debates involving biblical literary criticism.

The lead article by Petri Merenlahti and Raimo Hakola provides the book's subtitle. They propose that narrative criticism be reconstituted as a more historically based discipline that can serve the author-oriented goals of traditional redaction criticism. Although this is being done in America (e.g., Warren Carter) and Britain (e.g., Graham Stanton) the trend in English scholarship has been in the opposite direction, toward reconceiving narrative criticism as a variety of reader-response analysis.

Six additional essays by Scandinavian scholars focus on issues of characterization, often with regard to selected Gospel texts: Merenlahti examines "Individuality and Ideology in the Gospels"; Outi Lehtipuu looks at

"The Rich Man and the Poor Man in Luke 16:19–31"; Syreeni analyzes the role of Peter in Matthew; Talvikki Mattila examines "Gender and Discipleship in Matthew's Passion Narrative"; Arto Järvinen looks at Q's portrait of Jesus; Hakola focuses on "Lazarus in the Fourth Gospel and Afterwards."

The closing retrospect by David Rhoads is a masterful summary of how more reader-oriented scholars have reconceived narrative criticism in the past decade. He stresses, for instance, the admission that the "method" is but a heuristic reading strategy, the need to incorporate insights from studies of orality and the social sciences, and the acceptance of postmodern appreciation for ideological criticism and the ethics of reading.

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A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society. By Rodney Clapp. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996. 251 pages. Paper. $14.99.

In Christendom, the church suffers from amnesia. The telling symptom is that most Christians recognize no difference between church and culture. The church has become a private club, whose rituals abandoned the public sphere to the control of the nation-state.

Rodney Clapp in *A Peculiar People* has issued a clarion call for the church to reclaim its identity—not *within* the prevailing culture but as *itself* an alternative culture. "The original Christians . . . were about creating and sustaining a unique culture—a way of life that would shape character in the image of their God. And they were determined to be a culture, a quite public and political culture, even if it killed them and their children" (p. 82). Characteristics of the church and its own culture are a particular way of eating (Eucharist), a particular way of handling conflict (forgiveness according to the politics of Jesus), and a particular way of perpetrating itself (evangelism).

The place where Christians are formed in their peculiar culture is at worship, which Clapp describes as the "real" world. Baptism initiates us into the counterculture of the kingdom of God. Preaching immerses us in an alternative language. Eating the Eucharist forms us in the egalitarian and nonviolent way of Jesus Christ. Celebrating Eucharist sets the church in mission to act publicly according to the politics of the liturgy. The church as culture enacts the kingdom of God until the kingdom arrives in all its fullness. To that end, it is imperative that "evangelism be understood not simply as declaring a message to someone but as initiation into the world-changing kingdom of God" (p. 167).

This book is both creatively written and powerfully provocative. Clapp summons the church to assume a clearly alternative mindset in opposition to the status quo. He urges the church to return to its roots, grounded in the politics of the Jesus who died on the cross. *A Peculiar People* deserves serious attention from all those engaged in giving leadership to the church in the emerging post-Christian society. The richness of the footnotes, pointing the reader in the direction of further study, only increases the book's value. This is a manifesto deserving wide discussion in congregations.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Trouble with Jesus: Women, Christology and Preaching. By L. Susan Bond. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999. 216 pages. Paper. $18.99.

Susan Bond catches the attention of all preachers, but women in particular, as she tackles the difficulties of women preaching about Jesus/Christ. She begins her project by offering to the reader a sound argument for viewing preaching as a theological enterprise. Bond's "homiletic theology" is focused on the task of women preachers, proclaiming a theologically sound Christology.

Chapter 1 identifies the christological crisis that faces the woman preacher. Using the scenario of a women preaching within the communion liturgy, Bond demonstrates the tip of the iceberg. Having preached a sermon about

the Christ who liberates from captivity and suffering, one who "approves the resistance of victimization," the pastor now consecrates the Eucharist utilizing the traditional words of sacrificial offering that "embrace victimization" (p. 11). The woman preacher finds herself trying to find a theological balance between the metaphors and images of her sermon and the images found in the liturgy.

Chapter 2 offers the reader a survey of traditional Christologies that the church has drawn from for its symbols and rituals. Bond reviews the changes that each theologian has brought to Christology. She continues with an evaluation of the benefits and problems that each change presents to women preachers. Chapter 3 continues this approach as it reviews current contemporary christological options that are offered by women scholars. Read together, these two chapters provide the reader with a sound evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the theological positions being described.

Bond builds her theological proposal throughout the work. In chapter 4, though, she gives it concreteness in the metaphor of "salvage." Building on the position of Christology from below, *christus victor* in particular, Bond proposes *salvage* as a metaphor that meets her criteria of a Christology whose "primary purpose is to be contextualized through the vulnerability of metaphor, to produce homiletical reflection grounded in familiar terms but open to new levels of meaning" (p. 109). Sounding like salvation, the salvage metaphor offers the twin trajectories of deliverance and healing. It avoids romanticizing human life, accepts human temptation to evil, and calls the church to a response that is one of communal moral agency. These are precisely the challenges faced by women preachers.

Bond offers the reader a number of exciting pieces in this work. She skillfully builds an objective review of traditional Christologies, demonstrating both strengths and weaknesses. She offers the same critical view of the Christologies offered by women. She concludes with a metaphor that allows the Christology of *christus victor* new authority in the voice of women preaching in the church today. Bond calls all preachers to honestly evaluate their own theology of preaching. At the same time, she offers a proposal that can encourage proclamation filled with the power of God's salvaging love.

Elaine G. Siemsen
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The Word as True Myth: Interpreting Modern Theology. By Gary Dorrien. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997. 287 pages. Paper. $24.95.

Gary Dorrien, professor of religion at Kalamazoo College, sketches the history of modern Christian theology's encounter with the Enlightenment's desacralization of the world and rejection of mythic forms of thinking as superstitious. He believes that the contemporary "dethronement of the Enlightenment ideology of universal reason" opens a way "for theology to completely overturn the rationalist denigration of myth, imagination, and fictive representation" (p. 4). Hence, we can agree with C. S. Lewis that the gospel word is a "true myth." Indeed, if one seeks to demythologize all aspects of the Christian faith, one risks emptying Christianity of the gospel (p. 236).

Even those thinkers who disagree with Dorrien's retrieval of the gospel as a "true myth" will find his interpretation of the last two centuries of European theology engaging. Dorrien has a remarkable ability to make the complex inquiries of Kant, Schleiermacher, D. F. Strauss, Feuerbach, Ritschl, Harnack, Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, and Gilkey lucid—less like a textbook and more like a novel. Since he seeks to retrieve a kind of Barthian outlook on theology, his development of Gilkey's criticism of neo-orthodoxy's "faith" in the historicity of pseudo-acts of God and Gilkey's plea for a bridge between secular experience and religious experience (p. 165) is salutary.

Overall, Dorrien's assessment of Liberal theology's attempt of cultural accommodation, the aim to keep pace with the "progress" of modern culture and science, is negative. With Tillich, he agrees that while scientific method is anti-mythical in its study of objects, "even

science is myth-creative in its conceptual theorizing" (p. 119). Hence, "by its nature, myth (like science) seeks to unify creation—or at least make it intelligible—under a single conceptuality" (p. 119). Christian theology was wrongheaded to try to disengage itself from mythic thinking. Instead, it should honor this thinking by seeing itself as "true myth."

This book will benefit church leaders seeking to understand their role in the wider secular culture and perhaps give them encouragement that their voice is valuable. Dorrien is to be commended for his assessment of myth as an inescapable feature of human inquiry.

Mark C. Mattes
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What in the World Is God Doing? Re-Imaging Spirit and Power. By Lee E. Snook. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. vii and 179 pages. Paper. $18.99.

Lee Snook, emeritus professor of theology at Luther Seminary, offers here an attempt to overcome the separation between the secular and the sacred that Western culture has generated by means of his engagement with African Christian spirituality, which recognizes the Spirit of God as active in all events, both "religious" and "secular." His hope is that with a renewal of a theology of the Holy Spirit as the power or energy emerging in all relationships we Westerners can learn to discern the presence and activity of God in political, economic, social, and personal life and thus overcome our tendency to make God's activity a solely private matter.

The Spirit, Snook avers, is "not absent from the power to dominate or manipulate, but is as necessary a factor as such power is necessary to achieve things we call good" (p. 55). Nevertheless, "the power to dominate is largely physical, external, and observable. As such it can achieve order, but it cannot coerce unity of minds, hearts, wills, commitments" (p. 55). For this reason, Christians need to seek the long-range goals of the Spirit as promoting the "human quest for freedom and justice" (p. 62) and agree with the postmodern rejection of every presumption of privilege based on inheritance, gender, race, or European custom (p. 71).

Snook's work is salutary in that he seeks by means of a retrieval of pneumatology to overcome the impediments to Christian outreach caused by modernity's configuration of religion as something wholly private. This reviewer finds Snook's pro-worldly pneumatology to be unnecessarily opposed to ecclesiology. Snook could mine the classical tradition to find support for his pneumatological convictions. For instance, Luther's two kingdoms doctrine could be retrieved as a paradoxical affirmation of the spirituality of both the world and the gospel. Furthermore, N. F. S. Grundtvig's theology of culture and G. W. F. Hegel's philosophy of *Geist* (Spirit) would offer excellent sources for Snook's affirmation of God's spiritual agency in the world. However, his African outlook on pneumatology is a lively, instructive, and welcome alternative to our current Spiritless theology.

Mark C. Mattes

The Collegeville Atlas of the Bible. Edited by Jay Harpur and Marcus Braybrooke. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998. 144 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

This atlas belongs on the shelves of every parish library. Reasons are easy to list. (1) The maps, prepared by Oxford Cartographers, are designed to illustrate land contours clearly—though at times some of the place names are hard to read (see for example, the map of Paul's Missionary Journeys on pp. 118–19 or of his Second Missionary Journey on pp. 122–23). (2) The text retells the biblical story clearly, so that readers will have no difficulty in comprehension. (3) The atlas contains dozens of spectacular illustrations, some very small, that should help people to visualize the setting in geography and history. These include pictures of ancient sites and artifacts, and Christian art. (4) One of the best features is the artistic reconstructions of ancient sites: the Ziggurat of Ur (pp. 14–15), the Tabernacle (p. 31), Jericho (p. 35), the Tell Qasile Philistine Temple (p. 41), Davidic Jerusalem

(pp. 48–49), the Solomon Temple (pp. 52–53), Jerusalem's Water Supply (p. 61), Lachish (p. 63), Babylon (pp. 66–67), the Herodium (a cutaway, pp. 78–79), a first-century Palestinian house (p. 93), N.T. Jerusalem (pp. 100–101), Herod's Temple (pp. 106–7), the Via Dolorosa (pp. 108–9), the central part of Roman Ephesus (pp. 125–27), and Caesarea Maritima in Palestine (pp. 130–31).

There are a few problems. There is a listing of art pictorial sources but inadequate captioning of the illustrations. The elaborate reconstruction of the Via Dolorosa is probably a nod to traditional piety; a small inset plan gives the more likely historical route (p. 108). The caption to the Erastus inscription in the plaza outside the Corinth theater incorrectly translates the Latin, giving Erastus the nonexistent title of proaedilis. The Arcadian Way was not a part of Early Roman Empire Ephesus, since it was not constructed till the Byzantine era (pp. 126–27). The reconstruction of Caesarea Maritima incorrectly labels a stadium an "Amphitheater" (p. 131), though the editors label the stadium at Ephesus correctly. (There was an amphitheater at Romana Caesarea, not pictured in the reconstruction.)

In spite of these errors, this atlas deserves wide use in parishes and pastors' libraries. The price is surprisingly low for the quality of the volume. It will repay careful study richly.

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Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality. By George R. Hunsberger. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998. xii and 341 pages. Paper. $28.00.

This book is published in the series of The Gospel and our Culture under the general editorship of Craig Van Gelder. This particular edition is written by an outstanding new missiologist who teaches at Western Theological Seminary in Michigan. The book is a definitive work on the life and theology of Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin began his missionary vocation in 1936 in India, sent by the Church of Scotland. In India, he was a leader in the ecumenical movement, especially in the formation of the Church of South India. He served in the church as a bishop and theologian whose ecumenical and scholarly contributions were greatly appreciated throughout the world.

The author of the book first met Bishop Newbigin at Princeton Seminary when the Bishop delivered a lecture on mission-related topics. Hunsberger was profoundly impressed in that lecture by Newbigin's "theology of cultural plurality." Hunsberger wrote this book to "lift out this facet of Newbigin's thought and help it become apparent." However, this book does not necessarily shed any new light about a theology of culture, other than the greater enhancement and emphasis of the multiplicity of different cultures that exist in the world in which Christian mission takes place.

The most interesting and great contribution of this book is its theology of cultural plurality related to the biblical doctrine of election. The author claims that the doctrine of election is basic to Newbigin's theology of mission. According to Newbigin, the Bible is the story of election. God elected the people of Israel to establish a covenant relationship with them, show God's love, and bless them. God elected Jesus as the Christ to redeem the world, and God elected the believers of Christ to spread the gospel of universal salvation. Emphasizing this universal aspect of salvation, the author correctly points out: "Newbigin's critique of historic Calvinism charges that it has distorted the gospel."

The book is an outstanding contribution to help us learn about the most distinguished missiologist of the twentieth century and to vision true biblical theology of mission and practice for the twenty-first century. This book is commended to all seminarians and theology students to read and discuss.

Wi Jo Kang
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans. By Peter Richardson. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999. xxv and 360 pages. Paper. $34.95.

This fine book about Herod the Great is recommended for any one interested in Jewish Palestine during the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E. Professor Peter Richardson of the University of Toronto in Canada relies necessarily for his account of events in Herod's life on the writings of the Jewish historian Josephus, demonstrating judicial use and comparison of accounts in both Josephus' *Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*. Richardson's main thesis regarding Herod is expressed in the book's subtitle and summarized in the last paragraph of the book:

> Herod was not a monster; he had the good of his people at heart, just as he had the best interests of Rome in view. He was "King of Jews"; he wished no other position and had no intention of reshaping Judaism into a new mutation. He also was "Friend of Romans"; he had no wish to withdraw from the opportunities and benefits that this bestowed. It is in the tension between these two that he and his family lived their lives and made their reputations. (p. 314)

Starting at the end of Herod's life, the author's first chapter offers three perspectives on Herod's death—those of Rome, Petra, and Jerusalem. Thereafter, Richardson devotes alternate chapters for tracing the critical events in the life and career of Herod (from his birth in 73 B.C.E. until his death in 4 B.C.E.). In the other chapters he supplements this chronological account with background and cultural context material. Chapter 2, "Family Matters," discusses Herod's wills, family financial provisions, issues of genealogy and descent, and his marriages and divorces. Chapter 4, "Late Hellenism in the Near East," includes discussions of Syria, dependent kingdoms, the Decapolis, and the Coastal Cities. Chapter 6 describes the areas of Herod's vast kingdom—Galilee, Judea, Samaria, territories east and north of the Sea of Galilee, and Perea, with a helpful set of maps included on pages 144–52. Chapter 8 lists and describes all Herod's building projects, including fortresses and palaces, the Temple and other religious buildings, and cultural buildings such as theaters, hippodromes, baths, and gymnasia. In chapter 10, "Herod and Religion," Richardson investigates Herod's relations with the Temple elite, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, Herodians, and brigands. Finally, the author discusses in chapter 12 "The Herods and Christianity," including both Herod and his successors in his consideration of the topic.

The book is well researched and presented in a balanced and thoughtful manner. In addition to satisfying a reader's sheer interest in the fascinating and somewhat misunderstood figure of Herod, the book offers a wealth of information useful for a better understanding of the emergence of Christianity. The book's chronological lists, maps, and indices of primary texts, places, and subjects enhance its usefulness as a reference book. I recommend this book to all pastors and teachers who desire a comprehensive study of Herod the Great in the context of Second Temple Judaism and the Roman world.

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Wartburg Theological Seminary

Jesus and the Heritage of Israel: Luke's Narrative Claim upon Israel's Legacy. Edited by David P. Moessner. Luke the Interpreter of Israel 1. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999. xii and 395 pages. Paper. $40.00.

The essays in this volume are intended to chart and advance a "sea change" in scholarship on Luke and Acts. Although by no means united on many issues, most of the scholars represented here reflect some common concerns and conclusions.

One common thread is the literary view that Luke-Acts was conceived as a two-volume work with a single narrative purpose. A second common concern is an attempt to place Luke-Acts in the context of Greco-Roman literature, especially Hellenistic Jewish writings. A third tendency is to argue that Luke-Acts seeks to persuade its audience "that Jesus of Nazareth is

Israel's true heritage and enduring legacy to the world" (p. 3), with the result that Luke-Acts is seen as more open to Judaism than previous scholarship allowed.

Part 1 of this volume contains four essays on the prologues of Luke and Acts. Part 2 contains eleven essays on the patterns and purposes of the two-volume work. Some aspects covered are the pattern of promise and fulfillment, a theology of sea stories, a "rhetoric of silence" in the ending of Acts, the delay of the parousia, and the story of Israel in the narrative of Luke-Acts.

The one essay that seriously questions the reading of Luke and Acts as a single two-volume work is by Richard Pervo, who stresses the different genres of Luke and Acts and notes that the attempt to read the two volumes together is a recent phenomenon. Whether or not Pervo's critique is valid, it does seem that the authors of this volume generally neglect questions about the reception and readers of Luke and Acts.

Those who are looking for a sustained unitary reading of Luke-Acts will be put off by the technical nature and unevenness of this essay collection. But those who wish to plunge into the challenge of a dialogue-in-progress among scholars will be richly rewarded.

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Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical. By Frank C. Senn. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997. xix and 747 pages. Cloth. $55.00.

Today, it often takes a team of scholars to write a work of this magnitude. Frank Senn demonstrates his mastery of the history and theology of liturgy by producing what will be, at least among Lutherans, the standard work for a long time to come. Already the author of numerous articles and books as well as an active leader in prominent liturgical organizations, Senn's scholarly endeavors have been enriched by the perspective he brings as one continuing to be engaged in parish ministry.

We live in an age when many are tempted to dismiss the power of liturgy to shape Christian identity. The scope of this book roots present liturgical practice in a tradition that stretches from ancient Jewish worship, through the classical forms developed in the early church, by way of the reforms introduced at the time of the Reformation, to the orders of worship currently employed and debated. The three major parts of the book ("From Meal to Mass," "Reformation Liturgical Traditions," and "Liturgical Loss, Retrieval, and Renewal") are preceded by a significant Prolegomena on "The Ritual of Christian Worship." The two chapters of the Prolegomena deserve the attention of all those who are tempted, in this time of experimentation, to facilely cast off the ritual of Christian liturgy in favor of something seemingly more attractive. The shape of the liturgy functions to preserve the church as both catholic and evangelical.

Over the course of the book, Senn explores the contributions of each succeeding era to the history of Christian liturgy. Building upon the consensus of the modern liturgical research, Senn views the synthesis of the first centuries as establishing many normative practices. The Reformation brought necessary reforms that revitalized the participation of the faithful in Word and Sacrament. Each chapter offers a wealth of historical information that helps build a comprehensive understanding of what it means for us to employ certain forms of worship today. I was especially appreciative of Senn's discussion of "The Breakdown of Liturgical Order" at the time of the Enlightenment (pp. 541–48) and "The Role of Emotion in Worship" with reference to revivalist worship practices (pp. 565–67), insofar as these sections raise issues that continue to inform how we interpret the meaning of worship.

Christian Liturgy warrants attention by the church at many levels. It certainly deserves careful study by scholars as we reflect on present worship practices, seeking to be informed by the past with an eye toward recommendations for the future. This volume could be extremely valuable to pastors, church musicians, and worship committees as a reference work in learning about liturgy in the course of planning worship

services. Even for those who cannot savor the book by reading it from cover to cover, there remains much to satisfy the appetite. Clergy groups, for example, would be greatly enriched by discussing Senn's views on three "Contemporary Liturgical Challenges": the problem of inculturation, the feminist critique, and reaching the unchurched (pp. 676–92). Likewise, careful attention to the " Epilogue" on "Postmodern Liturgy" that concludes the book could guide us to think more deeply about worship practices to sustain the church in claiming its identity and equipping it for mission in the days to come.

I end this appreciative review with a provocative quote from this last portion of this exceptional book:

> Liturgy in this postmodern world must aim for enchantment, not entertainment. Entertainment is a major facet of our culture. But entertainment as a cultural model is inadequate to the mission of the gospel because it works best when it leaves one satisfied with oneself and one's world. Enchantment, on the other hand, casts a spell that leads one from a drab world to another, brighter, more interesting world. (p. 704)

The world that we enter through the liturgy of the church is none other than the kingdom of God. In this book, Senn lays the historical and theological foundations for making such a claim. Read and learn why!

Craig L. Nessan

Inculturation of the Jesus Tradition: The Impact of Jesus on Jewish and Roman Cultures. By Graydon F. Snyder. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999. x and 247 pages. Paper. $26.00.

"Inculturation" is a term of recent vintage that refers to what happens when two cultures interact with and influence each other, without implying that the invading system has completely absorbed or assimilated the host culture. Students of church history note the striking developments from the primitive Christian movement of the Gospels and Pauline letters to the more highly organized church of the second and third centuries C.E. Protestant scholars have tended to accent the differences and have suggested that the advent of so-called "early Catholicism" was a case of the Christian movement capitulating to the dominant Greco-Roman culture. Catholic scholars, on the other hand, have tended to downplay discontinuities and have argued that later Catholic sacramental practices and hierarchical church structures were inevitable outgrowths of the earliest apostolic principles.

Graydon Snyder offers a different perspective and reads the evidence as a case of the Jesus tradition, as a subset of Jewish culture, impacting and being impacted by the dominant Greco-Roman culture during the second generation of the Christian movement. He demonstrates the evolution of this inculturation by tracing half a dozen trajectories in these areas: symbols and representational art, architecture, inscriptions, calendar, food and meals, gender meaning and roles, and health and medicine.

How the Christian tradition modified eating practices is a fair example of Snyder's approach. He notes that as part of its Jewish background the Jesus movement inherited bread as a diet staple which when broken at a meal actualized the formation of community, water as an essential food recognized as a gift from God, wine as symbolic of divine blessing suitable for sacrifice or libation, and meat which must be drained of its life blood and prepared according to kosher regulations. In the Greco-Roman world, according to Snyder, male clients invited to a patron's banquet were seated according to rank and privilege and were often served "soft" perishable foods such as fish; women were present only as servers or (sexual?) entertainers. In Jewish circles distinctions between "clean" and "unclean" established a rigid ethnic purity system that excluded non-observant Jews from table fellowship.

Snyder argues that early Christian meals were built around a menu of fish, bread, and wine, which effectively eliminated worries about whether meats were kosher or had been dedicated to idols. Their meals could include men and women, Jews and Gentiles together, and as a result "the simple meal of the Christians

democratized the Greco-Roman class system" (p. 150).

Many of Snyder's allegations need to be demonstrated more clearly. For example, his assertion that "in the ancient world there probably was no more important popular religious practice than that associated with the cult of the dead and eating with the dead" (p. 165) demands better documentation. On the whole, however, he offers a significantly different sociological approach that offers dozens of challenging insights to students of the New Testament and the history of Christian origins.

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The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences. Edited by Richard Bauckham. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998. vi and 220 pages. Paper. $22.00.

This collection of essays by six scholars from England and Scotland aims to "challenge and to refute the current consensus in Gospels scholarship which assumes that each of the Gospels was written for a specific church or group of churches" (p. 1). Instead, the six authors offer counter evidence that "the Gospels were written for general circulation around the churches and so envisaged a very general Christian audience" (p. 1). If correct, the implications of this claim will require a complete reconsideration of much of the Gospel scholarship in the last quarter century that has increasingly focused on the unique social-historical contexts of each of the so-called "gospel communities" as reconstructed through a mirror reading of each of the four Gospels.

The Introduction and lead article ("For Whom were Gospels Written?"), both by Richard Bauckham, set the agenda for the volume. Bauckham reads the Gospels as examples of the genre of ancient biography (*bios*), as "open texts" that leave their implied readership relatively open, as fundamentally different from the letter genre in this respect, and as *written* communication whose function it was precisely to communicate across space, not within a narrowly circumscribed geographic area. Loveday Alexander ("Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels") offers numerous insights about the availability, accessibility, and circulation of the codex in antiquity which together strengthen the general arguments of the entire volume.

Michael B. Thompson's article "The Holy Internet: Communication between Churches in the First Christian Generation" documents the vibrant network that kept churches connected across wide geographic expanse. Richard Burridge's "About People, by People, for People: Gospel Genre and Audiences" maintains that, if the gospel genre is biography, then the Gospels are about a *person*, not about specific communities and their internal problems and disputes. Bauckham, in "John for Readers of Mark," offers a convincing alternative rereading of John's Gospel, read not against the hypothetical stages in Johannine community development but against the interplay of the Johannine and Markan portraits of Jesus for an audience that would have known both Gospels. Stephen Barton ("Can We Identify the Gospel Audiences?") exposes the many hermeneutical deficiencies in the "quest for the historical gospel communities," and the concluding article by Francis Watson ("Toward a Literal Reading of the Gospels?") contends that the current tendency to read the Gospels as products of and for particular communities denies their fundamental character as texts about the person of Jesus, his concrete, historical identity.

This collection of essays is a formidable challenge to time-honored assumptions about gospel literature. If the authors are correct, our reading of the Gospels will have to be completely rethought. The authors should receive our thanks for their provocative and convincing challenge.

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The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation. By Gabriel J. Fackre. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997. x and 230 pages. Paper. $25.00.

As part of the Edinburgh Studies in Constructive Theology series, the author examines the doctrine of revelation for the church today. Revelation comes to us through "the great narrative" of the Christian story. Foremost in interpreting this story is the covenant with Noah where God graciously extends preservation to human beings. This irrevocable covenant, sealed by the rainbow, includes the promise of the world's continued *knowing*. By God's grace preserved narratively in Noah we have sustaining glimpses of God's purposes now, and in the future.

The author treats the doctrine of revelation in three parts: General Revelation, Special Revelation, and Revelation as Reception. Included in his examination of "The Great Narrative" are chapters on Creation, the Fall, the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Israel, Jesus Christ, Scripture, the church, personal salvation, and consummation. He formats his study around four phases in the unfolding story of revelation: preservation, action, inspiration, and illumination. At the same time he points out four contemporary interpreters of the faith who can be seen to coincide with these phases: Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Paul Tillich, and Carl Henry.

I found this book to be helpful as an introduction to the theological roots of narrative theology. The author's treatment of a broad spectrum of theologians concerning revelation was a helpful corrective. I particularly liked his suggestion that all contemporary understandings of revelation must be critiqued theologically and historically. At the same time his conclusions on revelation leaned clearly to one side of the spectrum, the Reformed tradition of Barth and H. Richard Niebuhr. He broadly treated interpreters of revelation but did not formulate his own broadly conceived doctrine.

This book should be appreciated by all as an ntroduction to one of the foundations of theol- gy. A parish pastor would be helped through its ocus on "the Grand Narrative" in Scripture, for n preaching weekly on the pericopes, pastors ometimes do lose the big picture. Students in theology should find helpful the reclaiming of the grand tradition of theology in the twentieth century.

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The International Bible Commentary: A Catholic and Ecumenical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century. Edited by William R. Farmer, Andre LaCocque, and Sean McEvenue. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999. lii and 1918 pages. 14 maps. Cloth. $99.95.

This large commentary grew out of conversations between William Farmer and Bernard Orchard back in 1990. They talked of revising *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (1953), which Orchard had edited, but they soon agreed that what was needed was "a completely new and globally oriented commentary in the spirit of Vatican Council II."

They succeeded in gaining the participation of scholars from every continent. Most but not all of the authors are Roman Catholic. All write in the conviction that the Bible is the church's book and with the aim of assisting readers to "recover the ancient biblical truth with its precise meanings, its warmth, and its power."

The layout is exceedingly attractive and user-friendly. The authors write in paragraphs, without footnotes, rather than in a series of disconnected comments, and so they invite continuous reading.

Each commentary on a biblical book consists of two major sections, called "First Reading" and "Second Reading." The first reading is an overview of the material, designed to enable readers to see the book as a literary and spiritual whole. The second reading offers more detail on selected portions of the text, augmenting the first reading with "the passionate details of poetry and preaching and history in which the writers originally discovered the shattering presence of God in their lives." Scattered here and there in the commentaries are what the editors call "inserts." These inserts are occasional sidebars in which the editors offer their brief reflections

highlighting some special topic such as the following inserts in the commentary on Matthew: the perpetual virginity of Mary, baptism, the beatitudes, "daily" (in the Lord's Prayer), anti-Judaism, and the Gospel of Matthew. At the end of each commentary is a bibliography listing relevant works published in English.

Large one-volume commentaries (and multi-volume works like the New Interpreter's Bible) usually include long encyclopedia style articles on such matters as the history of various periods and sectors of the ancient world, biblical geography and archaeology, Old Testament and New Testament theology, the life and thought of Paul and of John, ancient and modern translations. That kind of material is kept to a minimum in the present commentary, because dictionaries and encyclopedias are readily available and because the editors wanted to focus on the reading of the biblical text itself.

This work invites at least a quick comparison with another one-volume commentary written in the spirit of Vatican II: *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* of 1990. The *NJBC* is for biblical students and teachers who delight in philology, history, and bibliographical references in English, German, and French. *The International Bible Commentary* is for pastors and lay people who want to open their heads and hearts to the beauty and power of the biblical story. Both of these big books are wonderful, complementary resources.

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Science and Theology: An Introduction. By John Polkinghorne. London: SPCK, and Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998. viii and 144 pages. Paper. $19.00.

Theoretical physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne has been a prolific contributor to the science-theology dialogue over the past twenty years. The present volume is an introductory text arising from a seminary course but is also appropriate for undergraduate courses or anyone with a modicum of theological experience who wants an overview of the field.

The author casts his net broadly. After an introductory chapter on some historical points and the characters of science and theology, he sketches the scientific picture of the world, issues relating to human nature, and theism. He then focuses on divine action (a subject to which he has made significant contributions), specifically Christian theology and interreligious dialogue, with some attention to the role of science as a "meeting point" for different faiths. A concluding chapter touches on ethical issues.

I would note a couple of points which are fairly typical of a good deal of the writing about science and theology today. On the religious side, the discussion of natural theology (pp. 69–76) does not seem to me to show sufficient concern about the dangers of that enterprise. The sort of contemporary natural theology that Polkinghorne endorses is modest, but the fact that "theism" is discussed before explicitly Christian theology opens up again the possibility that revelation will be made to fit prior conclusions about the divine. On the scientific side, and of some pedagogical concern, is the fact that the sketch of the scientific picture of the world is too narrowly concentrated on a few topics of modern physics. Brevity may be a consideration, but a broader scientific survey is needed if one is to appreciate the range of issues which the dialogue encompasses.

Polkinghorne labels himself a "consonantist" (p. 118), eschewing either complete separation of religion and science or assimilation of one by the other, but he also describes a spectrum of views on relevant topics. This centrist position, together with a very readable style, makes the book a good choice for an introduction to science-religion studies.

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Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire from Augustus to Justinian. By Albrecht Dihle. Translated by Manfred Malsahn. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. vii and 647 pages. Cloth. $55.00.

This book is a wonderful addition to the literary history of the Roman Empire—and of the church. It covers classical, Jewish, and Christian literature in Greek and Latin down to the eighth century. And that makes it a unique addition to the repertoire available to students. The eight chapters survey in order the antecedents of this literature in Latin and Greek classicism, the Julio-Claudian era, the Flavian era, the second century, the Severan era, the period of crises in the third century, the era of Diocletian and Constantine, and finally the Christian empire. Each chapter begins with a taut summary of the political and social currents of the period.

Dihle knows this literature well. His synthetic approach, in which he discusses Greek, Latin, Christian, and Jewish literature in chronological order, and hence in close proximity to one another, aids in understanding the growing Hellenization of Christian literature, the development of higher literary aspirations, and the growing inculturation of Christianity into the society of the Roman Empire. Therefore one should pay attention to his comments on style, literary character, and the like. His description of Paul will surprise New Testament scholars devoted to the rhetorical analysis of Paul's letters or who seek to find Paul highly influenced by ancient philosophy. He speaks of "Paul's exceptional wealth of ideas and his strong temperament, unfettered by that rhetorical and philosophical schooling which any educated Greek would have gone through" (p. 206).

There are things that Dihle, Professor at Heidelberg University and President of the Heidelberg Academy of Arts and Sciences, does not do. (1) He does not provide the student who might wish to consult these ancient writers any bibliographical resources. For that the student will need to consult the relevant bibliographical sources, *L'Annee Philologique* and *Die Internationale Zeitschriftenschau für Bibelwissenschaft und Grenzgebiete.* (2) Dihle presents his own, informed analysis of these writers without engaging in any scholarly debate with divergent opinions. (3) This is a history of literature—though not of *belles lettres*—not a history of ideas. Thus the discussion of Christian authors discusses their literary character, their use of scholarly methods, but does not engage in an evaluation of their theological content. (4) The final chapter is less satisfying than the earlier ones. In the earlier chapters Dihle discusses the major writers (e.g., Seneca, Plutarch, Pliny, or Apuleius), in a single, major cohesive section, so that one obtains a good, comprehensive interpretation of their literary output. One cannot do the same for major figures in early Christian literature (e.g. Origen, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, or Augustine), because Dihle analyzes their writings under differing heads (sermons, biblical commentary, etc.). One has to search out widely scattered material to form a comprehensive picture of one of these great writers. (5) Some English-speaking readers will have problems with the transliteration of a few names: Hieronymus, not Jerome; Theodoretus, not Theodore; Ambrosius, not Ambrose. The titles of all works are given in English translation. I noticed only one printer's error: p. 248 uses B.C. when A.D. is clearly intended.

Dihle ends his preface with this statement: "This book is meant for readers of the kind described by Cicero, in his dialogue *About the Orator:* Neque doctissimi neque indoctissimi, sed viri boni ete non illiterati—Neither very learned nor very ignorant, but good men, and not illiterate" (p. vii). Anyone who reads this graceful book will be more learned than before, more literate, and certainly more understanding of the course of early Christian history. I hope it gets the wide reading it deserves.

Edgar Krentz

The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary. By Herman N. Ridderbos et al. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997. Paper. $42.00.

From the outset Ridderbos makes it clear that his is not a literary critical work. He never mentions the literary critical work of Alan Culpepper, Paul Duke, or Mark Stibbe, for example. He regularly rejects misunderstanding and irony in favor of psychological realism as he interprets difficult sayings. Furthermore he has little use for the source criticism of the Fourth Gospel, and certainly his work is not social scientific, liberationistic, or feminist. Nor is he interested in trying to understand the gospel against some late first century background.

This is both a theological and a European commentary, and the author carries on a running dialogue with Rudolf Bultmann, C. H. Dodd, and Rudolf Schnackenburg. The one frequently cited American is the late Raymond Brown. Against readers who find the Fourth Gospel full of symbolism and who think of the Gospel as richly layered, Ridderbos strives to hold together event (history) and interpretation, but he wants to do that without becoming fundamentalistic or literalistic.

Usually Ridderbos locates himself in the mind of the evangelist addressing the reader, but he often slips into reading the minds of actors in the story, believing that he can understand their motives and feelings as they respond to Jesus.

His focus throughout the commentary is "the identity of Jesus in its all-embracing significance" (p. 9). The "grand theme" of the gospel is "the manifestation of Jesus' earthly glory 'in the flesh'" (p. 428). Ridderbos takes pains to emphasize that this is the glory of the preexistent only-begotten Son of the Father, the glory of the Son of Man who has descended from heaven. This glory is "God's reality in the power and majesty of his presence" (p. 387).

Ridderbos rejects the idea that the miracles of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel are signs pointing forward to his coming glory. When Jesus says that his hour has not yet come (at Cana) or delays (as in the case of Lazarus), it is not to indicate that "the full significance of Jesus' glory must be sought not in his miracles but in his subsequent glorification by the Father" in cross and resurrection (p. 106). The miracles "make the preexistent glory of God visible and tangible in the earthly existence ('flesh') of Jesus of Nazareth" (p. 388). Having faith in this Jesus means understanding who he really is. When John uses the word "sign," he means a miraculous act. John's use of this word does not mean that we are to think of some deeper or symbolic dimension. The miracles are powerful deeds of authentication or legitimation (p. 113).

Ridderbos reads John as a theologian who identifies God and God's glory with power. This is not to say that he is incapable of finding room for the cross in his thinking about God and the glory of Jesus. (See his remarks on John 6, for example). But he does not think that the cross is the focus of the way and work of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel.

This long and scholarly commentary wrestles with tough issues, and the patient reader will learn much.

Robert H. Smith

How to Think Theologically. By Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. 128 pages. Paper. $13.00.

How to Think Theologically came across my desk just as I was looking for a text to use for an introductory course on the Christian faith. My class audience, at a church-related school, consisted of mostly 18- and 19-year-olds. While these young people had opinions, they did not know how to think theologically. The authors admit that frequently we invite and expect theological answers to the problems in today's society without teaching people how to formulate those answers. I thought of parish life: adult education classes, high school classes, and possibly even Confirmation. Experience there confirms this opinion. For someone to reflect on the meaning of the "cloning issue" for their faith, for example, means that first they learn how to examine the components and processes of their faith.

In eight chapters, Stone and Duke have designed a book that can be taught in segments.

My students and I read these chapters over several class sessions. The authors bring the reader into the activity of theological reflection right from the Introduction. Theological reflection is not just the activity of the pastor. It is the responsibility of every Christian. They write, "Until that final word is spoken, each and every Christian has a contribution to make to the conversation—a duty to listen, and a question to ask" (p. 5). The aim of such reflection, they tell the reader, is to "develop the best possible understanding of the faith which our Christian church seeks to understand" (p. 7).

One of my personal favorite sections is found in the first chapter. Duke and Stone introduce the reader to the concept of an "embedded" theology. This is defined as the "understanding of faith, disseminated by the church and assimilated by its members in their daily lives." Their definition allows the student to examine personal beliefs, "instinctive responses," and even church architecture, searching for these embedded theologies. In contrast, the reader is introduced to deliberative theology. Here in the first chapter the reader sets off on a road that will systematically introduce tools to examine personal and corporate beliefs and actions.

To assist the reader in the application of the theological methodology, Stone and Duke offer several "cases" of church decisions. These include a Protestant church choosing a new hymnal, a decision about the removal of life support systems, The Tober's Sunday School class, and ministry to the homeless. In some places these stories were found helpful to advance the point of the chapter. Unfortunately, the authors did not build a strong "case-based" methodology that fully demonstrated the unfolding of theological thinking. One unfortunate inclusion was their interpretation of Martin Luther's actions in the Peasant's Revolt. The simplification of the events led to more confusion than clarification of their point about the human condition.

For my class, four of the chapters were strong and helpful. Chapter 3 introduces the reader to four resources for theological reflection: Scripture, experience, tradition, and reason. Chapter 4 pulls together the ideas into a theological method. Chapter 6 provides a well-developed introduction to several understandings of the human condition and provides an excellent summary of views on the work of Christ and salvation. Chapter 8, "Critical Theology," provides a summary and workplace to address particular issues.

At $13.00 I found this to be a valuable and versatile book. It provides a template for discussion and critical evaluation in a concise form. As in every situation, the pastor or teacher might choose to omit one or more of the chapters. *How to Think Theologically* proved flexible and yet informative.

Elaine G. Siemsen

Philo and Paul Among the Sophists. By Bruce W. Winter. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xvi and 289 pages. Cloth. $59.95.

Bruce Winter makes an outstanding contribution to the rhetorical interpretation of Paul by studying the rhetorical traditions of two major cities of the Hellenistic Eastern Mediterranean, Alexandria and Corinth. He concentrates on rhetorical literature produced in each city. *P. Oxy.* 2190 is a lengthy letter from Neilos to his father describing his rhetorical education in Alexandria, while Dio Chrysostom's Oration 32, delivered at Alexandria, criticizes the Alexandrians' misuse of rhetoric and philosophy. Against this background one can understand well Philo of Alexandria's war against the Alexandrian sophistic rhetorical tradition—and his use of it. His critique flows from his evaluation of Moses as the wise man (sophist) par excellence.

Winter interprets Paul against the backdrop of significant Greek teachers and orators in Corinth: Epictetus, Dio Chrysostom's 8th oration, Favorinus Arlatensis' Oration 37, Herodes Atticus, and Plutarch. Corinthian Christians, living in an environment that prized rhetorical ability, looked for it in Christian speakers. Paul describes his initial proclamation in Corinth in rhetorical terms—only to critique the Corinthian overvaluation of rhetorical ability. As Moses was the touchstone for Philo's critique, Paul uses the gospel as his criterion to measure rhetoric. Winter concludes that Paul rejected the elevated

style praised by the Corinthians, and even eschewed "the persuasive techniques which invigorated Greek rhetoric" (p. 289), a conclusion that runs beyond the evidence, in my opinion. But the discussion is significant for the interpretation of the Corinthian letters.

This volume deserves wide reading, both by Pauline scholars and pastors. Winter's concentration on works directed toward or written in these cities is laudable. It avoids a generalizing appropriation of rhetorical literature from a long time span. It is clearly written, with extensive interaction with the bibliography on rhetoric and Pauline studies. I recommend it to anyone interested in the Corinthian letters.

Edgar Krentz

The Didache: A Commentary. By Kurt Niederwimmer. Translated by Linda M. Maloney. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. xxvii and 288 pages. Cloth. $52.00.

The text of the Didache survives in a single manuscript discovered in 1873 by Philotheos Bryennius. The manuscript, completed on 11 June 1056, also contains the Epistle of Barnabas, 1 and 2 Clement, twelve letters ascribed to Ignatius, and four other texts. The Didache was known from references to it by Patristic writers, but presumed lost; Bryennius' discovery was the ecclesiastical manuscript find of that quarter century. Its similarity to Matthew, its testimony to early liturgical usage, and its use of the "two ways" schema for ethical instruction insured intensive study at once and over the next 125 years.

Kurt Niederwimmer's commentary, originally published in Germany in 1989, harvests the fruit of that research. His extensive introduction, 57 pages long, dates the writing between 110 and 120, summarizes the attestation of the work in early citations and references, and describes the complex textual tradition. (Since the Bryennius discovery, one papyrus fragment has been identified and Coptic, Ethiopic, and Georgian translations or fragments have been identified.)

Niederwimmer's commentary proper divides the text into four sections: A Baptismal Catechesis (1:1–6:3, the Two Ways Tractate), the Liturgy (7:1–10:7), Church Order (11:1–15:4), and its Eschatological Conclusion (16:1–8). The commentary is detailed, as is typical of the Hermeneia series, including an original translation and nineteen excurses (which include a discussion of the "two ways" parenesis, an examination of its Lord's Prayer text, *inter alia*). The importance of the Didache for reconstructing early liturgical history, the development of church order, and the use of the Old and New Testament texts insure wide use of this excellent translation. The index of citations and allusions to noncanonical literature is especially valuable. Niederwimmer will be the standard commentary for the next generation—and deservedly so. It joins Schoedel's commentary on Ignatius in the same series as the first two volumes of a projected commentary on all the Apostolic Fathers.

Edgar Krentz

Rethinking Gnosticism. An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category. By Michael Allen Williams. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. xix and 335 pages. Cloth. $49.50.

Conceptual clarity continues to be a *desideratum* of the first magnitude in gnostic studies, and to this end Williams' book makes a welcome and important contribution. Though it takes the form of an extended argument against muddled categories, and though it is aimed ultimately at specialists in the field, *Rethinking Gnosticism* is well written, copiously illustrated from both primary and secondary sources, and readily accessible to the general reader for whom it offers an excellent introduction to gnostic studies.

The study falls into three parts. Chapters 1 and 2 are introductory. They deal with two long-standing problems of definition: the wide range of texts generally identified as "gnostic" and the problem of ancient self-designation versus modern typology. Chapters 3–9 contain the meat of Williams' argument. Here he skillfully "dismantles" six common cliches: that Gnostics engaged in "protest exegesis," that they were

parasitic on older religious traditions, that they were anti-world, anti-body, either ascetic or libertine, and elitist. These cliches say more about the prejudices of gnosticism's interpreters than they do about gnosticism itself. Two final chapters, entitled respectively, "Where They Came From . . ." and ". . . and What They Left Behind," speak to the problems of gnosticism's origin and its legacy.

Specialists will, of course, differ with Williams on this or that point of interpretation. However, there is little to criticize in his project to evenhandedly and sympathetically reassess of the sources. I was particularly pleased to see Williams consistently reject efforts to describe the "essence" of gnosticism. Williams charts a new course for gnostic studies. I recommend *Rethinking Gnosticism* as an insightful and timely book that will be a stimulus to both specialist and nonspecialist alike.

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The Quest for Jesus and the Christian Faith. Edited by Frederick I. Gaiser. Word and World Supplement Series 3. St. Paul, MN: Luther Seminary, 1997. x and 214 pages. Paper.

This is a series of articles on the so-called Third Quest for the Historical Jesus, written mostly by members of the faculty of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Gaiser himself provides an introduction, illustrating competently the issues raised by the Jesus Seminar and other investigations of the life of Jesus.

Mary M. Knutsen provides an excellent definition of terms used in this quest and an annotated bibliography of the most important works. Arland I. Hultgren discusses the sources used in the quest and argues against strong reliance on Q as a source for a particular community and on the Gospel of Thomas as an independent early source.

Walter F. Taylor Jr. demonstrates that this quest is carried out within Jesus' social world, using insights from archaeology, sociology, and cultural anthropology,

Professor of Old Testament Diane Jacobson studies the connections in the Gospels of John and Matthew to the Wisdom literature. A table of parallels of John and Wisdom literature is especially enlightening. She argues that Jesus is identified with wisdom in these two Gospels and suggests that perhaps even the historical Jesus considered himself to be wisdom incarnate.

After discussing the O.T. and postbiblical expectations of the messiah, Donald H. Juel in "The Trial and Death of the Historical Jesus" investigates the contrast between the nonmessianic ministry of Jesus and his royal death. He comes to the conclusion that the belief of the early church in the messiahship of Jesus is based on the historical fact that Jesus was crucified by Pilate as "the King of the Jews." However, he fails to explain on what Pilate might have based his judgment.

David L. Tiede in " Jesus and the Manifest Power of God" has the assignment "to deal with the Jesus tradition of healing, exorcism, and wonders." He states his belief in the resurrection of the body and therefore also in the miracles of Jesus, mainly on the quality of the sources which surpasses the sources for the lives of Socrates, Alexander the Great, or Caesar Augustus. In Jesus' words and deeds we encounter the manifest power of God.

Sarah Henrich in "What Is the Saving Work of Christ?" limits herself to Luke-Acts but draws some conclusions also about the historical Jesus, a sort of minimal life of Jesus. She thinks that Pilate's decision to title Jesus "King of the Jews" would have been senseless had not messianic claims been made by or on behalf of Jesus. "Saving" has so many different meanings that distinctions have to be made.

Paul Berge in "The Word and Its Witness in John and 1 John: A Literary and Rhetorical Study" presents a chiastic structure in parallel of these two writings which "draws the reader and hearer into the foundation of faith, centered in Jesus Christ." Although his main thesis that the historical Jesus is the source of the tradition can be accepted, it is difficult to believe that the structure of the writings as he sees it is the original design and intention of the author.

David E. Fredrickson in "Christ's Many Friends: The Presence of Jesus in 2 Corinthians

1–7" discusses the references to Jesus' earthly life in this passage and argues that Christ, Paul, and the church are one in terms of friendship, although words with φιλ- are completely missing in this passage (except for φιλοτιμέομαι in 5:9).

Craig R. Koester in "Jesus' Resurrection as Presupposition for the New Testament" shows correctly how the resurrection faith is presupposed in the Gospels and in other writings of the New Testament and presents the resurrection itself as the fundamental reality for human faith and hope. He rejects political and psychological theories and argues that we should "let the New Testament press its claims about reality even as the modern world presses its claims."

James L. Boyce in "The Quest for Jesus and the Church's Proclamation" states his belief that Schweitzer's judgment on the first quest may still be valid even after the third quest because we have the "treasure in earthen vessels." Experience and conviction belong together.

The book ends with a panel discussion of the authors and some other participants which contains the interesting comment that, as of April 18, 1997, there were 65,571 books on Jesus.

The reader gets the impression of a rather strong opposition of all the authors to the results of the Jesus Seminar and the scholars involved in it.

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Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description, and Religious Development. Edited by Helmut Koester. Harvard Theological Studies 46. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998. xx and 443 pages. Cloth. $45.00.

This is a valuable collection of papers from the Pergamon Symposium of March 1996, jointly sponsored by Harvard Divinity School and the Harvard University departments of Classics and Fine Arts. It provides an up-to-date, comprehensive review of both archaeological and literary data for the city of Pergamon in the Roman and Byzantine periods. Like an earlier symposium devoted to the city of Ephesus, this gathering brought together archaeologists and scholars of the New Testament and early Christian history, and experts in numismatics, classical literature, and the fine arts. The interdisciplinary conversation has yielded fifteen separate papers on a wide array of topics related to ancient Pergamon.

There are a number of fine archaeological studies beginning with a survey of all pertinent recent research (1987–1997) in and about Pergamon by Wolfgang Radt of the Gennan Archaeological Institute, Istanbul. Individual papers follow on the Roman remodeling of the Asklepieion by Adolf Hoffmann (chap. 2), the "Red Hall" by Klaus Nohlen (chap. 4), the Great Altar by Volker Kastner (chap. 6), the Library by Gregory Nagy (chap. 8), the Zeus Philios and Trajan Temple by Daniel Schowalter (chap. 9), and the sanctuary of Demeter as "Cultic Space for Women" by Christine Thomas (chap. 11). Studies of the literary evidence for Pergamon include papers by Christopher Jones on Aelieus Aristides and the Asklepieion (chap. 3) and by Adela Yarbro Collins, "Pergamon in Early Christian Literature" (chap. 7). The theology and politics of Roman Pergamon are the particular focus of the studies of Marianne Palmer Bonz, "Beneath the Gaze of the Gods: The Pergamon Evidence for a Developing Theology of Empire" (chap. 10), and Ursula Kampmann, "Homonoia Politics in Asia Minor" (chap. 14).

The social and religious world of ancient Pergamon provides the subject for a final group of papers: Helmut Koester's "The Cult of the Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor" (chap. 5), Ulrike Wulf-Rheidt's "The Hellenistic and Roman Houses of Pergamon" (chap. 12), and L. Michael White's "Counting the Costs of Nobility: The Social Economy of Roman Pergamon" (chap. 13). These, together with a study by Klaus Rheidt on Byzantine Pergamon, round out the volume. A section of black and white glossy photographs, numerous site plans, isometric drawings, diagrams, a valuable glossary of terms, and an index make this volume a superb resource for anyone wanting to experience and understand more of the world of ancient Pergamon.

Barbara E. Bowe

What Is Theology? A New Agenda for Theology. By Rudolf Bultmann. Edited by Eberhard Jüngel. Translated by Roy A. Harrisville. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. vi and 250 pages. Paper. $22.00.

If biblical preaching and a sound theology to keep the preaching honest are important, then this is an important book. At least it's important in the sense of giving us a new, direct entrance to a Lutheran giant who worked hard to hold the two together. Rudolf Bultmann issues a wake-up call to the pulpit: The exposition of Scripture with the Word "accosting" us in the preaching requires a theological base of understanding "human existence as determined by God." More is required than a "good feeling" subjectivism and the rationalism of "pure doctrine" orthodoxy.

There used to be something in the curriculum called "Theological Encyclopedia" or "Introduction to Theology." That's what this book is, Bultmann lecturing on the subject in 1926 at the University of Marburg, with revisions through 1936. It seems unreal that it took so long for the manuscript to be published, not until 1984 in German (under the most meticulous editorship) and not until now in English (competently translated by Roy A. Harrisville). Beyond dispute is Bultmann's total mastery of Greek and second-to-none stature as a New Testament scholar in the long history of the church. How can he also rank as a foremost theologian, as qualified as any, to confront the question "What Is Theology?" This volume helps us understand that.

The outline is clear: from the "task" of theology to its "object," and from theology as "the science about God" to "revelation" and "faith," in fifteen sections. The "faith" chapter, the longest, ends with a ten-page answer to the question of the title of the book. Appended is another previously unpublished lecture (1929) on "Truth and Certainty" (of faith).

This was Bultmann in his 40s and early 50s. Not quite at his mature best, he was nevertheless a fully informed theologian, holding his own among the "greats" and ably staking out his own claim, especially in section 14, "Faith as Historical Deed." It is fascinating to have this late-opening door to a part of Bultmann we didn't know before—a friendly and also sharply critical interchange with Schleiermacher and Barth; with Herrmann, Brunner, Rudolf Otto, Troeltsch, and (surprisingly to me) Adolf Schlatter; and with many others. Tillich gets only the barest mention, and Schweitzer is totally absent.

Recall the time! Hitler came into power in late January 1933. Already that summer, Bultmann and others (but not all) bluntly rejected the pro-Nazi theological overtures by a Dean of Theology, Emanuel Hirsch. This explains why the expected revisions of the 1926 lecture stopped in 1936. There were awesomely greater demands to be met in an "unequivocal rejection" (p. 13) of "materialistic biology" (p. 74) and "biological ideology" (p. 216, n. 114).

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Who Comes in the Name of the Lord: Issue at the Margins. By Harold J. Recinos. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. 158 pages. Paper. $15.00.

Harold Recinos, Professor at Wesley Theological Seminary, presents a popular "liberation theology," though in this case he deals more with marginality than with poverty and oppression. Recinos begins with marginality caused by racism in North America (pp. 15–36) but eventually shifts to military and economic oppression in Salvador, an account sharpened by a number of very moving stories about the situation of Christians there. Intertwined with his concerns for oppressed people and the potential demise of present day mainline churches, he reflects on the Jesus of the Gospels as one who included and spoke on behalf of marginal people (pp. 37–80). I find it difficult to define his solution. At first he urges identification with the marginal (pp. 54–55) but later sees the voice of God speaking to us prophetically through them (the uninvited guests at the great banquet, pp. 33, 148–55). Finally he calls for the mainline church to open up and accept persons who come from or live in marginal situations (radical inclusivity, pp. 155–56). Probably he intends all three approaches.

Graydon F. Snyder

In Retrospect: Remembrance of Things Past. Revised posthumous edition. By F. F. Bruce. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993. xii and 336 pages. Paper.

W. M. L. De Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography. By John W. Rogerson. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 126. Sheffield: JSOT, 1992. 224 pages. Cloth. $55.00.

For those who study their painstakingly achieved exegetical results, biblical scholars are often scarcely visible to us as human beings apart from their scholarship or denominational commitment. These two books show us the human side of two very different biblical scholars. F. F. Bruce is justifiably the most famous conservative New Testament exegete of this century. Wilhelm de Wette was one of the premier critical biblical scholars and church historians of the early to mid nineteenth century.

Bruce's book is a collection of autobiographical essays originally published in *The Witness*, a monthly magazine of the Plymouth Brethren in Great Britain. The collection is very uneven, with some essays giving details of Bruce's personal and academic life. Others are about the nature and modern history of the Plymouth Brethren. Still others detail the books that Bruce found useful or influential. Bruce consistently demonstrates two remarkable personality traits throughout the book: humility and tolerance. Bruce mentions scholars such as Rudolf Bultmann or Hans Conzelmann in complimentary and collegial terms despite the immense theological gulf between his position and theirs. The book will interest those concerned with Bruce, the history of exegesis, and twentieth-century British church history.

Rogerson's book is a detailed scholarly investigation of de Wette's life and work, including details of de Wette's personal life such as the effect of his first wife's tragic death, his painful second marriage, and his frequent financial hardships. His subtitle is therefore somewhat of a misnomer. Rogerson, a respected Old Testament scholar, critically and deftly examines de Wette's some 300 extant personal letters, scholarly works in exegesis, history, and philosophical theology, works of fiction, and the secondary literature about de Wette. He plausibly reconstructs little-known periods of de Wette's life, critiquing de Wette's only previous biographer, Adelbert Wiegand. Since most of de Wette's work was informed by complex aesthetic philosophies, Rogerson necessarily writes abstractly but clearly throughout. He also does a masterful job of correlating the complex and passionate philosophical, theological, and political issues of the day to de Wette's work and life. This monograph is a major contribution to the history of exegesis and historical theology. Students of nineteenth-century German and Swiss political history would also find this book highly profitable.

These two books, in their different ways, help to demonstrate the relationship between an exegete's life and scholarship.

Lynn Allan Kauppi
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition. Edited by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar. 2 vols. Leiden, Boston, Köln: E. J. Brill; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000. xxiii and 1,362 pages. Paper. $100.00.

In 1994 Brill and Eerdmans published Prof. Martínez's translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls—and it was quickly hailed as one of the best available. Now the two publishers have published the study edition, which presents the Hebrew text of the scrolls and fragments (unpointed), cave by cave, with facing English translation and basic bibliography. Originally published in hard cover in 1997–1998, this corrected and slightly revised soft-cover edition will serve students and scholars well as the most complete, easily accessible texts of the Qumran manuscripts.

Arranged by cave and fragment number, the editors also provide an index of manuscripts arranged by number and an index of titles. The eight-page list of abbreviations is in effect a listing of the most significant editions of texts.

This edition belongs in the library of every

New Testament student and on the shelves of every college, university, and seminary library. It deserves wide use, even by general readers. Nothing illuminates more than the reading of original texts. The two editors, both at the Qumran Institute at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, deserve thanks for an immensely helpful edition.

Edgar Krentz

Briefly Noted

The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine. Edited by Colin E. Gunton (Cambridge University Press, $19.95). This fine work, written for scholars and theological students, is a collection of essays by British and North American scholars who are cognizant of the changed and changing intellectual, postmodern and postcommunist milieu in which the church exists and, in many ways, struggles to find its place. The book "is divided into two parts, with the first six chapters examining Christian theology in its current setting, the second eight treating major topics among those traditional in Christian doctrine" (p. xi). In this work, the Christian confession that God is essentially triune is more than simply an abstract doctrine; it is at the heart of all other doctrines, whether explicitly stated or not. Finally, two helpful features are a glossary of key theological terms (pp. xiv–xvii) and a chronology (pp. xviii–xix). *Winston D. Persaud, Wartburg Theological Seminary*

The Historical Jesus quest fascinates. Bart D. Ehrman's **Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium** (Oxford, $25.00) is a helpful entry into the popular literature coming out of this interest. In the context of Y2K millennial expectation he argues that Jesus was an apocalyptic thinker, thus setting himself against the major conclusions of the Jesus Seminar. He discusses Jesus' apocalyptic expectations and the methods of historical inquiry, surveys Jesus' teachings and actions, and shows how a literalist biblical interpretation is the basis for millennial frenzy throughout history. The clearly written book, designed to inform concerned nonprofessional scholars, achieves its aim. It will assist many in the face of the year 2000 hoopla to think clearly and biblically. *Edgar Krentz*

The sign of Jonah passages (Matthew 12:15–20, Luke 11:14–36) have long been a scholarly conundrum: How should one account for the similarity and the difference between the passages in Matthew and Luke and their presumed common source? Is the sign of Jonah the preaching of Jesus (Luke) or his stay in the tomb (Matthew)? In **The Sign of Jonah Reconsidered. A Study of Its Meaning in the Gospel Traditions** (Stockholm, Sweden: Almqvist and Wiksell International/Coronet Books, $47.50), his Uppsala doctoral dissertation, Simon Chow surveys the history of interpretation and examines the tradition history of Jonah in Judaism, Q, Luke, Matthew, and early post-New Testament Christian interpretation. He concludes that the Syrian community in which Q arose regards Jonah as a sign of coming judgment and destruction of their unbelieving opponents, while Matthew uses Jonah as a sign of the death and resurrection of Jesus and Luke as a symbol of proclamation that conquers Satan. The post-apostolic church largely follows Matthew. While the conclusions of this dissertation are not novel, Chow supports his interpretation with careful reasoning and extensive citation of modern scholarship. *Edgar Krentz*

Volume 7 in the English Edition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works is a fresh translation of his **Fiction from Tegel Prison** (Fortress, $37). Although never completed, the three selections (a drama, a novel, and a story) provide Bonhoeffer's imaginative portrayal of middle-class life during the same period as he continued work on

his *Ethics*. The ethos of the main characters may offer insight into what he meant by "nonreligious Christianity." This volume, based on the German critical edition, in addition to the extensive textual notes contains an "Editor's Introduction" by Clifford J. Green, an "Editor's Afterword" by Renate Bethge, bibliography, and indices. The translation of the collected works into English is a major contribution that promotes serious engagement with the Christ-centered theology of this twentieth-century martyr. *Craig L. Nessan*

Adolf Schlatter (1852–1938) went his own way as New Testament scholar, following no current trend, no particular school. He challenged two generations of students, including Rudolf Bultmann and Ernst Käsemann, to read the New Testament without the presupposition of systematic theology or the school of comparative religion. Little known in America, his writings are at long last beginning to appear in English. **The Theology of the Apostles**, Vol. 2 of his New Testament Theology (Baker, $39.99), now joins the translation of his commentary on Romans (Hendrickson, 1998). Schlatter was conservative in matters of history (only 2 Peter is not authentic) but original in his drawing together the strands of New Testament thought. A closely reasoned book, rich in biblical documentation, a dose reading of this text will benefit every reader. Some readers will know how much Schlatter's German writings influenced Martin Franzmann and take that as a recommendation. I heartily support it. *Edgar Krentz*

This volume marks the beginning of a major series, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Volume 2 in the New Testament series is the first published, on **Mark**, edited by Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall (Intervarsity Press, $39.99). The compilers hope this series initiates "the revitalization of Christian teaching based on classical Christian exegesis," that is, from Clement of Rome to St. John Damascene (some seven centuries). Each volume includes a brief introduction, extensive citations from patristic authors arranged according to the running text of Mark, and subject and Scripture indexes. The danger of brief citations is that one reads them out of context. Each citation is given a reference to the printed guide to the TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae) or CETEDOC CD-Roms, an extremely valuable aid to further study. The first contains the Greek texts of many patristic writers, the second the Latin fathers. One can read the fathers there in context. I wish this series rapid publication, since it will be a very valuable resource. With the nineteenth-century translation of the early fathers available on line ("Early Church Fathers" at Wheaton College: http://ccel.wheaton.edu/fathers2/) or on CD-Rom (The Master Christian Library by Ages Software), these volumes should stimulate a growing knowledge of the fathers. They deserve wide use. *EK*

Heresies often make a major contribution to the church by clarifying issues that must be faced. The Donatists did that in North Africa, as Maureen Tilley makes clear in **The Bible in Christian North Africa: The Donatist World** (Fortress, $32), a revisionist view of their biblical interpretation. She examines their martyr stories, Donatist texts (the *Gesta apud Xenophilum*, the Donatist Macrobius' pastoral letter *De singularitate clericorum*, the sermon *In natali sanctorum innocentorum*), the contributions of Parmenian and Tyconius to the Donatist understanding of the church, and their persecution after 390 C.E. She concludes that one strength of the movement was its ability to modify its self-understanding as the gathering of God's people in new situations. Tyconius produces the first set of hermeneutical guidelines to aid in this process. A stimulating read in patristic history that should interest both biblical scholars and historians of the early church. *EK*

Preaching Helps

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost—Christ the King
Series B

That Widow

Luke tells the story of a badgering widow who finally wore down a judge described as fearing neither God nor any human (Luke 18:1–8). Mark features the story of another widow (Mark 12:41–44, Pentecost 22), who keeps knocking on my consciousness, trying to wear me down. These widows are different from one another, but each displays a terrifying courage.

Mark tells the story of the widow with two thin copper coins as the climax in a series of eight scenes, all of which are set on the same day and in the same place (Mark 11:27–12:44). It all happens one day during the last week of Jesus' life, and the place is the temple. But what is the theme? These eight stories are often called "conflict" or "controversy" stories, as one after the other priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes approach Jesus and question him. The stories are commonly interpreted as showing Jesus' wit and intelligence in contrast to the mean-spirited cunning and trickery of his various opponents. And, we are told, these stories are narrated here, immediately before the Passion Narrative, in order to remind us readers of the relentless enmity of the leaders who hounded Jesus to his death.

These stories can be viewed from another angle. Mark's whole Gospel is the story of how Jesus willingly traveled the way of the cross. But Mark in his Gospel offers very little direct commentary on the meaning of the cross. Where do we find any statement about the significance of the cross? We can think right away of the three Passion Predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34), the Ransom Saying (10:45), and the Words of Interpretation spoken over the bread and the wine (14:22–25). But otherwise Mark offers hardly a word. Or so it seems.

For a long time I have thought of all the material in Mark 11:27–12:44 as indirect commentary on the cross. The story of the widow (12:41–44) concludes with a sharp contrast: "Many rich people out of their surplus threw in much" but "one poor widow out of her deficit threw in all she had." And Jesus adds words, commenting on "all she had." She gave "her whole life!" (ὅλον τὸν βίον αὐτῆς). Some versions render these words as "all she had to live on" or "her entire livelihood." But I think it helps to be literalistic here.

Hers was a wild gesture, a piece of shocking generosity. We almost automatically begin to ask how she could have done that. How can she live? We admire her strange deed, but isn't it imprudent, unwise? Isn't it too much? And how can we use such a story? Preach on stewardship and prod people to be like her and give a bit more generously?

But Mark is telling us, "Here is a story you need to ponder before you turn the page and read the Passion Narrative." Jesus' dying on the cross is prefigured and interpreted in this widow who gave "her whole life." And every other story in this sequence of eight likewise offers some comment on Jesus' dying.

Look at "The Great Commandment" (Mark 12:28–34). It is often taken to be the story of how Jesus cut through a great mass of commandments (613 by one traditional ancient account) to lift up what is essential: "Love God, and love the neighbor." Then we are told that we have been liberated from a sorry tangle of ancient legalisms and must simply keep our eye and our heart fixed on what is truly important.

But if we read the story as commentary on the cross, things turn out a bit different. Who ever loved God "with whole heart and whole soul and whole mind and whole strength"? And who ever loved the neighbor as the self? Of course! Mark is commenting on what Jesus did at the cross. The crucifixion may be the result of human blindness and human cruelty and human obstinacy. But Mark also sees it as the loving action of Jesus. At the cross Jesus brought to a stunning climax all the love toward God and all the love toward human beings that Jesus had been living all along.

Many translations have the wording "*all* your heart and *all* your soul. . . ." It may seem like a small thing, but the underlying Greek word is not some form of πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν ("all") but is ὅλον ("whole"). And Mark offers a word play: Loving God with the "whole" heart is better than any "whole" burnt offering. The Greek for "whole burnt offering" is "*holokautoma*" (ὁλοκαύτωμα) from which we have the English "holocaust." So "wholehearted love" is better than "holocausts" (burnt offerings in the temple). But then we see another connection: Loving God with one's "whole heart" is what the widow did in offering "her whole life."

Is that a sensible, prudent thing to do? Would Merrill Lynch recommend it? I don't think so. But Mark's is not a theology of steady financial growth. It is rather a theology of the cross. The cross looks for all the world like an unmitigated disaster. But it is the way of agape, and agape is the way *of* life and the way *to* life.

When the Sadducees brought their puzzler to Jesus (Mark 12:18–27), they were mocking the whole idea of the resurrection and the defeat of death. But Jesus told them that they simply did not understand (a) the scriptures and (b) the power of God.

I think that Mark is indicating that Jesus found the strength to love, the strength to walk the way of the cross, in the scriptural story as a whole, which is the story of God's power to give life.

As "Christ," Jesus is not simply "David's Son" (not just a chip off the old Davidic block) but is "David's Lord" (that is, he far transcends all the old Davidic categories). Jesus is more than David, in the sense that his cross is "more than" David's throne (12:35–37). Unlike the current batch of leaders who love long robes, respectful greetings, and seats of honor, Jesus will be stripped of his garments, be mocked by all the passersby, and will be seated on the rude throne of the cross (12:38–40).

Well, you get the idea. I set the cross down alongside every one of these reports, in fact alongside every one of Mark's stories from the very first page, because Mark is always commending the cross. Mark is always commenting on how the cross "shines forth in mystic glow," revealing the agape that sits enthroned at the heart of the universe.

In this final section of the season after Pentecost we do not really get to see Mark steady and whole. We celebrate Reformation and All Saints and Thanksgiving and Christ the King with texts chosen from other Gospels. But every Sunday in every season is a revelation of God's transcendent bounty—past, present and future. We can count on it. Mark did.

Helping us to trace the way of the Lord according to Mark and John is the **Rev. Larry Henning**, Pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin. Larry has written for these pages previously, and we are happy to have him return. He earned a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Virginia (1978) and subsequently worked as Staff Psychologist at army hospitals in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and at Fort Ord in Monterey, California. He then studied at Wartburg Theological Seminary and earned his M.Div. in 1987. Since that time he has been pastor at Messiah. Now after more than a dozen years at Messiah he has decided not to renew his psychology license. He writes that he is currently recovering an old passion for jazz, especially the two Miles Davis quintets of the 60s and 70s.

Larry says that he would not mind getting feedback from readers and so offers his e-mail address to potential conversation partners out there: *henning@techhead2.com*. I also invite comments and suggestions—and volunteers! (*duensmith@aol.com*). Meanwhile, my thanks to Larry. And best wishes to all of you who, like Mark, lift high the cross week by week.

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Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 22) October 8, 2000

Genesis 2:18–24
Psalm 8
Hebrews 1:1–4; 2:5–12
Mark 10:2–16

"He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan" (Mark 10:1a). "That place" Jesus left is Capernaum—home. He is on his way to Jerusalem, on his way to die. This "geographical" detail (left out of today's pericope!) is huge for Mark's narrative. The stories that follow can only be understood, as Mark would have us understand them, in the looming shadow of the cross. For each Marcan text in the remainder of the church year, it might be good to remind folks that Jesus is "on the way."

The Pharisees Jesus meets up with "on the way" are good lawyers who know their stuff. They are straight shooters who are genuine in their love of the law and their passion for the righteousness of God, and we do the text and ourselves no justice if we portray them as scoundrels. They come to put Jesus to the test with the very "best of intentions."

"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The Pharisees are not playing Bible trivia here. They are fully aware that Jesus knows the answer. They are pushing to see if he would align with one interpretation vs. another (Shammai vs. Hillel) or to see if this Galilean radical would dare even contradict the law. But, knowing something about the law himself, Jesus simply sends them back to the law books, back to Moses (v. 3). The debate might have been over at that point, with Jesus the winner. But, still, he does not rest his case. He presses the discussion beyond the provisions of the law to the very intentions of God for creation (vv. 5–9). What kind of lawyering is this? Well, it turns out that law is not really Jesus' occupational specialty. His specialty is heart surgery. So he pushes past the laws and loopholes. He pierces through the legal armor to the condition of the heart, and the condition is not good: "Because of your *hardness* of heart" God-joined relationships are torn asunder.

We all know the difficult pastoral context for this text. My beloved sister-in-law when enduring the painful aftermath of divorce made the hard trip alone to worship one Sunday when this was the text for the day. What she heard was pure judgment. She did not venture into a church again for a long, long time. And at the very moment I am writing this reflection, two of my best friends are in the courtroom for their preliminary divorce hearing. The context is real and difficult. However, "waffling" is not an option—not if we take Mark, Jesus, and our proclamation seriously. Divorce is epidemic, and the toll for individuals, families, and community is genuinely tragic. It is true that divorce was a different thing in Jesus' time and place—a solely male prerogative in Jewish law. So, it is true that Jesus' position can be interpreted as advocacy for women's rights in first-century Palestine. I believe that is legitimate and worth noting. I don't believe it gets us off the hook.

On the other hand, who is "on the hook" from Jesus' piercing look into our hearts? Only the divorcing and the divorced? I don't think so. I believe the heart doctor has revealing X-rays for every last soul who gathers in his name. I think this is not an occasion to look askance at the X-rays of our divorcing neighbors, but for us all to look honestly at our own X-rays, to see the hardness in all of our hearts, and to look at the countless and daily ways we all put asunder

the relationships formed by God in our lives: in our families, with those in need, with sisters and brothers in Christ. My own X-ray is far from being benign, and no legal loopholes can cover up the diagnosis.

Of course, diagnosis is not yet the cure. It is good to remember again that Jesus is on the way: on his way to do heart surgery only he can do, on his way to bear our hard-heartedness on the cross. And as the Risen Christ, he comes into our midst to heal those breaking relationships that can be reconciled. But I also believe that he comes to heal the aching and guilt-ridden hearts of those whose important relationships are tragically but truly broken beyond repair, to give them a new start with his love and forgiveness. Some may interpret that as "cheap grace." I believe it is the radical, costly grace of the cross.

After the text on divorce Jesus blesses children. Hmmm. Mark's placement could be intentional. Of course, the temptation with this incident is to romanticize children and their faith. This text has nothing to do with the innocence of children, and such idealization ultimately does children no service. The text does serve to pierce adult illusions of self-sufficiency. "Receiving the kingdom" means exactly that—receiving vs. taking, receiving vs. earning, receiving vs. grasping.

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 23) October 15, 2000

Amos 5:6–7, 10–15
Psalm 90:12–17
Hebrews 4:12–16
Mark 10:17–31

"On his way to the cross" Jesus was approached by a rich man (only Matthew tells us that he is young). He is a solid, religious citizen, and no doubt he is a strong supporter of his synagogue—probably a tither. His quest for "spiritual truth" is genuine and his obedience to the law scrupulous. I confess to you that I would love to have this rich man make his way into our church. When we needed to replace our furnace, I am sure that with his resources and his commitment he would have been first in line with a "leading gift." A good religious soul. A good religious soul . . . whom Jesus loved (v. 21). In fact, this is the only instance in Mark where Jesus is said to love a particular person.

So, if Jesus loves the rich man so much, why does he demand so much from him? "Sell what you own," he commands (v. 21). Trying to discern Jesus' motivation is by nature speculative (perhaps dangerously so), but my best guess is that freedom is what he's after for the rich man. The rich man's possessions actually possess him. The prima facie evidence for this is his decision to walk away rather than embrace Jesus' invitation to come and follow. The fact that "he had many possessions" resounds in the text like a verdict upon him. To be free for radical discipleship, he needed to be free from the false gods he had come to worship. When it came to the Ten Commandments it was the first that stymied him. As Bob Dylan sang in his Christian days, "You gotta serve somebody," and the rich man was serving his riches.

There are many and various ways to take the edge off this text for us, some of them more legitimate than others. A popular attempt at rationalization is to define "rich" in such a way that it applies only to "those people" (rich lakeshore property owners are "those people" in my neck of the woods). However, it takes only a little global awareness to know that any of us vested in our clergy pension plan are immensely rich by any world standard. When I preached on this text a few years ago, I made the rich man a "commodities broker" as a purposeful, if anachronistic, attempt to bridge the gap between the centuries. (These days he'd have to be an Internet whiz kid, CEO of "grapes.com" or something!) But I made a poor choice, because it made the rich man part of "them." I believe the Living Christ has something to say to every last one of us on this Sunday about our attachment to things and money. We live in a culture that boldly proclaims that what you own is who you are. We live in that seductive culture, and who of us is not enslaved by it? So, for the sake of freedom—freedom *from* idolatry and freedom *for* discipleship—Jesus will challenge us all on this Sunday to examine our own worship of false gods.

In the ensuing discussion with his disciples, Jesus does not let up on the demands: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (v. 25; this verse also has a long history of attempts to soften its blow, some of them quite ridiculous). Finally, in response to the disciples' astonished question, "Then who can be saved?" (v. 26), Jesus gives reason for hope: "For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible." I know of two basic interpretations for this verse. One (the "sanctification" interpretation, I'll call it) is that with God's help it becomes possible in this life to let go of wealth and embrace Jesus' radical call to follow. The other (the "justification" version) is that God is able to fit us through the eye of the heavenly needle in spite of our earthly failure. It's a no-brainer the choice of which dominates in Lutheran preaching. However, I'm not sure that a choice has to be made. Ultimately, of course, "no merit of [our] own [we] claim, but wholly lean on Jesus' name." But penultimately, God may work on us and in us to bring forth shocking obedience in the midst of idolatry because, after all, "for God all things are possible." And could not proclamation point to God's possibilities for both this world and the world to come?

One note about the rich man: As Karl Barth pointed out, Jesus' love for him did not end when he walked away. Given Jesus' steadfast and radical love, maybe the end of this text is not the end of his story. After all, with God "all things are possible." And, after all, Jesus is on the way to die for him as well.

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 24) October 22, 2000

Isaiah 53:4–12
Psalm 91:9–16
Hebrews 5:1–10
Mark 10:35–45

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus tries for the third time to warn his followers about the hard road ahead, and for the third time they just don't get it (10:32–34). Jesus tells them in the clearest language possible that this trip is not about business as usual. He is not going to Jerusalem to grab power *from* others or use power *over* others. He is going to lay down his life *for* others. He is going to give his very life to liberate God's people

from the power of sin and death.

And what is their response? Immediately after the warning, the Zebedee brothers are wheeling and dealing for the best seats in the kingdom. And the others are no better. "When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John" (v. 41). And why is that? Moral indignation? Yeah, right! It's because they too want a piece of the action. These disciples have been with Jesus for three years. For three years he has taught them about his mission and about their mission. For three years they have seen him serve others, heal others, welcome others and use his power for others. Three years, and they are still playing politics as usual.

Ah—but how long have we been with this same Jesus? And how long has he been with us? And are we beyond politics as usual? If politics as usual means the struggle for power and position, then it happens whenever two or three are gathered—even in Jesus' name: synod assemblies, church council meetings, and clergy gatherings, for starters. Even behind the doors of our quiet homes are political battles fought—sometimes the fiercest battles. We know the Zebedee brothers well, because they live inside of us. We too know what it's like to jockey for position and look out for ourselves at the expense of others.

Now, whether Mark even leaves open the remotest possibility that the disciples might "get it" beyond the resurrection is a matter of considerable exegetical debate. For us the good news is that we do have the possibility of making at least provisional steps beyond politics as usual to embrace the new politics of the kingdom where power for and with others reigns. We have that possibility through the sheer and amazing grace of God. I have frequently returned to a powerful reflection on this issue written by Thomas Merton:

> It is only the infinite mercy and love of God that has prevented us from tearing ourselves to pieces and destroying His entire creation long ago. People seem to think that it is in some way proof that no merciful God exists, if we have so many wars. On the contrary, consider how in spite of centuries of sin and greed and lust and cruelty and hatred and avarice and oppression and injustice, spawned and bred by the free wills of men, the human race can still recover, each time, and can still produce men and women who overcome evil with good, hatred with love, greed with charity, lust and cruelty with sanctity. How could all this be possible without the merciful love of God, pouring out His grace upon us? (*A Thomas Merton Reader* [Doubleday, 1974], 40)

"But it is not so among you" (v. 43). And maybe through the merciful love and sheer grace of God it might not be so among us. Maybe even in the midst of the same old politics as usual there can be glimpses of kingdom politics of love for the other's sake. Maybe we can even get what Jesus' brand of greatness is all about: not narcissistic glory but the shared joy of serving. Maybe, however provisionally, we can "get it" after all. Thanks be to God.

Reformation Sunday
October 29, 2000

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19–28
John 8:31–36

I will not be able to assume much knowledge of events in sixteenth-century Germany among my listeners for this Sunday. More and more of our visitors—and thus more and more of our new members—do not have a Lutheran background. More and more have no church background at all! So, part of what I have to do in my sermon is basic teaching on Luther and the Reformation. The challenge is to not have the teaching overwhelm the preaching. That is to say, I don't want the history lesson about Wittenberg to overshadow the proclamation of the gospel that needs to be heard in Twin Lakes, Wisconsin. As I look back on Reformation Sundays past, I find that my usual method of balancing the preaching and teaching is to use Brother Martin as an illustration that ultimately serves the gospel proclamation. At least, that's my goal. But an illustration of what?

Well, before I let the tail wag the dog (let the illustration shape the proclamation), I need to leave Martin for a bit and listen to John: "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?" (v. 33). Besides displaying a short memory (anyone remember Egypt? Babylon? the Seleucids?), this response to Jesus' offer of freedom is a frank denial of their bondage to sin. The connection to our own time is obvious. We live in a culture that is deep into make-believe. Our culture does not encourage us to face our struggles, but rather to pretend they don't even exist. Ignore them. Escape them. Deny them. Much of modern "spirituality" (i.e., recycled gnosticism) is all about claiming your own "divinity," and where is the place for the honest look in the mirror in any of that? *The Celestine Prophecy* and *Conversations with God* would be laughable as ridiculous, fluffy attempts at neo-gnosticism if they didn't remain on the best-seller lists and weren't therefore proof of how mired in make-believe we are as a culture. But, of course, even in the church we are constantly tempted to pretend as well. "Church should be fun and entertaining" is the essence of slick brochures that cross my desk on a daily basis. And, gee, how much fun is confessing "that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves"? But, maybe one more hour of "fun" (i.e., escape) is the last thing our people need. Maybe what we need is a time and place to lay aside the burden of faking and hiding and pretending, a time and place to face and tell the truth about ourselves, a time and place to get honest with each other and with God.

And now, back to Brother Martin. Luther had many faults—as has become quite fashionable to point out—but dishonesty was not one of them. Playing make-believe was not in him. He knew his own demons, and he knew their persistence. "[Baptism] means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self should arise" (*Small Catechism*). That was not just a doctrinal insight. It was the story of his life. On this side of eternity we never fully arrive, but the need for truth facing and truth telling will continue throughout the journey. Again, this is a hard truth in a culture enamored with the quick fix, which, again, I maintain is indicative of denial. (By the way, I don't believe Luther's truthful recognition of sin's persistence need deny the possibility of

progress—of movement toward sanctification—but only refuses to confuse the journey with the destination.)

But facing the truth about ourselves is only part of what Luther teaches us—and not even the main part. He also teaches us about the truth that sets us free: "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (v. 36). Now, it may be true that being set free needs to happen every day—for Luther and for us—but not to worry, because it turns out that Jesus knew something about the persistence of the struggle as well. "If you *continue* in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (31–32). "Continue . . . abide . . . live." Jesus didn't say, "If you listen well the first time, you will be free once and for all." Apparently he knows the dailyness of our need to be set free, which is why, in spite of the persistence of the struggle, he is more persistent still. So, truth telling for the sake of freedom is my theme for Reformation Sunday. And Martin will make an appearance as a fellow struggler. Works for me!

All Saints' Sunday
November 5, 2000

Isaiah 25:6–9
(*or*: Wisdom of Solomon 3:1–9)
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1–6a
John 11:32–44

The texts for this Sunday are ones that I frequently use for funerals—for individual departed saints of our community. That is no mere coincidence, of course, as a major thrust for today is the promise of resurrection for all saints. "The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Isa 25:8, and paraphrased in Rev 21:4) is a beautiful, poignant image of a future hope that sustains the saints in the midst of present struggles. Perhaps a thing to do early in the week is to work devotionally with this powerful image by first thinking of tears: your own tears, tears shed by your people and tears of forgotten neighbors far and wide. I've just been looking at heartbreaking pictures of crushing suffering in Rwanda—the tears of forgotten neighbors indeed.

Speaking of tears, in John 11 we have the tears of Jesus for his friend Lazarus. "Jesus wept" (RSV). That is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it can be powerful in giving permission for folks to grieve and express their sorrow. But tear sharing is not the main reason for the story's inclusion for this Sunday. It is, of course, Jesus' confrontation with death. "Lazarus, come out! . . . Unbind him, and let him go" (43–44). Powerful stuff. But for all the saints he goes further than that—much further. For his good friend Lazarus, Jesus stands outside the tomb and shouts. Later, for the sake of all the saints, Jesus will climb into the tomb himself, so that God can blow the stone away and defeat the power of death—from the inside.

But, it must be asked, who are all the saints? Whose tears are wiped away? For whom is victory assured? *Simul justus et peccator* provides the key to addressing the issue of who makes the cut. Yes, it's doctrine, but it's not "dry" doctrine. It's life-giving doctrine, without which the texts for the day can only be law. (Incidentally, as a psychologist I was in the "cognitive school," which essentially maintains that beliefs have real consequences. From that position, no doctrine is "dry," however dryly presented!)

Now, there is a "sanctification" understanding of sainthood that need not be excluded in the proclamation. It is indeed right and salutary that we remember great ex-

amples of courage and faithfulness from Christian history. It is also right that we remember local, "ordinary" saints through whom God has worked to bring glimpses of the kingdom into the midst of our lives.

But, sainthood by grace through faith, inherent in Luther's insight of *simul justus et peccator*, needs to be presented as well (though perhaps not in those exact words!) if the gospel is to be heard as good news. One way to get at Luther's insight is to juxtapose last week's proclamation with this week's. For Reformation Sunday I suggested focusing on telling the truth about ourselves, including the truth of our persistent sinfulness. That we are sinners is the truth our culture cannot face and seeks to deny. I lifted up the value of having a time and place where we can face and tell the truth about ourselves and learn again of the truth that sets us free—every day, one day at a time. So last week people heard that we are all sinners. And this Sunday people come and hear that we are all saints—saints since the day God claimed us in the waters of our baptism. One week we're sinners; the next week we're saints. Which is it? Well, you can tell where I'm going with this, and it's simply one attempt to lead into the truth of *simul justus et peccator.*

One last thing. I don't think the "sanctification" and "justification" understandings of sainthood need contradict each other (I made a similar point regarding Mark 10, the Gospel for October 15). That God could and would work through me to do God's holy work—in spite of my deep sin and profoundly mixed motives—is no less shocking than that I might have my tears wiped away in eternity, no less a profound reminder of the sheer, radical, and amazing grace of God.

Twenty-second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27) November 12, 2000

1 Kings 17:8–16
Psalm 146
Hebrews 9:24–28
Mark 12:38–44

After two weeks in John's Gospel, we are back with Mark. Jesus and his disciples have finally made their way into Jerusalem, where tensions with the religious/political establishment are mounting. The Marcan pericope presents a study in contrasts. First, in his temple teaching, Jesus promises greater condemnation for hypocritical and self-serving religious leaders. This is a text directed squarely at us called and ordained types. It doesn't take much self-examination to see the parallel ways we like to "walk in long robes and to be greeted with respect in the marketplace, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!" (vv. 38–39). In spite of our sincere talk of "servanthood" and our solemn vows to serve the gospel, we are not at all immune from the drive for self-aggrandizement—even as we do the Lord's work. I am often disheartened at gatherings of clergy with the amount of posturing and posing, all desiring to be "greeted with respect." And I am even more disheartened with my own posturing, my own posing, my own hiding my failures and struggles, so that I might be one of the respected.

Contrasted with the self-serving scribes is the self-giving widow who puts into the treasury all the money she has—two copper coins. That this story happens in Holy Week is no accidental placement for Mark. Narratively, the poor widow prefigures the self-giving of Jesus on the cross. Jesus too will "put in everything he has." Such a narrative

role for the widow, however, does not obviate the inspiration of her example for the original and all subsequent disciples, including us.

In Mark's spare telling of the story there is much we don't know about the widow: her age, whether she's always been poor, her demeanor. Preaching might mean creatively filling in those gaps, but ultimately those details are beside the point. The point is that at this moment the widow was free to give of herself beyond the law's requirement, free to "let go and let God." She was able to let go of her fears and take the risk to trust God with her whole being—something the rich man was unable to do (October 15).

Certainly as an example, the poor widow can serve the proclamation of the law. It is easy to see how we fail to measure up in comparison, and it is worthwhile to explore why. However, could she also serve the gospel? One approach would be to ask folks to think of themselves at their best moments—moments when they were able to take the risk and let go and let God, when they were able to put it all on the line for Jesus' sake (i.e., for others' sake)—maybe money, maybe heart, maybe career, maybe popularity, maybe pride or ego. And then the subsequent question: What gave them the freedom to take that risk? Did they find the courage to "let go and let God" by reaching deep within ourselves? Or did the Risen Christ through the Spirit's power give them the strength to do what they might not have thought possible?

When I did psychotherapy in the 70s and 80s, the emphasis was on discovering and cultivating your own inner resources. Free yourself, forgive yourself, accept yourself, love yourself, and find courage within your own heart. That emphasis on inner resources conforms to the American doctrine—or should we say myth?—of self-sufficiency. But no matter how empowering it all sounds, the imperative to love yourself or free yourself is nothing but law—law that makes any of the Mosaic 613 look like child's play in comparison. The indicative of the gospel is all about what comes as gift: we *are* loved, we *are* accepted, we *are* given courage and we *are* set free—even to follow the poor widow's inspiring example. Thus, I will spend essential time in this sermon pointing out how the Risen Christ, faithfully at work among us, frees us to joyfully trust our lives to our loving and faithful God with all our heart, soul, mind, and might.

Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28) November 19, 2000

Daniel 12:1–3
Psalm 16
Hebrews 10:11–14 [15–18], 19–25
Mark 13:1–8

I still remember my first trip to New York City. I was twelve years old, the stereotypical small-town kid in the big city. My family saw the usual tourist sites: Radio City Music Hall, Rockefeller Center, the Empire State Building, Greenwich Village. We were from a small town in Delaware, and New York blew me away. I remember walking down Fifth Avenue with complete amazement: "Wow! Mom, look at the skyscrapers!" I'm not sure about those of you who grew up in the city, but I can readily identify with the small town boys in the reading from Mark: "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" (v. 1). Jesus, however, is not leading a sightseeing tour. Jesus in on a mission, and his mission is coming to a head. At this very

moment, the political and religious honchos of Jerusalem are plotting to kill him. Thus, he warns his awestruck followers to get their priorities straight. "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down" (v. 2). In other words, "Don't lose sight of what is solid rock and what is ultimately sinking sand—and I am solid rock, and this great human achievement called the Temple is not." (Quotes from "My Hope is Built on Nothing Less," "Built on a Rock," and "Rock of Ages" would provide rich hymnic images for preaching this Sunday.)

It is one thing to look at the big temple and say what an awesome place to worship God, but it is quite another to end up worshipping the temple itself. Jesus knows how easily his disciples are tempted to find their ultimate identity and hope in human achievement and schemes including their own. But, at this moment, when the establishment is plotting against him, Jesus wants them to put their ultimate trust in God and nowhere else. It is the only way they can be prepared for the rough road ahead.

Staying "within the story" of Jesus and his disciples is my usual preference for working with Marcan texts. However, there are some important historical issues involved in Mark 13. The Temple was destroyed by Roman legions in A.D. 70, close to the time when Mark's Gospel was written. Mark's first readers/hearers had seen or would soon see the literal pillars of Jewish faith crumble. To be faithful, they needed to know that Christ was still the rock in their lives who would not abandon them no matter what crashed around them or what the future might hold. Readers/hearers 2,000 years later need to know the same.

This text begins Mark's "Little Apocalypse" that occupies the entire chapter. It provides some clear cautions for any who would try to figure out the timetable for the end times: there will be many misread signs (vv. 5–8) and "about that day or hour no one knows" (v. 32). I'm not sure what kind of literalistic apocalypticism you face in your ministry, but for Messiah Lutheran, such is not our challenge. In the run-up to Y2K, I don't think one of our people even considered buying a generator. There's not a survivalist among the bunch. Our greatest danger is complacency—the lack of eschatological passion. The problem is not with misguided attempts to predict God's future, but the temptation to live as if the future were not in God's hands at all. Thus, the challenge is to stir up urgency for present discipleship. My usual approach to that challenge is to focus not only on the "end times" (i.e., the promise that our ultimate future is in God's hands), but also on Christ's faithful and empowering presence among us in the "meantime"—the Solid/Cleft Rock at work in our midst.

Christ the King (Proper 29) November 26, 2000

Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14
Psalm 93
Revelation 1:4b–8
John 18:33–37

I think there are two emphases for this Sunday. One is to remember that Jesus is King, that he was not defeated on Good Friday but is seated at the right hand of the Father reigning as the Victorious One. The other emphasis is to remember that the King is Jesus, that is, to remember just what kind of king he is—one who reigns from a cross and continues to bear the pain and sin of the world in his wounds. "We proclaim Christ *crucified*" (1 Cor 1:23). I find Pilate's

interrogation a compelling way to get at both aspects.

Pilate embodies politics as usual and thus holds the typical understanding of kingship: the power of the sword. It might be useful to remind folks just what a Roman governor was: not like our state governors (although in Wisconsin some are given to calling Governor Thompson "King Tommy"!) but a powerful figure who had soldiers at his command. And Pilate was not afraid to use his power. Josephus (not always so reliable, but he can probably be trusted in this case) tells about an incident showing how ruthless Pilate could be. Pilate decided to take money from the Jewish temple to build an aqueduct. When Jews protested, Pilate sent in his troops to beat the protestors into submission. Politics as usual.

Thus, when this unarmed Palestinian peasant stands before him—charged by his people with pretensions to kingship—Pilate is clueless. This Jesus a king? The charge makes absolutely no sense to Pilate. All that makes sense to him is the power of soldiers and swords and clubs and coercion and . . . crosses. When he looks at Jesus, all he can see is a weak, powerless nobody. King? You've got to be kidding! But Jesus was becoming a nuisance. There were lots of people in town, and they seemed to be all worked up over this Jesus, for what reason Pilate couldn't figure out, but he had to take care of crowd control. He hated to do it. Jesus seemed harmless enough (and besides, his wife had some weird dream about this man), but he couldn't have angry mobs running in the streets. Oh, well. "Nail him up and be done with him."

Pilate could not see that the Reign of Love embodied in this peasant king was more powerful and enduring than the old order of intimidation, terror, violence, and oppression. Pilate could not see that, and I must confess, sometimes neither can I. When bombarded by the horror of the world, or more specifically when drawn into the quiet but still tragic evidence of the enduring power of sin in the lives of "my people," I can wonder if Jesus' Reign has anything to do with the "real" world after all. And I am not alone? Many, if not most, of those who sit in Messiah's pews go through similar troubling wonderings. So, what is the challenge of proclaiming Christ the King in the face of such struggles for faith?

Probably the most helpful comment I've ever heard about preaching pertains here. Duane Priebe, systematics professor at Wartburg Seminary, once told our class (I hope he tells every class!), "Your job is not to *tell* people to believe, but to *help* them believe." That is a huge and crucial distinction. One is easy. The other is work for a lifetime. For Christ the King Sunday, I think Duane's advice means taking seriously the present and real barriers people have to seeing Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But, then it also means looking with our people for signs of the kingdom's coming even in the midst of the terrorized, violent and warring old creation. Again, Thomas Merton's reflection on all this has been very helpful for me (see comments for October 22). Usually, though, what helps me know again that Christ's Rule of Love is still alive and will ultimately win the day, are the glimpses—however provisional—of the kingdom present in the extraordinary acts of selfless love I see on a daily basis among the ordinary people with whom I am blessed to share ministry.

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