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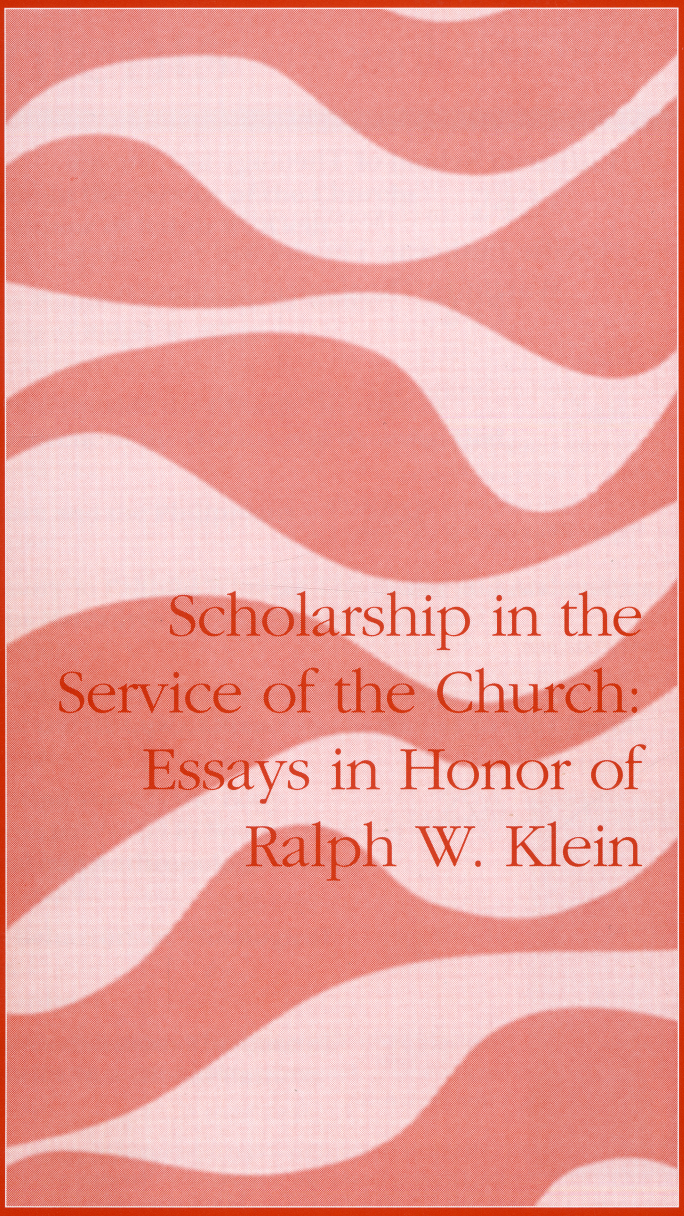

Scholarship in the Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein

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"Like Trees Planted by Streams of Water": The Blessing of Ralph W. Klein

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Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of
the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of
the LORD,
and on his law they meditate
day and night.
They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its
season,
and their leaves do not wither,
In all that they do, they prosper.
—Psalm 1:1–3 NRSV

In responding to the question "Why did the editor of the Psalter recognize the appropriateness of placing Psalm 1 at the head of the collection?" Denise Dombkowski Hopkins writes:

> The context for praying, singing, or preaching the rest of the psalms is set by Psalm 1 and its declaration of the Two Ways and the joy of the Torah. Psalm 1 serves as our guidepost at the entrance to the Psalter; it helps us to keep our bearings through life's journey because it tells us that Torah articulates God's intentions for us. As Brueggemann argues, Psalm 1 "announces that the primary agenda for Israel's worship life is obedience"; how we choose to live our life matters in terms of God's purpose for creation. Furthermore, the beginning and the end of the Psalter, Psalms 1 and 150, are connected in that "a life grounded in obedience leads precisely to doxology."[1]

"A life grounded in obedience leads precisely to doxology." This phrase captures something of the ray of light Ralph has shed for me on the life of faith. Although I have never taken a class from him, when it comes to lessons in wisdom he has been a cherished teacher. Because not all of those lessons may be mentioned in the space of a brief tribute, I have chosen one that, like the recognition of the connectedness between Psalms 1 and 150, has to do with the relationship between beginnings and endings, obedience and doxology.

As my predecessor as Dean of LSTC, Ralph walked a formidable path for a successor to follow. "In all that they do, they prosper" (Ps 1:3) certainly seems an apt description of Ralph Klein: highly respected and productive scholar; deeply valued and sought-after teacher, whether in LSTC classrooms, theological conferences, or the classrooms of congregations; pioneer in educational technology; editor of a journal that seeks to facilitate connections between seminary and congregation; trusted leader in the faculty and in the wider world of theological education; savvy administrator and church leader. Much more could be added to this list, but suffice it to say that Ralph's capacity for productivity and for prospering in all that he does is nothing short of breathtaking. To say he was a tough act to follow would be a significant understatement.

It became clear after I took office as Dean that Ralph was exercising obedience to certain principles with regard to his relationship with me and with the rest of the faculty. In leaving office he presented me with a little box that contained a copy of the mission of LSTC and a few paper clips. He told me that my job as Dean was both to tend the mission of the school and the details of administration—the tending of endless small details in service to a larger mission. Privately he told me that he would not be offering any advice, but he would be there if I ever wanted counsel or a listening ear. He has been more than true to his word.

What he did not say, but taught by example, is that when transitions come, they offer an opportunity to perceive something new springing forth (Isa 43:18–19). He taught me that one of the greatest gifts that we can offer each other is to have faith in one another, especially in those who come after us—a faith that has nothing to do with seeing one another in idealistic ways but everything to do with envisioning one another as trees planted beside trust-

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1. Denise Dombkowski Hopkins, *Journey through the Psalms,* rev. ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), 66. Quotation is from Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 38–39; 183n. 32. Hopkins observes that Psalm 1 may be called both a Torah psalm (which affirms that delighting in and meditating on the Torah marks the way of the righteous person) and a wisdom psalm (which contrasts the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked and affirms the reliability of God's blessing of the righteous way).

worthy streams of grace and mercy that will never fail, even when we do.

Through the wisdom of his example Ralph taught me what is common to beginnings and endings in the life of faith: They are nourished by the same streams of living water that alone make it possible to yield fruit in seasons we do not create or control. It is a delight to watch people who seem to have the grace to "go out and come in" with such cheerful confidence, rooted and nourished by streams that bubble up in the form of good humor, dedicated work that does not flag even to the last days in a position (and beyond it), and a demeanor that conveys the assurance that we will *all* find our feet in the changes ahead. "Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise."[2] Or, put as Ralph did in his last faculty meeting with us, "I can't wait to see what I'll be when I grow up!"

Yet perhaps it is not as easy as it sometimes appears. The wisdom psalms and Torah psalms, the proverbs and rules, the codes of ethics and covenantal promises and obligations provide one way to understand how law is a manifestation of grace. They remind us of our need for moorings outside our own needs, ambitions, accomplishments, and edifices; they point us to a larger story in which our own stories find a homecoming and horizon; and they intimate that there are dangers to be faced and griefs to be borne on the journey. Between the "gateway" of Psalm 1 and the extravagant praise of Psalm 150, the majority of psalms reveal the pain and struggle that is part of the life of faith. Yet even when suffering shatters familiar orientations and the waters come up to our necks and threaten to sink us (Ps 69:1), there is still Someone to whom to cry for deliverance when familiar ways are capsizing, One who has promised to be faithful through all things.

> The tree planted by the stream is not necessarily protected from strong winds, flood, or drought, but its deep roots help it survive them. Neither does it yield fruit all the time or any time it wants to, but "in its season," that is, at the proper time. . . . I think Peter Craigie is right when he argues that blessedness is not a reward but rather the natural result of a particular type of life.[3]

How we will miss the quiet *practices* of Ralph Klein: the steadiness of his participation in worship, the careful preparation for every meeting, the attention to fulfilling promises, and a host of principles that were seldom sermonized but so often embodied! How we will miss the steadfastness of those practices and all the fruit they yielded, not the least of which was his unfailing humor! During a playful e-mail exchange late one evening not too long ago, I wrote that I wish he would consider delaying retirement. I cannot imagine LSTC without him. His reply was vintage Ralph. With great good humor he thanked me, but then said, "But now let your servant depart in peace."

Of all the ways to say thank you, perhaps the best way is to have the grace to say, "You have been a blessing in countless ways, dear colleague. Now we let you depart in peace, blessed by our respect, gratitude, and abiding affection. Come in and go out freely in the years to come. It will be a grace to continue in relationship, and—like you—we look forward to celebrating all you will learn and all you will continue to teach us as you continue to 'grow up' in Christ."

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2. "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* #807.

3. Hopkins, *Journey through the Psalms*, 68. Reference is to Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983): 61.

"No Salvation Outside the Church" in Light of Luther's Dialectic of the Hidden and Revealed God

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Ralph W. Klein has been a seminary professor for four decades. A great deal of his scholarship and teaching has intentionally addressed the life and mission of the church as well as the academic context. This exploration of Martin Luther's theological insights and their contemporary implications is intended to celebrate Klein's commitment to the gospel, his sensitivity to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, and his conviction that theological scholarship can focus on practical questions of faith and of the church's calling in the world.

The claim that there is "no salvation outside the church" has been an integral part of the Christian tradition since the time of Cyprian in the third century. While it continues to be affirmed within the Christian community, it also has inspired substantial debate. Its theological, missiological, ecclesial, and ecumenical implications are varied, and it presents the contemporary church with complex challenges as the church strives to carry out God's mission in the world. The assertion is consistent with Luther's evangelical perspective. At the same time, Luther's dialectic of the *deus revelatus* and the *deus absconditus* provides contemporary theologians with resources to amend and reinterpret this assertion.

Luther clearly affirms that there is no salvation outside the church. It is either explicitly or implicitly articulated in much of his theological corpus. Nowhere is it stated more clearly than in a normative text of the Reformation movement, a text that ultimately was included among the Lutheran confessional writings, namely, the Large Catechism. In his discussion of the third article of the Creed he makes a variety of statements that clarify his position. While criticizing the Roman church for fostering human works as a means of obtaining grace and salvation and thereby obscuring Christ's redemptive activity and the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification, Luther asserts:

> Where he [the Holy Spirit] does not cause it [the Word] to be preached and does not awaken the understanding of it in the heart, all is lost. . . . For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call, and gather the Christian church, apart from which no one can come to the Lord Christ.[1]

Stressing the necessity of forgiveness in the lives of sinners, he warns: "Outside this

1. The Large Catechism, The Creed, III, in *The Book of Concord* (hereafter *BC*), ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 436, 45.

Christian community, however, where there is no gospel, there is also no forgiveness, there is also no holiness."[2] However, his clearest statement occurs in the conclusion of his explanation of the Creed where he praises the Creed as a careful explication of the essence, will, and work of the Holy Spirit. He points out that

> we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the LORD Christ, who is the mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.[3]

The saving self-revelation of God occurs only within the community of faith. Hence, Luther concludes:

> These three articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside this Christian people, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites—even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God—nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing, and therefore they remain in eternal wrath and condemnation. For they do not have the LORD Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[4]

It is not surprising that Luther makes this bold assertion, for it is clearly consistent with the chief articles of his evangelical theology, namely, his Christology and the related doctrine of justification. The very heart of his theology therefore informs his thinking.

In order to illustrate the theological logic of Luther's conclusion it is advisable to review briefly the chief contours of his justificatory thought. On the basis of his biblical studies and his spiritual struggles, those *Anfechtungen*[5] that were a consistent aspect of his faith journey, Luther articulated a doctrine of justification that he considered to be a faithful explication and proclamation of the gospel. Saint Paul was Luther's chief teacher and provided him with the "grammar of faith," as Kenneth Hagen has argued.[6] The Reformer maintained that since the fall all human beings are sinners whose nature is radically corrupted by original sin, which is hereditary and which manifests itself in sinful deeds.[7] Humans have difficulty obeying the second table of the law, especially as Luther explicates the Decalogue in his Catechisms,[8] but they are absolutely incapable of fulfilling the first table, especially the first commandment.[9] Thus, natural human beings are concupiscent and enemies of God who have lost the freedom of the will and the image of God. Echoing Saint Augustine, Luther insists that although Adam and Eve were able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) as well as to sin (*posse peccare*), their progeny are no longer able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). Hence, they stand under God's just condemnation and are wholly dependent on God for their salvation.

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2. The Large Catechism, The Creed, III, *BC*, 438, 56.

3. The Large Catechism, The Creed, III, *BC*, 440, 65.

4. The Large Catechism, The Creed, III, *BC*, 440, 66.

5. See Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483–1521*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 76–82. Brecht provides a concise but helpful discussion of the role of the *Anfechtungen* in Luther's spiritual quest.

6. Kenneth Hagen, *Luther's Approach to Scripture as Seen in His "Commentaries" on Galatians 1519–1538* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993).

7. The Smalcald Articles, III, 1, *BC*, 310–11, 1–3.

8. The Small Catechism, The Ten Commandments, *BC*, 351, 1–354, 22; The Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, 386, 1–431, 333.

9. The Smalcald Articles, III, 2, *BC*, 312, 4.

God, of course, has redeemed humanity through the Christ, who is fully divine and fully human,[10] who became incarnate and took on humanity's sin and punishment and who was victorious over all the powers that separate God and human beings.[11] It is only because of Christ's redemptive work that life and salvation are once again human possibilities. They cannot be earned or merited but are free gifts received in and through faith for the sake of Christ.[12] Faith is essential, for only faith trusts God's promises and, therefore, receives what is promised.

Thus, the church is the arena of God's justifying activity. Faith is not a human work but, like all other life-giving and life-sustaining blessings, a gift of God. It is created in individuals by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. Those means, the Word and the sacraments, are granted to the church and are available only in and through the community of faith. Those who come to faith receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation and are incorporated into the church, the body of Christ. There their faith is also nurtured through the Word and the sacraments. The members of the church, both individually and corporately, thus become means of the means of grace and agents of salvation to those who are not yet part of the body of Christ.

Luther's conclusion that those outside the church face God's wrath and condemnation reflects his evangelical theology. He was convinced that Christ alone redeems (*solus Christus*). The benefits Christ has won for us are received only through faith (*sola fide*) because of God's grace (*sola gratia*). Faith is created by the Holy Spirit only through the means of grace. Those means are available only in the church. All who receive the gift of faith become members of the church, where their faith is then nurtured through Word and sacraments. It is for these reasons that there is no salvation outside the church.

Luther's conclusion thus has a clear theological logic. The various assertions he made that led him to this conclusion are necessitated by his evangelical theology, except the last one. I support that contention later in this essay. However, a significant dilemma of Lutheran evangelical theology must first be addressed, because it is related to Luther's notion of the *deus absconditus* and has implications for the topic under discussion.

The dilemma is inherent in the Lutheran doctrine of justification and is related to the assumption that some are saved while others are not. The doctrine of justification asserts that God alone saves and justifies, that God has already redeemed humanity in Jesus Christ, and that the justification of all is God's intention. Yet, the Lutheran tradition also has consistently maintained that there is no salvation outside the church and that therefore not all are saved or justified. The dilemma is that God, who has already redeemed all in Christ, apparently does not justify all. As already noted, Luther argued that since the fall all unregenerated human beings are enemies of God who cannot obey God's will and fulfill the law. Only God can and does save. No one can do

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10. Luther's most incisive christological writings dealing with the two natures of Christ are the eucharistic treatises that he addressed to Huldreich Zwingli and his supporters. See especially "That These Words of Christ, 'This is my Body,' etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics" and "Concerning Christ's Supper" in *Luther's Works* (*LW*), 55 vols., ed. Helmut Lehmann and Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), vol. 37.

11. The Large Catechism, Creed, II, *BC*, 434, 25–435, 33.

12. The Smalcald Articles, II, *BC*, 301, 1–5.

anything to prepare for or merit salvation. In light of their sinful nature, all human beings are the same in God's sight and equally incapable in matters of salvation. Why, then, does God overcome the enmity and rebellion of some, grant them faith and justify them and not others?

In response to this crucial and troubling question, Philip Melanchthon proposed that there are three causes of conversion: the Holy Spirit, the Word, and the human will that does not resist God's activity. Thus humans themselves are the reason why some are saved and some are damned. The passivity or active resistance of the will determines the eternal destiny of each individual. God cannot be blamed for the fate of the condemned.

Melanchthon's solution was rejected by most of his colleagues, although it addressed the dilemma and avoided the doctrine of double predestination. His position was criticized as synergistic by many of his fellow evangelicals and was rejected in the Formula of Concord.[13] Seeking to avoid any hint of synergism, the Lutheran confessional writings maintain that the blame for people's condemnation must be ascribed to the devil and the perverse human will, even as they reject that the human will somehow cooperates with God in conversion.[14] This is also Luther's most consistent position.[15]

However, this explanation is found wanting. After all, the will of every unregenerate human being is perverse and at enmity with God, and the devil always opposes God's saving and justifying activity. There is therefore no essential distinction between one person and another. Furthermore, only God can and does save and justify. Human beings cannot cooperate with God in their justification. Indeed, any attempt to do so is a usurpation of God's role and fails to let God be God.

Why does God overcome the opposition of the devil and of the fallen human will in some and not in others?

Hence, the questions persist. Why does God overcome the opposition of the devil and of the fallen human will in some and not in others? Why does God justify some and not others? Is it because God is able to justify only a certain number, or does God will to justify some and to condemn others? Is it simply impossible to resolve the dilemma raised by the Lutheran doctrine of justification, or does the Lutheran heritage necessitate a doctrine of double predestination, even though the sixteenth-century confessors[16] and Lutherans since then have rejected that doctrine?

Luther himself apparently did not share the concerns of his colleagues and heirs regarding double predestination and af-

13. Formula of Concord, Epitome, II, *BC*, 491, 1–494, 19; Solid Declaration, II, 543, 1–562, 90, especially pp. 560, 86–562, 90.

14. Apology of the Augsburg Confession, XIX, *BC*, 235; Formula of Concord, Epitome, XI, 518, 13–519, 15; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II, 547, 17–549, 24, 552, 44–45; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XI, 653, 78–82.

15. *LW* 31:58–60; *LW* 32:226; *LW* 33: 65; The Smalcald Articles, III, *BC*, 1, 310,1–311, 11.

16. Formula of Concord, Epitome, XI, *BC*, 517, 1–520, 22; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XI, 640, 1–656, 96.

firmed it in his debate with Desiderius Erasmus. By doing so, Luther addressed the dilemma, although in a way that is inconsistent with his own theological method and troublesome in light of his understanding of the gospel.

The proposal I delineate in this essay affirms the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, avoids the doctrine of double predestination, and addresses the dilemma, but in a way that differs significantly from Luther's solution.

Having illustrated that the assertion that there is no salvation outside the church is a logical theological consequence of Luther's justificatory thought and having noted the challenging dilemma raised by his assertion that we are saved by grace through faith alone, it is now necessary to explore the Reformer's dialectic of the hidden and revealed God (see Isa 45:15) as a theological resource that sheds important light on the assertion and on the dilemma. This dialectic also has the potential of expanding the theological, ecumenical, and missiological horizons of contemporary evangelical theologians without necessitating a universalist position. While this dialectic is apparent throughout Luther's vast corpus of writings, he explores it intentionally and extensively in the "Heidelberg Theses" and in *Bondage of the Will*. These two writings serve as chief sources of the following discussion.

The *deus revelatus* is a particular focus of attention in the "Heidelberg Theses." Rom 1:19–25, 1 Cor 1:17–31, and the theophany recorded in Exod 33:18–23 clearly inform Luther's striking assertions. With his penchant for paradoxical thinking, Luther proposes that God's ultimate self-revelation is in hiddenness. He cautions those who wish to be theologians of the cross—that is, true theologians—not to focus on the invisible things of God revealed through God's mighty works of creation, such visible things as God's "virtue, godliness, wisdom, justice, goodness, and so forth. . . . The recognition of all these things does not make one worthy or wise."[17] The reason why true theologians should not seek the invisible things of God revealed through God's mighty acts of creation is explained by Paul in Romans 1. It is because humans have misinterpreted these natural revelations, have not honored God, have become fools while claiming to be wise, and have "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men or birds or animals or reptiles." Thus God gave them up to their sins "because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:23; 25). Paul notes in this passage, and Luther agrees, that although God is revealed in the wonders of creation, human beings have misinterpreted and misused that revelation and have become idolaters, making God into their image rather than recognizing God as God wishes to be known and confessing God to be God. For this reason, asserts Luther, God has chosen to reveal God's essence in a radically different and surprising way, in what the Reformer calls the back or invisible things, namely, in weakness, in folly, in the incarnation, and on the cross. Luther clearly reflects Paul's insights in Romans 1 as he notes:

> Because men misused the knowledge of God through works, God wished again to be recognized in suffering, and to condemn wisdom concerning invisible things by means of wisdom concerning visible things, so that those who did not honor God as manifested in his works should honor him as he is hidden in his suffering. As the Apostle says in I Cor. 1:[21], "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the

17. *LW* 31:52; Explanation of Thesis 19.

folly of what we preach to save those who believe." Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross.[18]

It is crucial to note Luther's emphases in this passage. God is revealed and wishes to be recognized in the suffering, humility, and shame of the cross. However, God is hidden in suffering. Hence, God is revealed in hiding, and only this revelation is sufficient and redemptive. Those who seek to know the invisible things of God, namely, God's glory, majesty, wisdom, and justice, through the wisdom of natural revelation are chastised as theologians of glory by Luther. They will never know God, at least not as Savior. Those who focus on the incarnate Christ suffering the shame and humiliation of the cross are theologians of the cross and recognize the nature and work of God in that hidden revelation.

What God is revealed by hiding on the cross as the Incarnate One? In Christ theologians of the cross see God as God wants to be seen, as a God who exercises power in weakness, whose glory is shame and humiliation, who brings life by means of death, whose suffering leads to resurrection, whose divine majesty is clothed in human flesh. It is no wonder that Luther maintains paradoxically that God is hidden in God's ultimate self-revelation. That is why faith is absolutely necessary in order to recognize God in the crucified Christ. It is, however, only in the Christ that God chooses to be revealed. It is only through the Christ that God and God's will are known. Luther supports this assertion by noting Philip's request to Jesus in John 14:8: "Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus responds: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). Luther concludes, therefore: "For this reason true theology and recognition of God are in the crucified Christ. . . ."[19] Thus in the Christ God is revealed by hiding, and in Christ God is revealed as the One who saves.

Luther's focus in the "Heidelberg Theses" is on the *deus revelatus*. He presents a challenging, yet fascinating, depiction of the *deus absconditus* in *Bondage of the Will*. This lengthy and complex work is one of Luther's most important and profound theological treatises. It not only illustrates the boldness and dialectical creativity of his thought but also raises crucial questions regarding the theological consistency and validity of his biblical exegesis. The radical nature of Luther's understanding of the hidden God, the *deus absconditus*, is surely evident in this treatise.

Luther warns that the theologian and believer must distinguish between the God preached, or revealed, and the God hidden, "that is, between the Word of God and God himself."[20] The hidden God, or "God himself," does many things and wills many things that are not revealed even in Scripture.[21] Hence, God is hidden "behind and beyond Scripture."[22] He does not say so explicitly, but the implication of his arguments are that the hidden will and the hidden deeds of God are not even apparent in and through God's ultimate self-revelation, in Jesus Christ. Luther also insists that human beings must leave this hidden, majestic God alone[23] and focus on the Word, which witnesses to the Incarnate Word, but

18. *LW* 31:52–53; Explanation of Thesis 20.

19. *LW* 31:53; Explanation of Thesis 20.

20. *LW* 33:140.

21. *LW* 33:140.

22. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 277.

23. "God must therefore be left to himself in his own majesty, for in this regard we have nothing to do with him, nor has he

he ignores his own advice and explicates what the *deus absconditus* wills and works. In doing this, Luther becomes a theologian of glory who seeks to look into the face of God rather than a theologian of the cross who focuses on God's back and, hence, the visible things of God. Luther contradicts his own theological method as he explores the hidden will of God and asserts boldly that God wills to reject some even as God wills that all sinners be saved in the revealed will. He essentially posits a doctrine of double predestination and maintains that the condemned suffer their fate in accordance with God's inscrutable will. Indeed, he affirms St. Augustine's assertion that God works both good and evil within people,[24] although he nuances that assertion later in the treatise and explains that God uses the evil that is already within a person to work evil by means of that individual.[25]

In order to support his position regarding God's will to condemn, Luther cites the biblical record and points out that God hardened Pharaoh,[26] foreknew that Judas would betray Jesus,[27] and loved Jacob but hated Esau.[28] He also examines the passages from Isaiah 45 and Romans 9 regarding the potter and the clay.[29] He stresses that this majestic, hidden will has no standards but itself[30] and that God is no more unjust in condemning the undeserving than in graciously rewarding the undeserving.[31] The impact of Paul's discussion in Romans 9 is clearly evident as Luther seeks biblical warrant for the doctrine of double predestination. Thus his chief theological mentors, Paul and Augustine, are obvious resources as he carries on his literary dialogue with his famous antagonist, Erasmus of Rotterdam.

While elucidating God's hidden will, Luther is careful to dictate what the human response to the will and work of the *deus absconditus* must be. Because God is God and humans are creatures, they cannot probe into the mystery of God's hidden will,[32] nor dare they question or judge it.[33] Rather, they must "pay attention to the word and leave that inscrutable will alone."[34] God cannot be approached in God's majesty but only "insofar as he is clothed and set forth in his Word. . . ."[35] The hidden will of God can only be revered, feared and adored.[36] The ultimate human response to the hidden God as well as the revealed God is, therefore, faith. Thus, Luther maintains, it is the "highest degree of faith" to believe that God is merciful when God saves so few and damns so many.[37]

As one considers the challenging nature and content of Luther's notion of the *deus absconditus*, the question arises as to why he found it necessary to articulate these ideas. A careful reading of *Bondage of the Will* suggests the following answer. Methodologically, Luther viewed the con-

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willed that we should have anything to do with him. But we have something to do with him insofar as he is clothed and set forth in his Word, through which he offers himself to us and which is the beauty and glory with which the psalmist celebrates him as being clothed" (*LW* 33:139; see also 33:140).

24. *LW* 33:58.
25. *LW* 33:178.
26. *LW* 33:179.
27. *LW* 33:194–95.
28. *LW* 33:195–202.
29. *LW* 33:203–6.
30. "He is God, and for his will there is no cause or reason that can be laid down as a rule or measure for it, since there is nothing equal or superior to it, but it is itself the rule of all things. For if there were any rule or standard for it, either as a cause or reason, it could no longer be the will of God" (*LW* 33:181).
31. *LW* 33:207.
32. *LW* 33:188.
33. *LW* 33:61, 139, 290.
34. *LW* 33:140.
35. *LW* 33:139.
36. *LW* 33:139, 140, 188.
37. *LW* 33:62, 174.

tent of his argument as an effective and convincing response to the anthropological assertions of Erasmus. However, he also had important theological reasons for stressing the majesty and hiddenness of God and the related doctrine of double predestination. For Luther, the doctrine of justification and, hence, the gospel were at stake in his debate with Erasmus. Therefore, he sought to reject the freedom of the will[38] and to stress that humans are totally dependent on God for their spiritual destiny.[39] He also wanted to emphasize the necessity of faith.[40] Perhaps most importantly, he eagerly defended the absolute freedom and noncontingency of God so that God is able not only to make promises but to keep them as well. After all, the eternal destiny of humanity depends on God's freedom and power to save.

How does this analysis of Luther's notion of the hidden and revealed God address the assertion that there is no salvation outside the church? It is not surprising that in their own time and place Luther and most of his European contemporaries, whether they supported or opposed the Reformation, agreed with the historic assertion that salvation is limited to the community of the faithful—the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. This claim was neither new nor radical. It had been made since the time of Cyprian, and at the beginning of the fourteenth century Pope Boniface VIII had even asserted that all human beings must be subject to the bishop of Rome in order to be saved.[41] Many of his contemporaries rejected Boniface's exalted vision of papal authority, but few extended salvation beyond the borders of the church.

It is much more difficult to defend these traditional salvific boundaries in the twenty-first century context when ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are affirmed as ideals by many Christians and when absolute truth claims, a tendency toward exclusivity, or signs of religious imperialism are seen as problematic or rejected altogether by many within the church and surely within society in general.

Is it possible, then, to question and even reject these exclusive claims of Luther and of the broader Christian tradition without denying central affirmations of that tradition? At first glance, it appears that Luther's doctrine of justification and his dialectic of the hidden and revealed God unequivocally support the assertion that there is no salvation outside the church. However, if one nuances these doctrines carefully, especially his notion of the *deus absconditus*, and considers their varied implications, it is possible to challenge contemporary students and heirs of Luther to expand their theological and missiological perspectives.

It must be stressed, first, that evangelical theology clearly affirms the uniqueness of Christ as Savior and as God's ultimate and absolutely trustworthy self-revelation. Humanity's salvation is always impacted by and assured by Christ's redemptive work. Hence, it is impossible to embrace a radical universalist position on the basis of Luther's theological insights.

Evangelical theology also necessitates the joyful claim that there is salvation within the church. After all, the church is the sphere of the Holy Spirit's activity where the means of grace, the Word and the sacraments, are proclaimed and celebrated. It is precisely through those means that the Holy Spirit creates and nurtures faith. Within the church forgiveness of sin is

38. *LW* 33:64 and numerous other citations throughout *Bondage of the Will.*

39. *LW* 33:191.

40. *LW* 33:62.

41. See Boniface VIII's bull "Unam Sanctam" from the year 1302.

God's hidden will, no matter what it is, will not contradict God's revealed will.

granted to all who trust God's promises. Although they remain sinners as well as saints, people of faith are renewed and made holy, their very nature is transformed, and they bring forth the fruits of faith whereby they serve God and their neighbors. Their eternal destiny is assured by the gracious gifts that they receive freely for the sake of Christ. There is, therefore, salvation within the church.

Evangelical theology is, by definition, christocentric. In Christ God's will for humanity is revealed with certainty and clarity, and through Christ God has accomplished God's saving acts. The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and brings life and salvation. People of faith proclaim this gospel within the church because they are nurtured by that proclamation. They also proclaim it in the world with the conviction that God intends all to be saved, that faith is created and nurtured through the gospel, and that Christ is not only their Savior and Lord[42] but the Redeemer of all.

A christocentric, evangelical perspective therefore insists that the will of the *deus revelatus*, the God revealed in Christ, is to save the whole creation. That will has not been abrogated or superseded. However, as Luther asserts so strikingly in *Bondage of the Will*, God is not limited by God's revelation; God is also *deus absconditus* whose majestic will is hidden beyond revelation. While the Reformer could not resist the temptation to explicate God's hidden will in his diatribe against the *Diatribe* of Erasmus, it is more consistent with his theology, particularly with his theology of the cross and his Christology, to leave the hidden will of God alone and to approach God as God clothed in the Word, specifically in the Word Incarnate. When one does, one sees God's back,[43] not God's face, and meets God as Savior. Hence, God's hidden will remains hidden, even in Christ, although God's will revealed in Christ is trustworthy. It is also consistent with Luther's theology to distinguish but never to separate the *deus revelatus* and the *deus absconditus*. Luther is not a dualistic but a paradoxical theologian. Therefore, it is theologically defensible to assume that the hidden will of God does not contradict the revealed will. It also is necessary to leave God's hidden will alone, with the faithful assumption that humans will not know this will until they are enlightened by God with the "light of glory."[44] In the meantime, they trust that the revealed will sheds light on the hidden will.

The following consequences can be drawn when one assumes such a theological stance. First, believers, particularly evangelical theologians, will resist the temptation to describe what God's hidden will is. Rather, they will humbly and necessarily accept the reality that God chooses not to reveal God's face, only God's back, and that much about God remains hidden be-

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42. Luther defines "Lord" as "Redeemer" in his explanation of the second article of the Creed in the Large Catechism. See The Large Catechism, The Creed, II, *BC*, 434, 27.

43. See *LW* 31:52, "Heidelberg Theses," Explanation of Thesis 20. See also Exod 33: 18–23, which informs Luther's theological insights.

44. *LW* 33:292.

yond revelation. They will let God be God, both in God's revelation and in God's hiddenness. Second, people of faith will approach the hidden God as they do the revealed God, namely, in and through Christ and with the christological assurance that it is God's will to save. Third, on the basis of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith as well as the dialectic of the hidden and revealed God they will confess that God alone can and does save.

With such a perspective evangelical theologians, who are theologians of the cross, will proclaim Christ, even as they avoid speculating about the fate of those who have not yet come to faith and who do not confess Christ. They therefore need not assert the condemnation of such people. Rather, knowing that only God saves and confessing that they cannot and dare not delve into God's hidden will, they leave the fate of those who are not members of the church in God's hands. They do so with the assurance that in Christ God has saved all and with the expectation that God intends to bless all with the benefits of Christ's redemptive acts. That expectation is warranted because the hidden God is none other than the revealed God, and people of faith consider God's hidden will in light of God's revealed will.[45] Hence, they must be open to the possibility that in God's hiddenness God has done and will continue to do surprising things for the sake of God's creation. After all, there is much that God has chosen not to reveal even in the Word.[46] If part of the hidden will of God is to justify people in ways of which they are not aware, that is God's prerogative. As Luther argues so consistently, the person of faith is called to believe and to confess that God's actions are just, no matter what God does, because God is just. God's promises in Jesus the Christ, witnessed by the prophets, apostles, and believers throughout the ages, are not abrogated, even if God has another plan of salvation. God has kept those promises in the past and continues to keep them. The church is a visible manifestation of that fact. Thus, God's revealed will is trustworthy, and God's self-revelation in Christ is sure. God's hidden will, no matter what it is, will not contradict God's revealed will. Christ is the Christian's assurance of that fact and so is the believer's faith.

People of faith who affirm the gospel and the dialectic of the *deus revelatus* and the *deus absconditus* cannot become universalists. They cannot claim with certainty that there is salvation outside the church, even as they need not assert that there is no salvation outside the church. Rather, they are called to proclaim Christ joyfully and humbly, with the assurance that it is God's will to save and that God creates and nurtures faith through that proclamation. The rest must be left in God's hands because God alone saves and justifies. Humans, even believers, cannot determine their own fate or the fate of others. That is God's prerogative. The revealed God assures believers that God is Savior. The hidden God prevents them from limiting God's freedom or possibilities, even in matters of salvation.

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45. A practical manifestation of this perspective is the church's stance regarding the fate of infants who have not received emergency baptism.

46. The authors of the "Formula of Concord" also caution evangelical Christians to leave God's hidden will alone and to find comfort and assurance in God's revealed will. Yet, they assume that some will be saved and some will be condemned, although they reject the doctrine of double predestination. See, for example, Formula of Concord, Epitome XI, BC, 517,1–519, 15; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XI, 643, 12–645, 29; 649, 52–651, 70.

Civic Culture and the Philippians

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Ralph Klein combines meticulous and creative scholarship in the study and teaching of the Old Testament with a strong interest in both the social issues facing the church and our social context. For example, in the 1960s he, along with others, spoke out so strongly against the Vietnam war that a very conservative colleague suggested to me that Ralph was "pink"—and he did not mean it as a compliment. In recent years he has spoken and written about homosexuals in the church. This article picks up the language of the ancient Roman urban environment in tribute to him.

In Philippians Paul uses extensive political language, language at home in the environment of a Greek polis and/or a Roman *urbs*. Much of this language is unique to Philippians. For example, Paul uses the terms πολιτεύεσθαι and πολίτευμα only in Philippians (1:27 and 3:20). The term πολίτευμα denotes the political group to which one belongs.[1] Paul's describing the Christians in Philippi as a πολίτευμα may account for his omission of the term ἐκκλησία in the praescript of the letter, even though it is a standard term for the voting body of citizens in a Greek city. The term is used of Jews in Alexandria in that sense in Pseudo-Aristeas, *Ad Philokrates* 310.[2] The Roman army veterans (settled in Philippi by Mark Antony after the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C.E. and again by Octavian (later Caesar Augustus) after his sea victory in the Bay of Action) had *ius Italicum*, i.e., they were citizens of Rome, their πολίτευμα, even though resident in Philippi. And their descendants inherited this citizenship; their πολίτευμα too was Rome. But Paul implies that the Philippian Christians are a heavenly, eschatological colony inside Philippi. They thus hold a loyalty that differs from the people about them. He defines them with a political term.

The verb πολιτεύεσθε in Phil 1:27 correlates well with their colonial status. Their citizenship determines their manner of life. They are to "live [their] lives as citizens of the πόλις [or, perhaps better, the πολίτευμα]." The norm for this life is the εὐαγγέλιον, another term from political life, as the famous calendar inscription from Priene illustrates. He goes on to urge them to contend as soldiers in the army of Christ (Phil 1:27–2:4), which demands unity of purpose. Paul uses this military language throughout Philippians.[3] Paul also contradicts their Roman citizenship by asserting

1. Martin Dibelius defines the term as "die Verfassung, die Bürgerschaft, den Staat," *An die Philipper*. HNT 11, 3. Aufl. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1937), 93. BDAG, s.v. says that the term "often denotes a colony of foreigners or relocated veterans" and gives numerous ancient references.

2. The Cretans had a πολίτευμα in Egypt, *PTeb* 32.17; see LSJ, s.v.

3. Edgar Krentz, "Military Language and Metaphors in Philippians," in *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of*

that their πολίτευμα was in the heavens. It is from heaven that their σωτήρ, Jesus, will come. Paul uses the language of Roman citizenship and the eastern cult of the Roman emperor to assert the eschatological superiority of Jesus.

Paul claims that his imprisonment has advanced the gospel ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ (Phil 1:13), referring either to the elite praetorian guard of the Roman emperor or to their camp. He refers to his death as a libation in Phil 2:17 (σπένδομαι), a sacrifice before battle, and speaks of the Philippians as his στέφανος in 4:1, probably referring to a military decoration.[4] In Phil 4:21 he sends greetings especially from "the ones in the household of Caesar" (οἱ ἐκ τῆς Καίσαρος οἰκίας), referring either to relatives of the emperor or, more likely, to imperial slaves who worked in the bureaucracy, such as Epaphroditos, Nero's freedman and secretary, who had himself owned and then freed the Stoic philosopher Epiktetos. Later he was secretary to Domitian.[5] He was not the one to whom Josephus dedicated his *Vita,* his treatise *Against Apion,* and was one of the patrons of the *Antiquities*.[6] (He has the same name as the Epaphroditos sent by the Philippians but is an imperial freedman who had become wealthy in the service of the emperor.) The name Epaphroditos means "one dedicated to Aphrodite," possibly indicating a special devotion to the goddess of love. It was a popular name in the early Roman empire. We know of at least three or four in the first century.

Paul describes Euodia and Syntyche as ones who "fought together with me because of the gospel also along with Clement" (αἵτινες ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ συνήθλωσάν μοι, 4:3). They are asked to think the same thing, i.e., to agree (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, 4:2). Unity is a special stress in Philippians. See the language in 1:27: ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (that you take your stand in one spirit, with one life fighting together for the trust [or is it "oath"?] of the gospel). Note that Paul here uses the same verb as in 4:3); 2:2 πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες, σύμψυχοι, τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες ("Fill up my joy that you think the very same thing, having the same love, thinking one thing . . ."). Such unity (ἑνότης) was clearly a need in the military. But ὁμόνοια (concord, or unity in the body politic) was also a virtue in the Greek city.[7] Paul often addresses a letter to a local Christian community as an ἐκκλησία (see 1 Cor 1:2; 2

Judaism and Christianity. Essays in Honour of John C. Hurd (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 105–27; "Paul, Games, and the Military," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 344–83.

4. Yann Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (New York: Hippocrene Books, and London: B. T. Batsford, 1994), 62, describes the crowns (*coronae*) that were awarded "in exceptional circumstances" and pictures four of them on plate 12a on p. VIII. See also Karl Baus, *Der Kranz in Antike und Christentum.* Theophaneia 2 (Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1940), 144–223, and Tafel 6, 7, 12, etc.

5. See Miriam T. Griffin, s.v. "Epaphroditus (1)," *Oxford Classical Dictionary,* 3d ed., 527. Epaphroditus of Chaeronea, also of the first century, is (2) in *OCD*, and also not the one in Philippians.

6. Théodore Reinach, *Flavius Josephe Contre Apion* (Paris: Societe d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1930), 3, note 2, argues that Josephus' language about him proves that he was a highly placed person and so identifies him with Nero's freedman.

7. See Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 60–64, *et passim.*

Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1). Most modern translations use the term "church"; that obscures the fact that the term is not a religious term but a civic title for the assembly of citizens in a polis. Paul uses a term from political life to name a local Christian group.[8] Although Paul does not use the term in the letter praescript (Phil 1:1–2), he does use it in Phil 3:6 of the group he persecuted and in Phil 4:15 of the Philippians. Thus he applies a civic virtue to the Philippian community in 1:27–2:4 and to the two women in Phil 4:2–4. John Chrysostom suggested that they were the "head" of the Philippian church.[9]

The two paragraphs at the end of Philippians 2, which describe Timothy (vv. 19–24) and Epaphroditos (vv. 25–30), are especially interesting in their use of civic and political language. Paul says that Timothy will remind them γνησίως ("nobly"), a term that implies higher social rank. When he does this, they will recognize his δοκιμή ("approval after testing").[10] In a Greek polis the verb δοκιμάζω was used of the examination of a public official's carrying out of his duties and his financial accounts at the end of his term of office. If one passed the scrutinies, he was approved (δόκιμος). Paul sends Timothy to Philippi as his representative. The Philippians will learn that he carries out his duties meticulously ("nobly"). All others seek to advance their own affairs, not the things that relate to Christ. But Timothy, Paul implies, is concerned with Christ's affairs. So the Philippians will approve his activity as if he were a civic official (Phil 2:21–22). Timothy's role in Philippi is similar to that of Epaphroditos, to whom we now turn.

The description of Epaphroditos in 2:25–30 is striking.[11] Paul couples religious terminology (ἀδελφός, "brother," used of members of the same religious community), commercial vocabulary (συνεργός, "co-worker," though here it is metaphorically applied to his sharing in the proclamation of the gospel), and military language (συστρατιώτης, "fellow soldier") in describing Epaphroditos' relationship to himself (Phil 2:25), all terms at home in the Greek city. The term "fellow soldier" recalls Paul's appeal to the Philippians in 1:27–2:4.

But in relation to the Philippians, Epaphroditos is their ἀπόστολος, that is, their emissary or ambassador, and their λειτουργός. He represents the Philippian disciple community to Paul. Anthony Bash[12] surveyed Greek inscriptions that describe ambassadors. (He concentrated on language based on the stem *πρεσβ–; so he does not

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8. Paul uses the term five times in Romans (16:1, 4, 5, 16, 23, though not in the prescript); nineteen times in 1 Corinthians; nine times in 2 Corinthians; three times in Galatians; and twice in 1 Thessalonians.

9. John Chrysostom, "Homily 14 on Philippians," *Interpretatio Omnium Epistularum Paulinarum per Homilias Facta.* Bibliotheca Patrum Ecclesiae Catholicae qui ante Orientis et Occidentis Schisma Floruerunt (Oxford: J. H. Parker; London: DF and J. Rivington, 1855), V, 146 describes their position as follows: δοκοῦσι δέ μοι αὗται αἱ γυναῖκες τὸ κεφάλαιον εἶναι τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐκεῖ.

10. See BDAG, s.v. δοκιμή, "the experience of going through a test with special ref. to the result, *standing a test, character.* Defines it in Phil 2:22 as *make proof of someone's character or value.* Also see the entry under δοκιμάζω, and also LSJG, s.v. δοκιμάζω.

11. John Gillman, "Epaphroditus (Person)," *ABD* 2.533–34 gives a good summary of Epaphroditos' activity according to Philippians.

12. Anthony Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ: An Exploration of Ambassadorial Language in the New Testament.* WUNT, 2. Reihe 92 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997). See also Margaret Mitchell, "Envoys,"*JBL* 111 (1992): 641–62.

include the term ἀπόστολος in his study.) He describes the conditions under which one served as an emissary. The ambassador acts in the interest of the sending group. Ambassadors came from the elite wealthy in a community; they paid their own expenses when they functioned as ambassadors. His discussion clarifies what Epaphroditos did for the Philippians in relation to Paul.[13] They sent him as their representative to deal with Paul. Epaphroditos must have been wealthy enough to pay his own travel expenses from Philippi to Rome.

Epaphroditos brought money to Paul from the Philippian Christians. In Phil 4:18 Paul writes a receipt for the money, assuring the Philippians that Epaphroditos has carried out his commission faithfully, without skimming off any money for his own use. Paul probably said this because he himself had wrongfully been accused of such activity by some Christians in Corinth. That would account for his surprisingly long paragraph, 2 Cor 8:16–24, in which he mentions Titus and the brother sent with him. He is taking care that he not be blamed in the matter of the collection (2 Cor 8:20). Thus Paul would have been sensitive about the Philippians' opinion of Epaphroditos' handling of the money. He took care to give Epaphroditos a clean bill of health financially.

An ambassador performed a public benefaction. Λειτουργία was the proper name for such a benefaction, while the one who performed it was called a λειτουργός, the second term Paul uses to describe Epaphroditos in Phil 2:25.[14] The wealthy did such "liturgies" for their city. The most frequent liturgies were done by the choregoses, wealthy citizens who paid all the costs for one of the three tragedians who competed each year in the dramatic contests during the month of Elaphebolion in Athens.[15] They hired the actors, the members of the chorus, and the musicians and paid for the construction of the stage set and all other costs of production. It was a significant expense. If their dramatist won, they could then erect a choregic monument in their own honor, such as Lysikrates erected above the Theater of Dionysos. Other liturgies included erecting a building for the city, building and manning a trireme

13. Gillman says, "Whether the term indicates that Epaphroditus was their 'apostle' in the sense of being commissioned and sent out with a specific task of spreading the gospel as was Paul, or in the sense of being their messenger, envoy, or delegate, is not immediately clear." Clearly Epaphroditus is not an apostle in the same sense as Paul. But in relation to the Philippians he fulfills both functions, which Gillman puts in opposition.

14. LSJ, s.v. defines λειτουργία as "public service performed by private citizens at their own expense," while λειτουργέω is to "serve public office and one's own cost"; see Andocides 1.132; Isaeus 6.61, Lysias 3.47, and Isocrates 8.13.

15. Peter J. Wilson, "Choregia," *OCD*, 3d ed., 323–25, says "a *choregos* was responsible for the recruitment, training, maintenance, and costuming of *choreutai* at a festival. The same system of individual conribution was used to provide the Athenian navy with its ships."

(battleship) in time of war, endowing a professorship of rhetoric for their city, or creating an endowment to provide an unending supply of olive oil for the gymnasium. Such benefactions were expected from the wealthy.

Paul calls Epaphroditos the λειτουργὸς τῆς χρείας μου (Phil 2:25), who filled up what was lacking in the Philippian church's service to Paul (τὸ ὑμῶν ὑστέρημα τῆς πρός με λειτουργίας, 2:30). Paul is in some kind of physical detention. Roman prisoners had to provide their own housing and meals. If Paul, as was likely, was in *custodia libera*, "free detention," he would have had to pay rent for his quarters and provide his own food and whatever else he needed to stay alive. Phil 4:18 makes it clear that Epaphroditos brought money from the Philippians to support Paul in Rome. He carried out a public benefaction on behalf of the Philippian Christians (Phil 2:25, 30).

Epaphroditos was also to ascertain whether the partnership arrangement between Paul and the Philippians was still in force. Paul frequently uses terms based on the stem *κοινων- in Philippians (see 1:5,7; 4:14, 15). Although we do not know the precise details of this partnership,[16] a partnership depended on both members being able to carry out their responsibilities. Paul calls it a partnership "for the gospel" in Phil 1:5. The Philippians presumably sent money to support Paul a number of times (at least twice when he was in Thessalonica, Phil 4:16) so that he could devote himself more freely to the proclamation of the good news.

The term εὐαγγέλιον is another one with political overtones. The *Decretum de fastis Provincialibus provinciae Asiae* (ca. 9 B.C.E.)[17] reorders the calendar of the province of Asia to begin the year with the birthday of Caesar Augustus, which was the beginning of good news for the kosmos. Providence (προνοία), which orders life, brought in Augustus and filled him with virtue for the benefaction (εὐεργεσία) of humanity. He is a protector who put an end to war and set all things in order. He was therefore a σωτήρ; Phil 3:20 uses language borrowed from imperial cult to describe Jesus.

Now Paul was sending Epaphroditos back to the Philippians with a positive recommendation. Thus it is not surprising that Paul describes Epaphroditos' presence with him from the viewpoint of the Philippians. He uses the term ἀδημονέω, literally "to be away from the people" (the δῆμος) to describe his absence from Philippi. It too carries citizenship overtones in the use of the term for people). One was a citizen of a particular city or town in the first century. When you were away from your home town, you were a resident alien (πάροικος) or a foreigner (παρεπίδημος).[18] Epaphroditos is a Greek, not a Latin, name. He may not have been a descendant of the army-veteran colonists and so not a Roman citizen. In that case he would literally have been an alien when in Rome.[19]

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16. J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ: Christian Community and Commitment in Light of Roman Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 51–78, holds that it was a form of *societas consensualis*. His analysis has not persuaded many.

17. *OGIS* 458. See also Frederick Danker, *Benefactor* (St. Louis: Clayton Publishing House, 1982), 215–24.

18. These two terms occur in 1 Pet 2:11. Literally they mean one who "lives alongside a house" and one who is "next to the people." Both terms stress that one is an outsider. The most famous example of this is the rhetorician Lysias in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens.

19. I hold that Philippians was written from Rome, the last of Paul's certainly authentic letters. If Paul was imprisoned in

When an ambassador returned to his hometown, he (and in the first century the ambassador was always a male! No Condoleezza Rice back then) was welcomed back with honors. A benefaction was a costly thing; it deserved honor from the city.[20] Such honors might include the erection of a statue and/or the placing of an honorific inscription in a temple sanctuary. The inscription might be decorated with the engraving of a crown, a στέφανος (*corona* in Latin). The ambassador thus received honor (τιμή) or reputation (δόξα). Paul urges the Philippians to receive Epaphroditos joyfully when he returns (Phil 2:29) and then adds the more general admonition, "Hold such people worthy of honor" (τοῦς τοιούτους ἐντίμους ἔχετε). The Philippian Christians should give Epaphroditos the honor any successful ambassador deserves. Paul then shifts back to the second person to make clear what the benefaction is that Epaphroditos has performed: He did the work of Christ to the point of death, as he filled up what was lacking in the Philippians' service to Paul (Phil 2:30: ὅτι διὰ τὸ ἔργον Χριστοῦ μέχρι θανάτου ἤγγισεν παραβολευσάμενος τῇ ψυχῇ, ἵνα ἀναπληρώσῃ τὸ ὑμῶν ὑστέρημα τῆς πρός με λειτουργίας).

Finally, one might argue that the list if virtues in Phil 4:8 are the virtues one would prize in all good citizens (τὸ λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά, ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἁγνά, ὅσα προσφιλῆ, ὅσα εὔφημα, εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, ταῦτα λογίζεσθε).[21] There is nothing in the list that is specifically Christian. The terms ἀληθῆ and δίκαια reflect standard classical virtues, while προσφιλῆ and εὔφημα are clearly social virtues. Dibelius suggests that σεμνά and ἁγνά, separated from one another in the list, "Wegen der Paralleleln wird man auch . . . in der profanen Bedeutung 'sittlich gut' fassen müssen."

The concluding conditional clause unites virtue and praise. The noun ἀρετή is unique in Paul's letters, which suggests that the list and its conclusion is traditional, taken over by Paul, not an original composition by him. Such virtues deserve praise (ἔπαινος). Paul's uses the list to encourage fitting into the societal norms of this Roman city.

Paul gives more specifically Christian, eschatological parenesis in Phil 4:5–7. Both short parenetic paragraphs end by referring to the peace of God. Peace is also a good for the city.

In Philippians Paul uses contemporary societal norms and language to describe the life of the Philippian disciple community.

Ephesus as some scholars hold, Epaphroditos was certainly an alien there.

20. J. E. Lendon in his appendix, "The Latin and Greek Lexicon of Honour," to *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1997), 272–79, gives a list of the Latin terms in the vocabulary of honor and the Greek equivalents.

21. Dibelius, 95, says "Jedenfalls aber handelt es sich um lauter Begriffe des bürgerlichen Lebens, dem der Christ eigentlich schon entrückt ist!"

From Memory to Faithful Witness: The Power and Ambiguities of Religious Narratives (Zephaniah 1:7, 12–18)

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As a tribute to my colleague Ralph Klein, in celebrating his retirement from full-time work at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, I want to share this brief reflection based on my reading of Zephaniah 1:7, 12–18. In November 2005 I was invited to attend an international conference in Bethlehem exploring the topic "Shaping Communities in Times of Crisis: Narratives of Land, Peoples and Identities."[1] This was a gathering of Christians from all over the world representing a variety of church bodies and a plurality of ministries, at the International Center of Bethlehem (*Dar Annadwa Addawliyya*). The Center is exceptionally directed by our Lutheran Palestinian brother Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb and his staff, Rev. Sandra K. Olewine and Ms. Anette Klasing. This is an important Center engaged in serious dialogue and provocative expressions of solidarity with the struggles of the peoples of that region.

The choice of Bethlehem as the place for the conference at a time when much of the world believes that it is too dangerous to do so was not arbitrary. The goal of the planners of the activity was to dare to engage in a process to create new networks of mutual recognition, and joint action, moving from individual and local collective programs of solidarity with the liberating struggles of people around the world toward a global movement of justice and dignity for all.

This, my first visit to Palestine, Jerusalem, and other biblical lands, was the context in which I wrestled with the text of the prophet Zephaniah in search for a better understanding of the prophet's provoking message as we move forward together with our mission that aims to be faithful and accountable to the gospel.

Prophetic challenge to conflicting narratives of identity

The reading from Zephaniah confronts us with a problem that still challenges our ministry and mission today when we struggle with conflicting narratives of identity.

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah of Judah (640–609 B.C.E.). Several generations had passed since the prophetic ministries of Micah and Isaiah. The

1. The main text of this reflection was written while still at Bethlehem.

reigns of kings Manasseh and Amon had negatively transformed Judah's faithful witness. God's people had incorporated other gods in their worship of Yahweh, and their social and political practices were leading to injustice, deceit, and violence. Their unfaithful turn from their original covenant with God led Zephaniah to preach a message of dreadful divine judgment.[2]

> I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the world, says the Lord. . . . I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, and the name of the idolatrous priests. I will punish the officials and the King's sons . . . all . . . who fill their Master's house with violence and fraud. (Zeph 1:2, 4–5, 8–9 NRSV)

The prophetic challenge of Zephaniah's message focused on the conflict existing between two narratives of identity. One defined the identity of God's people from the covenant established by God with Abraham, Moses, and their legacy; the other, instigated by recent leaders of God's people who turned away from this original covenant, led to idolatry, deceit, injustice, and violence.

Against this background, Zephaniah offers a word of hope. Eventually a new day was anticipated, one that bespoke joy, reconciliation, and restoration, especially for the people of Judah (3:9–20).

At the conference I attended, Mitri Raheb, born and raised in Bethlehem, pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem since 1988, who also holds a doctoral degree in theology from Philipps University in Marburg, addressed the participants in a provocative exploration of the present crisis of prevailing narratives of identity in the Palestinian context.[3]

While a major dimension of this crisis was triggered more than 150 years ago in England as a consequence of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the flourishing European Nationalism of the time and the British military occupation of the region, establishing a colonial political mandate in which two exclusive nationalistic ideologies, one Arab, the other Jewish, began to emerge separately from and against each other. In 1948 the Israeli by military force established a Jewish state on 77 percent of the land, and in 1967 the State of Israel occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights up to the present. The land was unified geographically by force, but one nation was controlling the other and suppressing their identity.

These events introduced a serious crisis for Arab nationalism and a rise of Jewish national ideologies. The Palestinians decided to take their future in their own hands and fight to establish their own state, thus developing a distinct Palestinian national identity. The Jewish religious national groups started settling in the West Bank, claiming the whole of historic Palestine and leaving no room for any other national identity.

For Raheb, this crisis of national identities is further negatively affected by a crisis in religious hermeneutics expressed by fundamentalist Jewish Zionist movement leaders as well as both conservative and liberal Western Christian theologians

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2. Three of the sources that inform our study of the biblical text are Alice Ogden Bellis, *Many Voices: Multicultural Responses to the Minor Prophets* (New York: University Press of America, 1995), 39–46; Carol J. Dempsey, *Hope Amid the Ruins: The Ethics of Israel's Prophets* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 47–88; and Carol J. Dempsey, *The Prophets: A Liberation-Critical Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 85–91.

3. The historical account that follows comes from Raheb's unpublished lecture, "Shaping Communities in Times of Crises: Narratives of Land, Peoples and Identities" (November 7, 2005).

and Christian religious leaders that link or confuse biblical narratives with national, ideological, and exclusive identities.

Looking back over one hundred years of history, we are confronted not only with the failure of these original national projects of identity but also with the spread of this identity crisis over the broader region of the Middle East. The project "Israel" failed, for the violent and oppressive nature of an occupying state based on military force, without borders or constitution, deviated from the dreams characteristic of the first Jewish emigrants. The project "Palestine" is also falling apart because the performance of the Palestinian authorities and the projected Palestinian mini-state falls short of the original and present dreams of the Palestinian people. The present predicament of Iraq, the increasing tensions in Iran, Lebanon, and Syria, the social and political crisis in Egypt, and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict are symptoms of a severe crisis in the identity of a region in continuous search of reconciling diverse peoples with their multiple identities.

Discerning the narratives of the faithful

As in the time of Zephaniah, a prophetic voice continues to emerge in this context of struggle and adversity. The difference is that, instead of the single voice of a prophet, today we have a collective witness of voices cutting across gender, social, political, and religious orientations calling us to a discernment and practice of faithful narratives of identity,

At the conference in Bethlehem we were introduced to a number of courageous and visionary leaders, both Palestinian and Israeli, people from other religious expressions, and geographical locations that resist conforming to this state of affairs and, being transformed by the renewing power of God's Spirit, witness with their voices and through a variety of social, cultural, and religious projects to a new reality celebrating God's inspiring and renewing presence among us. Among the most important of these expressions were the following:

First, the provoking and inspiring leadership of the International Center of Bethlehem fostering intercultural, international, and interreligious dialogue leading to a faithful witness of faith in all parts of the world;

Second, the faithful and courageous witness of Israeli and Palestinian leaders against violence, prejudice and injustice;

Third, the spiritual and prophetic renewal of cultural expressions of resistance;

Last but not least, the prophetic witness of the Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salaam community. This community was started by Fr. Bruno Hussar, who passed away on February 8, 1998. Fr. Hussar was a visionary who dreamed of and eventually established the community—whose name means "an oasis of peace," a name he derived from Isa 32:18, "My people shall dwell in an Oasis of Peace." It is the only mixed living community inside Israel, with Jews and Arabs living, working, and learning together. Many Israelis and Palestinians describe this community as an abnormality, an illusion of coexistence detached from reality. Yet, this environment of sharing the land is the reality for these families. They do not hide from the difficulties and in fact share their struggles with the Israeli government, which does not want to encourage their model of shared existence.

The empowering witness of these various expressions of resistance and hope is driven by a compelling spirituality fostering a global community that goes beyond gender, race, social, cultural, economic, political, and religious boundaries and leads toward a global movement of justice and

dignity for all. It is a community of bold and faithful witness inviting us all to join hands, to invest our time, and to bring the best of our resources to witness to God's gracious and transforming power in the midst of suffering, violence, and injustice.

As I continue to reflect on this experience as well as on the call I share with my colleagues at LSTC to participate in the theological formation of leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who are preparing for offices of ministry to move forward the mission and ministry of the church in our world, I pray that the empowering presence of God renew our discernment of the crisis and suffering experienced by our brothers and sisters in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

May we become more sensitive to the environmental crisis that our decisions have produced throughout the world; may the continuous presence of God in our midst

provoke us to engage in bold and courageous acts of faithful witness; and may the power of the gospel continue to equip us for a prophetic mission and ministry that leads to the healing of our world.

Patristic Principles for Post-Christendom Preaching: An Example of the History of Preaching in Service to the Church

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Connecting scholarship in the field of homiletics and the mission of the church is not rocket science. Every book in the field must include what one homiletician calls "the 'So What and Why Should I Care' chapter,"[1] which considers how the scholarly endeavor plays out in the preacher's life and offers constructive proposals for preaching. The more removed the scholarly enterprise is perceived to be from Sunday preaching, the stronger this chapter needs to be.

This is perhaps nowhere more true than in the sub field of the history of preaching. Scholars study great preachers and preaching traditions from the past in order to learn more about preaching for their day. Their questions concern homiletical-rhetorical method, sermon form and content, hermeneutics and theories of interpretation, theologies of the act of proclamation and as sermon content, and pastoral care.[2] From my perspective, the greatest contribution that scholarship in the history of preaching makes to the ministry of the church is that it assures preachers that "what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun" (Ec 1:9). Preachers who went before us faced the challenges we face and leave us their wisdom on how we might "proclaim Christ crucified, . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23–24).

Preachers today increasingly confront a culture that may call itself and claim to be Christian; however, its values and priorities are often at odds with the gospel. For the first time in nearly fifteen hundred years, no one is a Christian because of government compulsion, in order to qualify for public office or procure favor with the powerful, or because they would lose respectability, social status, and business contacts if they did not go to church.[3] As spirituality becomes increasingly diverse, individual, and private, public life is gov-

1. Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 109.

2. Paul Scott Wilson, *A Concise History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 12.

3. Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999), xvii.

erned by the values of economic prosperity and national security, standards inconsistent with the reign of God announced in scripture. And so the call sounds forth from every quarter of the church: "The age of Christendom is over! The context for preaching has changed!"

With the removal of so many inducements and compulsions to be Christian, and facing a culture that does not understand and embrace the Christian faith and way of life, Christian leaders find themselves preaching to decreasing congregations who increasingly question the relevance of their message. Many argue that the church finds itself in uncharted waters. Looking longingly back to the mid-twentieth century, when pews were packed, they raise a panicked cry for a homiletical approach that will somehow reverse the downward trend in the number of professing Christians. In some quarters, preachers are urged to embrace contemporary culture as the means for proclaiming the gospel in order to eliminate the gap that exists between the church and the culture.

Rather than looking nostalgically back to a chapter of church history when things were the way we liked them, and trying to come up with ways of preaching that will get us back there, an alternative approach is to look back to a chapter of history similar to the situation in which the church finds itself and ask how those preachers responded. For example, the church's patristic age assures contemporary preachers that the situation in which the contemporary church finds itself is not new. Then, as now, the culture called itself and claimed to be Christian but in many ways stood in opposition to the gospel. Then, as now, preaching needed to present a vision, meaning, and purpose that flow from the gospel. It had to proclaim the gospel as the life-changing, world-shaping good news of Christ crucified and risen. We are back for the first time in something like the early centuries of Christianity. Preachers who embrace and are even excited by this perspective have discovered that, as we seek clues on how to preach the gospel with power and relevance to a post-Christendom culture, the church does well to consider preaching from times in Christian history, such as the patristic period, when church and culture did not walk hand in hand.

In this essay, I consider principles for preaching the gospel in our post-Christendom context that grow out of sermons from the end of the fourth century through the middle of the fifth, often considered to be the golden age of Christian preaching. While the fourth and fifth centuries produced many kinds of sermons, including festal, doctrinal, and expository, in this essay I discuss the catechetical and mystagogical preaching of four fourth-century preachers: Ambrose of Milan, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.[4] Stated simply, catechetical preaching teaches the faith, and mystagogical sermons reveal the saving activity of Christ that occurs in the church's worship and sacraments.

I examine these types of sermons for three reasons. First, catechetical sermons were addressed not primarily to well-established Christians but rather to people who came to church for many different reasons, people whom the preacher hoped to bring to deeper faith in Christ and greater commitment to the church.

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4. Brief introductions to and English translations of the majority of these sermons are found in Edward Yarnold, S.J., *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.*, 2d ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 67–250.

Second, the content of mystagogical sermons is what the patristic church considered the central "mysteries" of the Christian faith. Topics include repentance, faith, the identity of Jesus, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Prayer, and the new life in Christ. The goal of these sermons is to demonstrate the ways these beliefs find expression in Christian worship. Although the church in our day holds a diversity of opinions regarding the centrality of worship and sacraments to its mission,[5] these sermons are nevertheless valuable in revealing how preachers in the time before Christendom proclaimed what they considered to be the heart of the Christian faith.

Third, while the orientation of these sermons is "catechetical" in that their purpose is to foster and teach the congregation, they remain authentic Christian preaching. They were delivered within the Christian assembly gathered for worship. They are rooted in scripture in a way that proclaims Jesus Christ. These sermons address real-life circumstances with divine authority so that the power of the gospel might transform that reality.

This essay resulted from a two-step research methodology. First, I analyzed the catechetical and mystagogical sermons of our four preachers, particularly those of Ambrose of Milan, in order to discover what insights these sermons hold for contemporary preaching.[6] I examined the roles played by the preacher and the hearers, the use of scripture, and sermon content, form and delivery. I then field-tested my findings with pastors from diverse contexts and traditions who endeavored to incorporate these insights into their own preaching.[7]

This process yielded six principles that contemporary preachers may find useful in their preaching: (1) Trust God to act in and through preaching, (2) Reclaim a patristic approach to scripture, (3) Preach a holistic understanding of Christian formation, (4) Reflect critically on how to preach in the language of the people, (5) Use images to pile up meaning, and (6) Cultivate a catechetical style of preaching. None of these principles is new. On the contrary, they are at least as old as the church and so invite us to reexamine our assumptions and clarify our purpose in preaching.

Trust God to act in and through preaching

First, these patristic preachers approach their task trusting that God gives faith, life, and salvation in and through Christian preaching and worship. In fact, the purpose of catechetical preaching is to prepare people to experience and participate in Christian preaching and worship and the purpose of mystagogical preaching to assist them in reflecting on and understanding that experience. Convinced of God's ongoing activity in our world, the patristic church believed that we experience God's saving activity most clearly and directly in the church's worship and preaching. Through preaching and worship we do more than remember God's saving activity; we enter into the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our preachers believed that God acts in the world in the same way that

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5. See Craig A. Satterlee, *When God Speaks through You: How Faith Convictions Shape Preaching and Mission* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007), 48–53.

6. See Craig A. Satterlee, *Ambrose of Milan's Method of Mystagogical Preaching* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002); Craig A. Satterlee and Lester Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001).

7. This program was made possible by a grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship with funds provided by Lily Endowment, Inc.

God acts in the Bible. In preaching and worship, God acts to give faith that enables us to recognize and celebrate the reality that God's saving activity continues in our daily lives.

Each preacher holds a distinct understanding of how God acts in preaching and worship to give faith and life. For Ambrose of Milan, through worship and preaching God gives faith to perceive God's invisible activity in our lives and in the world. Ambrose declares, "Through the font of the Lord and the preaching of the Lord's passion, . . . your eyes were opened."[8] Seeing everything with eyes of faith, we pass into a new world of consciousness, the world of salvation history, and in worship we turn toward and are incorporated into God's saving activity in Christ.

Cyril of Jerusalem understands God's saving activity in the events of the Old and New Testaments as a single, ongoing reality and describes our participation in God's saving activity in Christ as a passage from the reality of the world to the reality of God's salvation. Cyril relates Old Testament events to their New Testament correlatives and highlights the passage from one reality to another—darkness to light, slavery to freedom, death to life. Cyril then applies this same passage to Christian worship in order to reveal the connection between Christ's presence in the Bible and Christ's presence in the church. For example, after describing baptism as our imitation of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection, Cyril declares,

> Our imitation was symbolic, but our salvation a reality. Christ truly hung from a cross, was truly buried, and truly rose again. All this he did gratuitously for us, so that we might share his sufferings by imitating them, and gain salvation in actuality.[9]

Thus, Cyril preaches the unity between God's saving activity in scripture and God's saving activity in worship, by which God brings people from old reality to new.

John Chrysostom was concerned with the moral obligations that flow from participation in Christian worship. For him, in preaching God tells God's people how they are to live in a continual state of rebirth; in worship God gives the faithful the strength they need to live this life. Chrysostom began a sermon to those preparing for baptism:

> Today I am going to speak a few more words to those who have been enrolled among the household of Christ, to teach them the power of the weapons which they are about to receive and the indescribable goodness of the love that God shows to the human race.[10]

In his preaching, Chrysostom approaches the figures of the Old Testament as examples of how Christians are to both respond to God's indescribable goodness and use the power of the weapons they have received.

We may question the logic with which a particular preacher makes the claim of God's saving activity in Christian worship and preaching, but contemporary preachers do well to trust that God is the actor in worship and preaching. Trusting that God works through preaching to give faith, to bring the faithful to a new reality, and to empower them to live as Christ's people in the world, preachers will approach their task with the energy that comes from God's assurance that their work is not in vain because preaching is a means by which God brings people from death to new life.

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8. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Sacraments* 3.15. See Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 126.

9. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses*, 2.5. See Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 78.

10. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Homily* 2.1. See Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 152.

Reclaim a patristic approach to scripture

The patristic church approached the events proclaimed in scripture—the life and history of Israel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the mission of the apostolic church—as the single, continuing story of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ. It held that God's saving activity recorded in the Bible did not end with the book of Revelation but continues in the life of the church. The early church therefore understood itself in biblical rather than cultural terms and saw itself as the continuation of God's saving work. From this perspective, the patristic church understood the narratives of the Old Testament as figures of Jesus' actions in the New Testament and the sacraments of the church as reflections of those same activities.

With Christ at the center of scripture and worship, patristic preachers found in the Bible both the meaning of Christian worship and the images they used to explain it. They interpreted worship almost exclusively in terms of scriptural stories, images, admonitions, and segments of psalms. Telling their hearers that baptism changes who Christians are, patristic preachers used scripture to provide the language, description, and images that illuminate what that change looks like in the lives of believers. Proclaiming that receiving the Lord's Supper makes Christians different, patristic preachers used scripture to give the framework for how Christians are to live out this difference.

At the same time, patristic preachers used the church's life and experience to provide the context for interpreting what scripture means. From this convergence of experience and Bible, of scripture and worship, patristic preachers derived the images, metaphors and language for describing and encouraging the Christian life.

The sermons of the early church invite us to ask whether there is wisdom for our time in rediscovering and reclaiming the coherence and wholeness of the Bible in order to bring scripture to bear on the lives of real people. Wherever we look in scripture we find God bringing light out of darkness, life out of death, freedom out of slavery, and hope out of despair. Put another way, the Bible tells how, again and again, God establishes a covenant with God's people, God's people break that covenant, God remains faithful and forgives, and the covenant is renewed. Preachers in the early church helped people to see scripture holistically, as the single story of God's saving activity in Christ, a story that continues in our day and will be brought to completion when Christ comes again.

"The hermeneutic key to this approach to the Bible is simple: Interpret scripture according to its application to Christian life and interpret the life of the Christian by its correspondence to scripture."[11] The task is to lift up the connection or the continuing relationship between scripture and the Christian life, first, by showing how the various events recorded in the Bible are all united in the saving activity of Jesus Christ and, second, by showing how this saving, activity continues beyond scripture in the Christian life. By lifting up the unity between God's saving activity in the Bible and God's saving activity here and now, scripture will remain relevant to ordinary Christians as providing the principles by which they are formed in faith, the world of meaning that helps them to understand their life, and the structure of language that sets the Christian life apart from life in a post-Christendom world.

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11. Satterlee and Ruth, *Creative Preaching on the Sacraments*, 20.

Preach a holistic understanding of Christian formation

The sermons of the early church reveal that evangelism, conversion, coming to faith, and living as a Christian "involves change not just of belief but also of belonging and behavior."[12] In a culture that cannot be counted on to form Christians and reinforce their faith, preaching moves beyond doctrine to include solidarity—where people belong—and ethics—how people live. Preaching that moves people to faith in Christ is concerned with more than right thinking or intellectual assent. More than bringing people to understand Jesus as their *personal* savior, such preaching brings people into and makes them part of the community that *the world's* savior is gathering around himself.

Preaching also teaches those who belong to Jesus and his community how to go about living in the church and in the world. The sermons of the early church invite us to reexamine the balance of belief, belonging, and behavior in our preaching. These sermons call us to consider whether there is wisdom for our day in the notions that insight into truth comes out of practical engagement rather than theoretical construct and that learning is a product of doing.

This view of Christian formation is found in some quarters of the contemporary church where communities of faith expect more of their members than a conventional religiosity that manifests itself in compliance with certain minimal regulations. These communities instead expect their members to undergo radical and lasting transformation—new relationships and lifestyle as well as new insight and understanding. As people seek to find meaning for their lives, this kind of transformation is what they hope for.

Reflect critically on how to preach in the language of the people

Preaching in the language of the people has been a priority of Christian proclamation since the Reformation, if not the preaching of St. Paul. Today the task has become much more difficult than it may at first seem. As in its early centuries, the church again finds itself in societies whose narratives and folkways it needs to evaluate. Some the church will use; some it will adapt; some it will reject. The question before us is this: How will we draw upon the narratives, images, and technologies of our time to proclaim the gospel, while at the same time recognizing the power of these tools to cast and reshape the countercultural message of the God whose perfect self-disclosure is Jesus Christ?

In examining the narratives, folkways, and technologies of its day, the early church seems to have asked whether a given practice gave life or whether it led to bondage. More than embracing the culture that surrounds us, preaching in the language of the people involves naming those things that lead to bondage and not only announcing that God in Christ sets us free but also naming how Christ does this.

Preaching in the language of the people requires that, as we look to contemporary culture for clues on how to effectively proclaim the gospel, we remember both that a gap exists between the church and the world and that there are limits to how appropriate any culture (including that of the patristic period) is for Christian proclamation. Preaching in the language of the people in a post-Christendom culture involves uncovering those limits even as we

12. Kreider, *The Change of Conversion*, xv.

discover new ways of proclaiming the gospel. What does our use of contemporary culture say about God, the church, and the world? For example, how does preaching to a "target audience" affect our understanding of the all-inclusive nature of God's reign? As we preach in response to individual needs, are we reinforcing a self-centered individualism that runs counter to love of neighbor? To what extent does our use of technology imply that the reign of God belongs to those who can afford the projector or see the screen? In preaching, are we using contemporary culture as illustrative material or as the text on which our sermon is based? While we are called to do everything we can to preach in the language of the people, patristic preaching reminds us that whatever language we use shapes the gospel that we preach. In a post-Christendom culture, that shaping may undermine and even negate the good news we have to share.

Use images to pile up meanings

While it is essential that the preacher have a solid theology, these sermons remind us that sermons are not systematic theology. Their logic is more associative than discursive, more poetic than philosophical. These preachers understand the Christian faith as a mystery, and they take seriously the truth about mystery: Mystery can be pointed to, hinted at, and even glimpsed, but it cannot be defined or exhausted.[13]

Thus, these preachers pile up meanings rather than seeking clear definitions. They allow Christianity to overflow with meaning rather than reducing it to syllogisms. For example, baptism is tomb and womb, death and resurrection, absolution and new birth. Baptism heals, cleanses, washes away sins, cancels guilt, and makes members of the church. To really appreciate all that God does in baptism is to recall the biblical stories of creation, the flood, Israel crossing the Red Sea, the cleansing of Naaman the leper, Jesus' own baptism in the Jordan, and his healing the man at the pool of Bethesda. We are talking both/and rather than either/or, recognizing that no single image or narrative, to say nothing of concept, can fully express the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

These sermons remind contemporary preachers that their task is to open up and expand their hearers' experience of the gospel so that hearers can explore and plumb the depth of God's grace. The sermons also remind us that an effective way to express the Christian faith is through story and image. Recalling that the early church found in the Bible its world of meaning, its cultural system, and the structure of language that sets the Christian life apart from life in the world also reminds us that, in preaching, biblical images and narratives take precedence over culture and theology. Before we drill doctrine into people's heads, we teach them the stories of the Bible. And although cultural images may be useful, they do not replace the stories and images of the Bible. When we search for an image to explain the reign of God, for example, the parables of Jesus are a better pick than anything at the video store.

Cultivate a catechetical style of preaching

Finally, these sermons reflect a catechetical style of preaching. They move beyond providing information and even teaching in order to create an intimate connection and dialogue between the faith community, which is represented by the preacher, and

13. William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (New York: Pueblo, 1995), 367.

the hearers. The hope of this style is that preaching itself is an experience of Christian care and grace.

These sermons are not occasions for theological sophistication or oratorical brilliance. Sentence structure and vocabulary are simple without being sloppy. The sermons reflect conversation rather than writing while maintaining clarity, forethought, and substance. They remind us that creating intimacy and dialogue with our hearers calls for simple sentences, conversational grammar, and understandable vocabulary. Such simplicity requires careful planning and preparation on the part of the preacher.

These preachers employ repetition, alliteration, and sharp contrasts to invite the congregation to participate in the preaching and to help them remember both their experience of God in scripture and worship and the message of the sermon. Although in our day rhetoric is often considered manipulative, at its best rhetoric respects and engages the listener as an active participant in communication. The sermons engage their hearers by presenting information using analogies and concrete examples rather than theoretical constructs. Dialogue and drama make both Bible stories and sermon content more immediate and accessible. Respect is evident in the way the sermons give voice to their listeners' experience, questions, skepticism, and objections.

Questions appear frequently in these sermons. Their purpose is twofold: They help to move the sermon along, and they assist in holding the congregation's attention by prompting the hearers and engaging them in the preaching. Questions are short, consisting of one to three words, in order to engage the congregation in dialogue and invite at least a mental response.

Moreover, these preachers address the hearers directly. The words *you* and *we* are used regularly, not to accuse but to remind, engage, and invite. Phrases such as *remember when we* and *perhaps you wonder* appear prominently in these sermons. God's saving activity is also directly addressed to the hearers in phrases such as *God raises you* and *you will live*. The pronoun *you* is used to speak to members of the congregation, the pronoun *we* to establish a connection with them.

By cultivating a catechetical style consisting of these tools, patristic preaching sought to create an intimate connection that facilitates an experience of grace. In that period of the church's life, preachers trusted God to act in preaching to give faith and to lead people to embrace the vision, purpose, and meaning that flow from the gospel. Their trust is evident in their approach to scripture, which rests on the conviction that the church's life is the continuation of God's single story of salvation in Jesus Christ as it is foreshadowed, proclaimed, and reflected in the Bible. Trust for God's continuing activity is also found in the preachers' holistic understanding of Christian formation. In addressing a culture often at odds with the gospel, these sermons maintain a critical use of the language of the culture while giving priority to the language, stories, and images of the Bible. Finally, the style of these sermons is aimed at creating experience and not merely conveying information.

These pre-Christendom principles offer helpful clues to those called to preach in a post-Christendom context on how to proclaim the life-changing, world-shaping good news of Jesus Christ to a context often at odds with the gospel. They invite us to look to the history of preaching for the wisdom and courage of those whose proclamation of the gospel can—and does—shape and empower our own.

What the Mind Forgets the Body Remembers: HIV/AIDS in South Africa—A Theological and Anthropological Issue

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We have come a long way, in the United States at least, from the many years when thousands were dying and President Ronald Reagan would not even say the words publicly. We have come a long way, in the United States, from shunning the disease carriers or assuming that HIV/AIDS is only a gay disease. The red ribbon is no longer an anomaly. A few churches, here and there, even speak and teach about the reality of HIV/AIDS (at least on the Sunday in December that is World AIDS day).

Yet, beyond that single Sunday, churches in the U.S. rarely enter into frank discussions about sex, sexual practices, or sexually transmitted diseases. We do not unearth on Sunday mornings the centuries and millennia of theological principles that govern sexual choices, gendered realities, or concepts of sexual power in relationship. Once in a while, mostly in private, with doors closed and in crisis, discussion may ensue about one of life's fundamental components—sex.

How often do we hear about or converse about the reality that women are the fastest growing population in the U.S. being infected with HIV, primarily through heterosexual intercourse? I posit that rarely does that make it into our public or even private discourse.

How often do we talk publicly about a sexual reality that will affect or is affecting approximately 50 percent of persons living in the United States; that is, one of every two of us living in the United States has or will have a sexually transmitted disease or sexually transmitted infection in our lifetime? (*http://www.ashastd.org/learn/learn_statistics.cfm*)? How often do we talk together in church or in structured public discourse about the inequitable power dynamics that receive support from religious teachings? Such teachings tell heterosexual women that our role is to please, accept, and submit to our male partners' sexual dominance. How often do we talk about the problematic underlying ideology and very real, unhealthy, and, to be honest, less pleasurable consequences that result from it?

If anyone is squirming, even a little bit, at the notion that this article written to honor Old Testament professor Ralph Klein freely broaches the topics, I rest my case. Here, in the much enlightened United States, we still have a long way to go in dealing

together with sexuality in an effectively public way.

This article examines HIV/AIDS, African Women, and the Bible. I bring up statistics and realities in the U.S. as a preface to my topic that focus on issues surrounding HIV/AIDS in South Africa. I bring them up for two reasons. First, we are part of this story, this crisis, this epidemic. It affects us. It is born, in part, from our very own religious and cultural traditions in the U.S. I have no doubt that HIV/AIDS is part of some of the lives of those reading this article, particularly those who are African American, because of all persons living in the U.S. with HIV/AIDS, a full 44 percent are, indeed, African American (*http://www.avert.org/statsum.htm*). African American and Latina women, by the way, who account for about 25 percent of the U.S. female population, account for a striking 79 percent of HIV/AIDS cases among women (*http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/womenhiv.htm*). Let us be certain that we live with both the heritage and the physical reality of HIV/AIDS.

Second, I often am struck by the ease with which "issues" can be dissected, analyzed, mused about, considered, and pondered at, from afar. Those in the Christian tradition have long looked to the "other," the outsider, as the one in need of healing. We look *at* the other and see his or her or their problems that are in need of fixing. It is a tradition as old as the first attempts to Christianize the continent of Africa and as ingrained as the continued attempts to place blame, send moral critique, or purport that the "other" need only to learn about Jesus, as we have done, in order for their lives to be more fulfilled, more morally righteous—in short, more like us.

I will not do that in this article. I must say first that I am part of the heritage and history that infiltrated and continues to penetrate the lives and ideologies that influence ways that HIV/AIDS is transmitted and managed. While I will explicate and share with you the realities of women in South Africa that live with HIV/AIDS, I will not do this to suggest that the problem is "over there" in some distant land or only affecting "those people." It is my intent for this piece, while focusing on South Africa, to be enlightening about the particularities of women living in South Africa. However, my ultimate aim is for us to listen and know that many of the same issues, in varying degrees or with situational differences, affect our very lives and the lives of those with whom we live, work, and encounter daily. South Africa forms a frame and the women who live with HIV/AIDS are particular. They are not, however, the other; the issue is not only out there, over there, or only with them.

I am a North American Womanist scholar. That, at first glance, will cause me to be somewhat of an outsider among the South African women about whom I write. Please know, however, that when I write, I do so as a long-time (let me just say decades-long) researcher with deep personal and professional relationships among the community at St. John's in South Africa. I discuss a community that I have witnessed and stood with for many years as they live with, manage, survive, and thrive amid the gendered reality of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. I share their reality, aware that their challenges are faced in circumstantially different but ideologically similar ways by communities in my neighborhood, at my own church, and among my students, colleagues, and friends.

I begin with the basics—the things we know but bear repetition until they cease. Even nation-states like the new South Africa whose constitutions speak of a nonracist, nonsexist society continue, in

practice, to perpetuate patriarchal control of women. Just as women in the U.S. are far more often forced to live in poverty with the lowest wage-earning jobs, many women in South Africa are trapped by the dual cuffs of patriarchy and poverty. Add to that the entrenched reality of racism and we have the infamous and insidious triplet: the intersection of race, gender, and class that brings unduly difficult burdens for women to survive in South Africa. The penetration of HIV/AIDS has raced in to create a fourth point of capture that dominates the lives of women in South Africa.

Here are the statistics: In 2006 the Health Department of South Africa reported that more than 4 million persons are living with HIV. By comparison, that number in the U.S., as reported by the CDC in 2005, is less than 450,000. Among those in South Africa over the age of two, girls and women in virtually every age group are definitively more likely than their male counterparts to live with HIV. Indeed, UNICEF reports that among adolescents, girls are five times more likely than boys to contract HIV (*http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/hiv_aids_729.html*). Of South Africans ranging from 20–24 years old, 6 percent of men live with HIV, compared to 24 percent of women. Of those who are 25–29, the numbers are equally staggering: 12.1 percent of men and 33.3 percent of women live with HIV.

Now, the sheer percentages of persons living with HIV/AIDS are enough to demand a closer look, yet, the divide among women and men is what concerns me. I want to understand some of the reasons that women are disproportionately affected and infected with HIV/AIDS. I need to unearth at least some of the reasons that 29.1 percent of pregnant women in South Africa are living with HIV (*http://www.avert.org/safricastats.htm*).

The reasons are simple to name. We speak about them in classrooms and from pulpits with regularity—or at least we purport to. While easy to name, harder to say, and incredibly complex to solve, the big-picture reasons sound like this: Patriarchy. Sexism. Poverty. Religion. Most major disciplines could point to a contributing factor. The confluence of myriad "ologies" perpetuates practices that are killing girls and women disproportionately. UNICEF says it plainly: that the dramatic disproportion of females living with HIV is due to sex and gender inequities.

> Women's vulnerability to HIV infection is particularly heightened by their economic dependence on men, lack of access to education, poverty, sexual exploitation, coercion and rape, as well as by their engagement in informal and commercial sex work. Women face additional and more acute discrimination when they are identified as being HIV positive. Because they are often first to test positive through prenatal testing, they are branded as the "spreaders" of the virus. Once their HIV-positive status is revealed or disclosed, women face being physically abused, losing access to important economic resources, and face the threat of being chased from their homes. (*http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/hiv_aids_729.html*)

And so, the result is this: Honestly and terribly, in this time of HIV/AIDS, African women and their children die first. They die without equal rights, without access to power, without power of influence, without access to education, and with religious beliefs that support and are complicit in male dominance. As South Africa scholar Mpine Oakida writes, "South Africa's women's rights are inherently non-existent . . . the male-dominated South African society perpetuates to the current AIDS crisis."[1] Research bears out the reality that a major-

1. Mpine Oakida, "Let's Talk About Sex: Reaching Young People Through the Media in the Age of AIDS," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 14 (Nov. 2002): 83.

ity of African cultures judge women as inferior to men and consign them roles considered less important in the private realm of life. Males are the power brokers in the private and public sphere when it comes to decision making. This is very important to consider in the private sphere of sexual practices in an HIV/AIDS era. As South African theologian Beverly Haddad writes,

> Women experience great difficulty in negotiating sexual practices in their relationships. Because of their subordinate cultural status, it is accepted that women's role is to please men sexually, and they have little say over the kinds of sexual practices they engage in.[2]

All theological reflection related to the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the continent of Africa needs to incorporate an analysis of the unequal power relations between women and men. Moreover, we must be mindful that the political economy on both macro and micro levels further marginalizes women, particularly those who are "infected and affected" by the HIV/AIDS virus. Indeed, "poor and marginalized women are severely discriminated against in macro-social and economic policies resulting in this group continuing to bear the brunt of poverty in South Africa."[3] As such, African women are situated in a micropolitical economy that is adversely impacted by globalization. As New Testament scholar Musa Dube asserts, "Globalization as an anti-social force worsens poverty, escalates mobility, the trafficking of women and girls, and sex work, thereby creating fertile ground for the spread of HIV/AIDs."[4]

If a globalized economy is a primary macro force at work that allows HIV to breed, the place where that insemination occurs is in the so-called private sphere of personal heterosexual sexual relationships. Across the variety of cultures on the continent of Africa marriage and patriarchy are norms that together subordinate and create the conditions for the spread of HIV/AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa the "culture of marriage" is the primary vehicle through which African women contract HIV/AIDS. By "culture of marriage" I mean the folkways and mores out of which African men and women live daily. In other words, martial sexual intercourse is the cradle in which the HIV/AIDS virus is rocked. The World Health Organization (WHO) claims that the reason there are more new infections among married African women than among any other group is because of the "sexual and economic subordination of women."[5]

Practices such as lobola (bride-price) and strict biblical interpretation contribute to women's cultural vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Husbands often treat their wives as if they are owned because the men paid lobola in order to marry. This proprietary treatment extends to the couple's sexual relationship, with the husband expecting sex on demand. Requesting the use of a condom often evokes anger and suspicion; and surely there is no need for male compliance since the husband is the head of the household, as St. Paul, St. Peter, and the biblical authors remind us in Genesis, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Peter. The result is deadly for women. It is this simple: Condoms are the single most effective way

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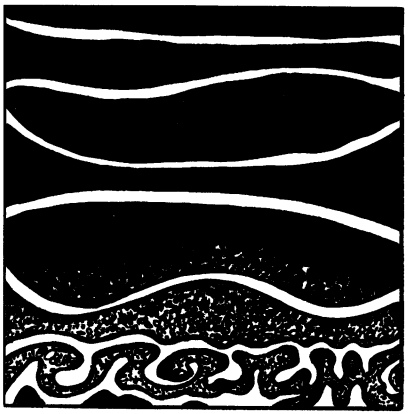
2. Beverly Haddad, "Reflections on the Church and HIV/AIDS: South Africa," *Theology Today* 62 (2005): 35.

3. Beverly Haddad, "Theologising Development: A gendered analysis of poverty, survival and faith," *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa* 110 (July 2001): 6.

4. Musa W. Dube, "Theological Challenges: Proclaiming the Fullness of Life in the HIV/AIDS & Global Economic Era," *International Review of Mission* 2003, Vol. XCI No. 363: 536.

5. Isabel Apawo Phiri, "HIV/AIDS: An African Theological Response in Mission," *Ecumenical Review* 56.04: 422–31.



to prevent the spread of HIV. Yet, women have no power to insist on condom use during intercourse, and they contract HIV at unacceptable rates because of it.

Women do not discuss safer sexual practices with their husbands/partners because it is not culturally or religiously appropriate for females to have such an exchange with the males who are infecting them. Professor Oakida notes that "women are not able to discuss safe sex practices with their respective partner because women will be looked upon as sexually promiscuous."[6] In other words, to talk openly about sex is uncommon for African women, so to speak directly about a sexual practice infers licentiousness on the part of the woman. This implication is not very different in this place that many of us call home and certainly not different for those of us who were trained in traditional Christian social norms.

Of course religion is not at all the only source for norms that inhibit open discourse about sexuality or the only source for the norms that rip away a woman's control over her own body. Culturally, the misinformed belief of HIV-positive males that having sexual intercourse with a female virgin will cure them of the disease still persists. Layered onto that is a culturally rooted dilemma for unmarried women that suggests that female virgins who consciously decide to refrain from sex are considered sexually unendorsed by men, untested, and possibly incompetent at pleasuring a male partner. However, sexually experienced women can and are viewed as sexually promiscuous—an equally problematic stigma. Men expect women to have experience in pleasing them sexually yet reject women who seem too experienced. The entire perception of the situation is driven by the male sexual partner, and the woman is in a vexing catch-22.[7]

It is not a difficult step for those of us trained in the Christian tradition to see how Christian teachings about sex/gender relationships and the glaring, gaping lack of open discussion in churches about healthy sexual activity makes the Christian influence one that ultimately perpetuates the spread of HIV/AIDS among women. Not surprisingly, it is the concerted governmental and nongovernmental, largely secular awareness and education campaigns that are breaking the silence, according to Haddad. She concludes with a familiar refrain that the "church continues to be slow to speak openly about the subject, which is so closely tied to issues of sexuality."[8] The metaphor of Martin Luther King Jr. resounds with grave clarity, that the religious community functions as "a mere taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight"[9] in this issue that is about life and death.

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6. Oakida, "Let's Talk About Sex," 83.
7. Oakida, "Let's Talk About Sex," 83.
8. Haddad, "Reflections on the Church and HIV/AIDS," 32.
9. This quote comes from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," *http://historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=40*. The full quote is "So here we are moving toward

Surely, the predominant literalistic biblical interpretations imposed on existing patriarchal African cultures reinforce the subordinate position of women and tie them down for further slaughtering by the HIV/AIDS virus. As long as this is the case, HIV/AIDS will not be controlled.[10] It is unlikely that the church will intervene because African cultures are so firmly rooted in the church. Progressive theologians are trying, however, to bring a liberationist rereading of texts to combat the entrenched and dominant historical readings. Whether or not this effort will succeed, time will tell.

At least, and gratefully, there is an effort underfoot across the ocean. Professor Dube underscores the gendered face of HIV/AIDS and promotes a gender-sensitive multisectoral approach to the pandemic. She urges people to read HIV/AIDS into biblical texts in order to expose the social injustices visited upon African women. She claims that much biblical interpretation supports patriarchal customs in ways that "increase the likelihood that women will become HIV positive."[11] She further argues that "texts of terror" that posit God's punishment upon people living with HIV/AIDS must be reevaluated in order for fresh and hope-filled readings to come forth for those living and dying with HIV/AIDS. Her edited book *Grant me Justice: HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible*[12] offers a method for communities to reread the Bible for liberation in the midst of the HIV/AIDS struggle in Africa. Given the matrices of oppression that cultivate the spread of HIV, this book's main concern is with providing a culturally sensitive tool that recognizes the layered nature of African male-female relations as they are tied to race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. The authors write in a manner that suggests their belief that the Bible and faith offer liberatory models that can provide hope in ominous times. The book's goal is to advocate for justice and empower women living on the continent to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic by being resilient and persistently fighting injustice. It judiciously provides a rereading of key biblical texts, making it useful to a broad audience.

Part 1 of *Grant Me Justice* focuses on the Hebrew Bible, HIV/AIDS, and Gender, with Denise Ackermann and Johanna Stiebert rereading significant texts on women and sexuality. Ackermann rereads the story of the rape of Tamar as the story of violence against women in South Africa. According to Ackermann, the Tamar narrative offers the "bleak immensity" of HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa, and yet she claims that there are traces of resistance and hope in the passage, positing that the subordination of women is a virus more deadly than HIV.

The story of Tamar, of course, has been reread by Womanist and feminist theologians, with some degree of success, as a story of survival and strategies of brokering power in an inequitable patriarchal world—as have the other dozen or so stories that are sprinkled throughout the Christian canon. For those living within the Christian tradition, without question these rereadings provide a glimpse and sometimes even a name to which women may look for inspiration,

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the exit of the twentieth century with a religious community largely adjusted to the status quo, standing as a taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading men to higher levels of justice."

10. Phiri, "HIV/AIDS," 426.

11. Letty M. Russell, "Re-Imagining the Bible in a Pandemic of HIV/AIDS," in *Grant Me Justice! HIV/AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube and Musimbi Kanyoro (Cluster Publications and Orbis Books, 2004), 202–3.

12. See note 11.

affinity, or strength. I would not wish to take that away or diminish it in any way. With complete respect, I posit this question and concern. Even with this liberatory reading, I wonder if is it reasonable to place hope in scriptures to reshape patriarchy when the Bible overwhelmingly buttresses it.[13] Without question, the pervasive, penetrating social standard throughout the biblical tradition is one of male-dominated patriarchy where women primarily serve and are eternally cursed as the one who first brought sin and death into the world. In this tradition, are not women destined to be either temptresses or very minor characters at best? Does the Christian tradition and its teachings, by their nature or at their core, fall into support of patriarchy?

As an ordained woman in the Christian (United Methodist) tradition, I do not ask these questions lightly. But in light of the continued oppression of women throughout the so-called Christian nations where the church virtually always functions as a taillight, and where South African women and children are dying in part because of my tradition, I must ask the questions.

As if that is not enough to ask, here is one more question and concern that is of equal importance. For the most part, even among Womanist and Black theologians, there exists a basic assumption that the Christian canon has universal application; with rereading, of course, but on the whole, the canon has been taken as an authoritative and foundational theological source that may be transported anywhere to anyone with equal validity and authority. I ask: "Hmmm. Really?" Am I sure that a so-named sacred text written in the Near East in early antiquity speaks with any universal or God-given authority to the women living with and dying from HIV/AIDS-related causes in South Africa?"[14]

Now, trust me, I know I am asking *the* question of biblical authority. As I prepared for this moment and decided to ask the question, I concluded that there is no better environment in which to ask it.[15] If not here, where? Among people who have studied and analyzed and written and published and preached and taught about religion and its sources, I thought, this is exactly the place to ask the question of whether the sacred texts from one region written so long ago can legitimately be transplanted and set upon another continent of people, millennia later, and claimed to still carry authoritative status.

It gives me some measure of comfort to know that others are asking the question and actively seeking to claim authority from other sources. While Dube and the authors who are members of the Circle of Concerned African Women attempt to reform interpretations of the Bible, South African theologian Tinyiko Sam Maluleke and Hebrew Bible scholar Sarokini Narar offer stories about women and violence from their personal lives to illustrate the ways that the "unholy trinity—religion, culture and gender socialization"[16] perpetuate aggression against women. They claim, frankly and unapologetically, that the Bible is the primary source used by Christians to propagate violence against women as God's

13. I acknowledge Monique Moultrie, a Ph.D. student at Vanderbilt Divinity School, for helping me to frame this question in my Womanist Theology class in the fall of 2005.

14. I thank Adam Wright, a Masters Degree student at Vanderbilt Divinity School, for raising this question in my Theologies of Women of Color class in the fall of 2007.

15. A version of this essay was delivered as part of the Taylor Lectures at Yale Divinity School, October 8–11, 2007.

16. Sam Tinyiko Maluleke and Sarojini Sadar, "Breaking the Covenant of Violence Against Women," *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa* 114 (November 2002): 14.

will through divine design. Biblical interpretation supports the belief that God bestowed upon men power and authority over women. This belief held by both women and men supports the normativity of the subordination of and violence against women that maintains a HIV/AIDS deathtrap for women.

Given the statistics, the hard, cold facts of violence toward women—and men infecting women with HIV can be seen as expression of this violence—it is difficult to rely on the limited stories of female strength in light of the thousands of pages that teach otherwise in the biblical texts. And so, the question is: Can the Christian Bible be seen as the authoritative and most life-giving text for women living with HIV? Is knowing Jesus and following his life of sacrifice, his relinquishment of power, and ultimately his glorified unjust death the most positive message for women forced into sexual relationships without power where they contract a disease that kills them? Is it the best resource for their survival? I don't know. I don't know if it is the best message, the message that will grant women any legitimate power over their situations, especially when even the Jesus story takes place in a patriarchal world governed by men.

There, I've said it. I've asked it. I've given voice to the place where the sacred and secular crash into one another.

In theory, sure, I'm all for the notion of a loving God who understands pain and injustice and promises redemption. I'm all for the comfort that this can and does bring . . . sometimes. I am *not* for the notions of patriarchy, the messages of submission, and the model of women predominantly presented in the Christian scriptures—not in my life, not in the lives of African American women, and especially not in the lives that become deaths among South African women unjustly infected because of forced submission, sacrifice, and patriarchy.

Now what? We've explored the pockets of traditional theology that are trying to make sense of and find life in the Christian scriptures. What are other methods of survival that can and do bring life to women affected by HIV/AIDS?

First, lives can be changed through the eradication of poverty. If churches spent more on eradicating poverty and less on preaching, we would be bringing a life-giving message to women in South Africa, because the political economy of HIV/AIDS determines who lives and who dies of this disease. While HIV/AIDS does not discriminate between the rich and the poor, it is the poor who are most adversely affected by the disease, resulting in the largest number of deaths being among the poor.

African scholar Eunice Kamaara claims that HIV/AIDS has such a negative impact upon the poor that it plays a significant role in the advancement of poverty. She writes,

> While HIV is not just confined to the poor, poverty contributes enormously to the spread of HIV and to the development from HIV to AIDS. On the other hand, HIV/AIDS contributes enormously to poverty. This means that a vicious circle exists where poverty contributes to HIV/AIDS and vice versa complicating the situation.[17]

UNAIDS Associate Director for Policy, Strategy and Research, Robert Hecht, speaking at the World AIDS conference in Durban, South Africa, in 2000, supports Kamaara's thesis. He writes, "Breaking this cycle will require not only increased

17. Eunice Kamaara, "Stigmatization of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS in Africa: Pastoral Challenges," *African Ecclesial Review* 2004, 38.

investments in more effective HIV prevention and care, but also more effective measures to combat poverty."[18]

Of course, not unlike virtually all patriarchal nation states, poverty disproportionately affects women. From land rights that restrict land and inheritance rights of women to access to education and healthcare, women bear the burden of living with poverty while living with HIV/AIDS. Land is transferred upon a husband's death not to his wife but to a male relative who has no obligation to allow the woman and/or her children to remain there. She has far less access to jobs that pay enough to maintain land or a home at the same level as she could with her husband.[19] Further, illiteracy is at least 50 percent in rural areas. Hospitals and clinics are virtually nonexistent or ill-equipped in poor communities.

Apart from religious ideology of any kind, these are tangible ways that religious communities can provide the services and education necessary to remove one of the barriers to women's health and life. As education and income increase, HIV/AIDS decreases. This we know. We can do something with that knowledge—without spreading the word of patriarchy. These are things those among us with resources can do to save the lives of women forced to live with HIV/AIDS.

There is one more thing we can do, approach we can take, and model from which we can learn. We primarily Western-trained scholars can be quiet. We can stop theorizing and planning and imposing our "solutions" on the people of South Africa. Instead, we can simply be quiet. Well, almost quiet; we may ask for an invitation to witness the ways South African communities are developing survival and healing strategies. If we are invited in, we can be quiet. We can be blessed by watching—observing solutions designed by those who know far more about living with HIV/AIDS in epidemic proportions.

I do this. Rather than go to bless or to impart or to teach, I go to South Africa, to the St. John's community, and I am blessed. I learn. I see how those who live daily in communities rife with poverty and patriarchy and poisoned by HIV/AIDS have developed ways to heal, to care, and to get by in situations in which most of us, myself included, would have no idea where to begin.

St. John's takes a multifaceted approach. First, they are asking what the larger social implications are of land distribution. The congregation builds homes for members with need. Sometimes they were building homes for members who were certainly near death from HIV/AIDS-related causes. This left the question of who would rightfully inherit the land and the home and what would happen when there were children in that home. Traditionally, the land would pass to a male relative, who might or might not care for or allow those orphaned or widowed to stay in the home. Leaders and members of St. John's are beginning to see that, long-term, this tradition does not work. It results in more poverty, more orphans and widows without adequate shelter and living under the power of male relatives. Although it will take time to change the power structures, St. John's is asking fundamental questions about the ways its own community traditions may be contributing to the poverty and the resulting exposure to HIV/AIDS.

The problem is not "out there" with others for St. John's. The community looked first at its own implications in the epidemic. Nor was the problem primarily theo-

18. Kamaara, "Stigmatization of Persons Living with HIV/AIDS," 38.

19. Haddad, "Theologising Development," 9.

logical. It is practical and it is structural and it is something that they are seeking to change about themselves first. We need to follow suit and question the ways that our traditions within our communities contribute to the spread of HIV and the ways we fail to bring life to those living with AIDS.

Second, St. John's seeks out people, actively looks for those in their community who live with HIV/AIDS. They don't just hang a sign outside that says "All are welcome." They go out, using trained counselors, and find them. They do not place the burden on ailing persons to find the community. The community finds those in need and gets them to clinics. They share information. They actively pursue those who are alienated. This approach is very, very different from the "All are welcome" sign. They not only say, All are welcome; they truly meet people where they are—on their own doorsteps, not the church's.

Finally, St. John's offers sacramental healing within the walls of the church. Mother Gomba is the female head of the congregation—in and of itself a powerful statement in a land of male dominance. She describes and I have witnessed the life-giving power of ritual healing. Mother Gomba and her minister leaders have developed a fourfold ritual for anyone who is living with an ailment or disease. The ritual combines traditional elements of African religion with some Christian elements in a very embodied ritual that physically and symbolically renews the person living with a disease of any kind.

Notably, and intentionally, HIV/AIDS is not singled out as different, not given a special ribbon or scarlet letter, not made out to be a special or marked disease. The lack of singling out HIV/AIDS is not an attempt to hide or mask it but rather a way of normalizing it so that the person affected need not feel set apart, as often happens negatively outside of St. John's. Whatever the ailment or disease, care is given, indiscriminately.

Here's how: First, the priest/healer "prophets" the person, which means that, with Bible in hand and the person who has requested healing present, the priest/healer opens the Bible (to no specific place), fixes her eyes upon a passage, reads it out loud, and begins to talk to the person about her/his life. Two things happen. First, the person typically hears something about her/his life with which she/he resonates. Second, the person hears what will happen to her/him in the future. This may or may not be positive. Whatever the prophecy, the person has some sense of what he or she can and must do. This gives the person motivation and restores a sense of ability to "do something." The specifics of the something matter, to be sure. However, equally, if not more powerful, the person regains a sense that she/he actually can and must actively take part in healing.

Following the propheting session is a ritual bath. The priest/healer draws water into a bathtub and adds an ash/salt mixture. Sunlight soap, which the adherent supplies to the minister, is also used. Again, the adherent's supplying the soap functionally makes the person an active participant in her healing. She takes the bath, washing herself seven times. Then she emerges from the bath water and puts on clothes without drying her body. The full physicality of the ritual places the person firmly in her body, where the disease still lives, but in a way that embraces and reclaims the corporeal as worthy and capable of being healed. The healing is not a simple prayer. It involves active body movement.

The adherent then goes to the church sanctuary with the minister, who is vested in a special uniform that includes a blue-and-white stole and a shepherd's staff. The

adherent stands on a white cross etched in the floor in front of the altar. The priest/healer submerges his hands in holy water and places the blue-and-white stole that he wears upon the adherent's head and shoulders while saying a prayer. Holy water is then sprinkled upon the person in need of healing. Here, physical connection is made between priest/healer and adherent. The stole, warm from the body of the priest/healer, is transferred to the body of the one seeking healing. The stole does not come from a pristine box but is given directly from the body of one to another, making a ritualized connection between embodied members of a community.

This initial healing session is followed by three other sessions over a period of a month in which a healing team assists the person in other visceral and corporeal rituals that involve vomiting (after ingesting a very large volume of water) followed by an enema and a concluding bath employing the same elements used in the first session. The final element is more theological, involving participation in community worship services throughout the month-long ritual process, providing a combination of private and public sacramental acts.

Such physicality may seem unfamiliar to American notions of ritual or sanitized oil-dabbing or sign-of-the-cross–making. For St. John's the ritual process markedly and intentionally involves the entire body. Precisely by treating the body without shame, with touch, with fundamental human bodily functions, and without holding back or buttoning up, the St. John's rituals honor, give esteem to, and renew the bodies of those who otherwise spend their days and nights knowing their body is sapping their life's energy.

When I am with the St. John's community, I am struck immediately and blessed surely by the ways that one community, surrounded by patriarchy, poverty, and disease—all of epidemic proportions and each as insidious as the other—has found ways to heal individuals, seek out those who may not otherwise find a clinic, and at the same time work to change the systems within their own community and culture that contribute to the real-life consequences of HIV/AIDS.

I close with the questions asked earlier. Does or should or can the Christian Bible serve as the ultimate source of authority in the lives of South Africans living with the HIV/AIDS epidemic? Is it the Christian Bible that "gives" the St. John's healers/priests the authority to take care of people among them? Is the message of a sacrificing Jesus who promises some otherworldly existence the central message necessary for full and complete wholeness? Is the message of a sacrificing, servant model a healthy one for subjugated women? I do not know, and this, here, now is the right time and place to begin asking those questions, perhaps as we learn from St. John's and ask first of our own communities, "How does our, how does *my*, theological and religious community contribute to the penetration of HIV/AIDS? Because, as I mentioned at the outset, South Africa is a frame with real people, real bodies that face epidemic challenges. However, the problem of HIV/AIDS, its links to poverty, and its confluence with heterosexual norms that are supported by biblical teaching live, breathe, and breed among us.

May we continue the conversation until we are no longer a taillight but the headlight that searches within and ultimately shines and exposes those things that we can stop, start, and change here, in our own selves, our own homes, and our own communities.

Research Behaviors of Theological Educators

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Ralph Klein is a friend of libraries—hardly surprising given the scope and depth of his research and teaching. He has certainly been a friend of the JKM Library, which serves the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. From the moment I arrived as library director in the summer of 2004, Ralph has shown persistent interest in the library—interest that I am sure far predates my brief time on this campus. He reads (actually reads!) every report of the librarian, and he e-mails comments and questions to her arising from the reports. He verbally supports the library in faculty meetings and routinely calls for increased library—particularly acquisitions—budgets. When the matter of the future of the LSTC rare books came to light, Ralph formed a Rare Books Task Force, devoted hundreds of hours over Christmas break to the creation of a rare books Web site, and pledged to devote his precious retirement time to their care. Ralph *uses* the library: He is one of the few faculty members who routinely can be found in the West Wing, risking (!) student interruption to locate and use its many resources.

So it was no surprise to me that when I asked for faculty participation in a modest research project of my own concerning the research behaviors of theological educators, Ralph was one of the first to step forward and offer his time—in his case, a delightful lunch hour during which he graciously and completely submitted to my intrusive questions about his research activities. See if you can hear his voice among the several speaking through this essay.

This project began at the 2006 American Theological Library Annual Conference where I delivered an address in which I said that we librarians know that theological libraries need to adapt to all the changes in the larger theological academic environment but that until we have real data about our patrons' research needs, we don't know what changes to make. Currently, we're trying to navigate change on the basis of anecdotal evidence or inferences drawn from other academic disciplines. So, for example, we don't have hard evidence that *theological* research performed over the Internet is inherently inferior to more traditional scholarship, or that having resources available on site is somehow better than having resources a mile down the road or online . . . and we librarians need a new

way of defining and describing success for *theological* libraries in order to justify our budgets and our existence.

To come to this new understanding we first need to learn how our students and faculty actually pursue their work, how they actually understand and do research, how they actually read, how they actually write. We need to get beyond anecdotes and inferences to a real, serious, wide and deep study of contemporary research behaviors in the theological community. And then we need to look at how these behaviors hook up (or not) with our libraries.

Along with this look at behaviors, we need to understand what faculty and students *mean* by research, because the values and understandings embedded in their definition will directly determine how we need to demonstrate our contributions. Once we have data on actual behavior and actual goals and understandings, we will be in position to measure if and how libraries and librarians contribute to theological scholarship.

Hoist on my own petard, in 2007 I conducted a pilot interview project on the campus of the JKM Library. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain preliminary data on actual research behaviors and operative understandings of research from seminary faculty and to provide a sense of how this data does or does not substantiate anecdotal information and assumptions outside and within the theological library profession.

I interviewed eight faculty—four each from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and from McCormick Theological Seminary. These faculty researchers included three women and five men, three young scholars at the beginning of their careers (interestingly, the women), one scholar on the verge of retirement, and four mid-career scholars. The academic disciplines represented were three Old Testament, one Christian-Muslim dialogue, two theology, and two ministry professors. Their Ph.D.-granting institutions—where they learned research—were Harvard, Notre Dame, Vanderbilt, Pontificio Istituto di Saudi Arabi e d'Islamistica, Princeton, Union Theological Seminary (New York), Duke, and the Graduate Theological Union.

I set out to ask these fine folks basically two questions: "How do you actually do research? (Not, how do you think you *should* do research, or how do you *wish* you did research, but what actual practices do you pursue?)" and "What is research?" Along the way I asked them where they did research, what resources they used (human and otherwise), how much time they spent on research, how they learned to do research, and what their perception of their students' research abilities were. I may not have framed these questions in the best possible way, or probed as deeply as I might have. But faculty were eager to talk about their research habits—in fact, sweetly flattered that they were being asked about this significant part of their lives for the first time. (It reminded me of something James Fowler said almost 30 years ago: that people were so eager to talk about their faith because no one had ever asked before!) At any rate, here's what I heard.

First, and without exception, faculty do the majority of their studying, research, and sustained reading and writing not in the library but at home. Home is where they are comfortable, where their personal library is, where they can spread out, and *where they are invisible*. Faculty offices are just "places to meet students," and the seminary library is a land mine strewn with pesky students. As one person put it, "A professor who comes into the library must be prepared to teach, because students won't leave you alone." Others spoke of the need to work

undisturbed, the "need for invisible spaces" in the library, and the need to leave laptop and materials undisturbed and secure for long periods of time to make it possible for them to consider doing research in a library. Faculty do come into the library—to check out materials already identified online, to peruse current periodicals, to photocopy, or to get that all-important cup of coffee. But sustained research? It happens at home or at the local university library (University of Chicago's Regenstein, in our case) or at the local Borders—anyplace where seminary students don't go.

Second, faculty rely heavily on "the invisible college," that informal network of professionals they know from graduate school days, from conferences and personal contact. Again and again, when asked "How do you begin [your research]?" the answer was "I talk with my friends, I go to my colleagues, I go to my teaching partners, I go to my list serves, I go to conferences where 'it's like a family reunion.'" "I know all the people in my field, and know what they're writing." That informal network works alongside and often instead of any bibliographic work done in libraries.

Several faculty replied, "I go to my personal library or to my own database or bibliography" to begin a new project. A few mentioned using ATLA's RDB though fussed about it being out-of-date. SBL's online Book Forum, publishers' e-mails, catalogs and conferences displays; journal book reviews, Wabash Center and AAR syllabi, *Wilson FullText, OTA, Currents in Research*, the Coop Bookstore in Chicago—these were also mentioned as starting points. But no one, no one goes to the seminary library to begin his or her research.

Two points about that. On the one hand, the library seems at best to be simply a depository or access point for previously identified resources. Faculty use the library to obtain resources and occasionally to locate them but not to identify them. I had one fascinating conversation with a younger scholar who said it would never occur to her to ask the reference librarian to find something for her, even in a field outside her own. "Aren't I supposed to know how to find things?" she asked. "Aren't I the expert?" She was unaware of a reference librarian's particular skill set or mission to find what is not immediately findable.

Six of the eight said that one of the first places they go to identify new material is . . . *Amazon.com*! They browse by key word to get the supposed latest titles. The "Look inside . . ." and "People who bought this also . . ." functions were mentioned as particularly useful, and one person was adamant that it was far easier to use Amazon than any library online catalog. Controlled vocabulary is not how (these) scholars operate anymore.

Other online search strategies were used, but they were pretty tame. List serves, e-mail, known Web sites, and subscribed databases were all mentioned, but folks knew about them through personal contacts. Googling was mentioned more than once, with no sense of awareness that the sorting was weighted by nonacademic criteria. People constructed online bibliographies, e-mailing references to themselves to then take to the library. But no one used the library online catalog for anything other than getting call numbers and an indication of library ownership. Overall, the Internet and e-resources do not seem to have changed how people go about finding the existence of materials. It has changed where they are physically when they find resources and perhaps the speed with which they find them, but that is all.

Third, faculty read print texts, not electronic texts. Some of them take copious notes from the printed page, some under-

line and write on the page (and thus need to own the copy). But the research movement seems to be from electronic searching to print reading to electronic writing—a fairly conservative process.

Where technology seems to have made a difference is in the way hardware (and possibly software like EndNote) has changed the writing/research interaction. Librarian for Academic Technology Anthony Elia's interviews with McCormick faculty revealed that faculty think that writing—the process of writing—now guides the research and not, as in the past, the other way around. I heard something similar in my interviews. End products—articles, reviews, books, papers, syllabi—seem to be the beginning and end of research, and the research/writing processes are, in the words of one colleague, "swirled together." No one claimed to do research for research's sake.

Another way technology has affected research and writing is the *when* of it. Faculty claim to "work hours and hours—harder than the students" every week at research and writing at home. There are different seasons of research dictated by syllabi construction, academic calendar and faculty committee work, of course—these are not new. But now faculty often go "prowling late at night on e-mail" or the Internet. Both space and time boundaries have gotten squishy.

When asked where they learned to do research, the common answer was that they learned in graduate school, writing the dissertation. "I saw how others did research and followed their example," said one. Another was quite candid: "I talked to my classmates, not professors!" (He then told an illustrative incident about a time when he asked an important scholar a question and the scholar began pulling volumes off the shelf, assuming this doctoral student knew how to read Aramaic as fluently as he did, and how embarrassing the whole thing was, not to be repeated!) One person credited a required seminar he took that culminated in the dissertation proposal. Another spoke at length of his time at Monmouth College where faculty had to team teach across disciplines and taught each other how to teach each other's subject.

And yet, when I asked "How do you assume your students' research behaviors and abilities are different from yours, and what research mentoring do you provide them?" faculty responded "I don't assume they have any research ability" or "Our alternatives are either to give assignments that are internal to the textbooks, or require an intensive course in research" (which we don't) or "Assignments have to be very specific: Find three of this sort and three of the other, otherwise you'll just get Wikipedia." In other words, faculty despaired of students' abilities. Some agreed we should do "something" to force students into research, while others capitulated and admitted "I give them everything they need" so students don't have to research. One said simply, "My job is to teach them to preach, not to teach them to do research."

So, faculty see that students can't do research (and so supposedly can't learn from each other the way they themselves did in graduate school). Yet, by their own admission, these same faculty are not teaching research to their students, sometimes feeling guilty about that, sometimes just angry. Ironically, the person who expressed the most guilt did the most to teach research, requiring students to go into the library together and work collaboratively on tracking a current biblical scholar and his/her career and work.

When I asked how the library could best contribute to faculty and student research needs, the answers were, in order of frequency:

- Provide places where faculty can be invisible, undisturbed (8)
- Procure faculty advocates to fight acquisitions budget cuts, and not let hard times and other budget priorities imperil acquisitions (4)
- Provide a required noncredit course on research for students (2)
- Have all holdings in the online [not card] catalog (2)
- Provide faculty with mini-workshops on library search strategies (1)
- Provide study desks with lots of power for laptops plus some way of securing those laptops if people need to leave for extended periods of time (1)
- Provide more searchable digital materials in English, Spanish, and Korean (1)
- Provide research assistants, someone to bring me things and make copies for me [not sure this should come from the library]
- It's the little things (ease of using the copier, browsing opportunities, the placement of the coffee machine by current periodicals) (1)

I did not hear any self-aware irony about faculty use of the Internet (Google and Amazon specifically) and their despair over student use of same. I did not hear any sense that library teaching staff (reference, public service, academic technology librarians) could provide students—much less themselves—research assistance outside the mention of a (currently nonexistent) research course. I did not hear faculty expressing dissatisfaction with the seminary library's role in their research except with the diminished acquisitions budget. I did not hear faculty ever laying the current state of affairs regarding student research skills at the feet of librarians. Nor did I hear them finding the solution to the current state of affairs with librarians. All in all, I did not hear anything terribly radical. For all of the awareness of interdisciplinary, collaborative work in the academy and the parish, that kind of approach to research, with one or two exceptions, seems not to have filtered into their own research. Faculty work solo and in isolation with print-based or printed-out material. In fact, faculty definitions of research (again, with one or two exceptions) are rather conservative. For, finally, I did ask these faculty, "What is research?" Their answers were:

1. Research is looking at a piece of human experience that hasn't been considered for awhile.
2. Research is sorting through a problem you don't have a question for yet.
3. Research is study designed to advance our understanding of whatever we are investigating with the ultimate purpose of publishing these findings.
4. Research is making a claim and providing evidence for that claim.
5. Research is open-ended inquiry. It is *not* beginning with a thesis for which you collect evidence. You must change how you think about something as a result of research.
6. Research is not finding a new thing; it is engaging difference, hearing voices and issues different from your own. You know who you are by knowing who others are, so it is a process of self discovery.
7. Research is finding out—everything from How do Latinos perform baptisms? to Where are we going to eat tonight?

Only the last three are nontraditional definitions. The very last statement came from the professor who said that "at seminary we teach students the wrong kind of research—how to use academic databases instead of how to answer a pastoral question or how to teach an adult Christian education class. They aren't going on to write academic papers. They're going to the middle of Nebraska somewhere where there's no theology library. How do they

find what they need to do ministry? That's what we should be teaching them." In other words: The standards and practices of research to which we hold faculty accountable may not be the standards and practices to which we should hold seminarians.

In brief, then, I heard the following:

- Faculty read, write, and do research at home for a number of reasons, most of which have little to do with technology.
- Research is generated by a specific need: a syllabus to prepare, a paper or article or book to write, a deadline to meet.
- The single most important resource for faculty research is their network of colleagues.
- *Amazon.com* has replaced BIP and, in some ways, the library catalog.
- Theology faculty use online search resources and write electronically but are still print-oriented.
- Faculty have largely given up concerning student research behaviors.
- Libraries are not perceived to be the problem or the solution to poor student research skills.

Therefore, faculty research behaviors bypass the library in the following ways:

- They discover new resources through the network of colleagues.
- They work at home.
- They do not use library reference staff to identify resources.
- They do not browse the stacks and use the classification system to group like things together.
- They do not use the online catalog and its controlled vocabulary, except as a location device.

For those of us who work in libraries these clearly are matters of concern. More hopefully, if these eight faculty are representative of their seminary colleagues, such glimpses into faculty research behaviors tell us much about how to plan for our theological libraries' future. The future may not lie in eBooks, hand-held devices, and online databases . . . solely! It may not lie in the continuation of controlled-vocabulary inventorying (a.k.a. "the catalog") or classification systems . . . or it may lie in more aggressive instruction for faculty in these areas. It may lie in the cultivation of the library as place and teaching space. In fact, when I presented these interview results to the McCormick faculty at their faculty forum lunch in February 2008, their response (led by Professor Robert Cathey) raised many helpful points about the validity (or lack thereof) of the behaviorist nature of this research project, the role of intersubjective dimensions of scholarly research that are not evident in discrete research behaviors, and the ways in which spaces and gatherings invoke, sustain, and reward excellence in research.

Indeed, I would say that at this point these eight interviews are just another form of anecdotal information even if specific to the theological-education environment. Much more investigation and analysis remains to be done, for the sake of theological teaching and scholarship per se as well as for the extensive investment in our heritage and the present and future mission that our theological libraries represent. These interviews help us glimpse the "need to plan our libraries' futures not by extrapolating trends or imagining a speculative techno-utopian facility, but by thinking long and hard about the library-research process, and the library-research community."[1] Ralph Klein has helped us do this, and he will continue to so help as long as he draws breath, I am sure!

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1. From the Report of the University of Chicago's Provost Task Force convened in 2005 to study the current state of the university's libraries.

Clashes of Confession: The Case of Latin America in a Global Context

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Ralph Klein begins his massive and authoritative commentary of *1 Chronicles*[1] with an elucidation of the different meanings the name of the book has received. Among them is that the book deals with the events of the day but also about things omitted or left behind. A chronicler in this combined sense is the one who registers the events of the day but with particular care for those things that otherwise would be rendered to oblivion. A chronicler is one who engages facts and events and pledges back. This is what the word *responsibility* means (from the Latin *re-spondeo*—more on this follows). Professor Klein's service to the church, faithfully paying heed to the pleas and plaintive of the faithful, listening to the diverse voices of the people from all over the world, testifies to this very sense of responsibility. In classroom, in scholarship, in assisting the challenged in technological innovations or carrying the thorns of administration, and as editor of *Currents in Theology and Mission*, he was the "chronicler" in that sense attributed to the book he so deeply studied, the sense of being responsible. My contribution to this volume in homage to Ralph is, fittingly, about responsibility.

I was asked to share some dimension of my scholarly contribution and to reflect on ways in which my scholarship serves the church and world. This calls for a relocation and reallocation, wherefore I will relocate myself to Latin America, Brazil in particular, and reallocate my thoughts to the subject of "confessional clashes" so as to be faithful to the task at hand. I situate my discussion of clashes of confession in Latin America in a global context, and in order to do that I need to start with the latter, the global context. Hence I need to provide what is entailed by globalization and its impact in Latin America, whose history since the conquest coincides exactly with the history of globalization.

Globalization

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. The word is derived from the Latin *globus*, meaning a round mass or a sphere.[2] Although part of the English vocabulary since the sixteenth century, designating terrestrial planetary sphere, *globalization* is a rather recent word describing the simultaneity of an event and its planetary consequences

1. Ralph Klein, *1 Chronicles: A Commentary. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

2. The oldest existing world representation as a globe comes from the late fifteenth century, created in Nürnberg by Martin Behaim.

creating a common system by which desires and punishment and satisfactions are waged. Indian writer Arundhati Roy properly defines globalization as a mode of standardization where everyone desires the same thing but only few are able to have it.[3] But what globalization theories have recently described is certainly not a brand new phenomenon. It has been in vogue since the late fifteenth century when *globe* became an operational concept.

Although Christopher Columbus had it wrong when he thought to have reached the coast of India by sailing west, he was right in establishing at least the possibility of traveling around the globe and arriving without returning to the place of origin. This actually was accomplished by Ferdinand Magellan 28 years after Columbus reached the Americas. Since then an incredible intensification of global traveling has reduced the size of the planet, as it were. Not only has physical mobility dramatically increased, reaching supersonic velocities, but virtual traveling and transportation circle the globe at the speed of light.

In all of this drastic increase in velocity and mobility, one thing remains the same—the forward motion that brings one to the point of departure without necessarily having to return. This phenomenon means one simple thing: It is a movement forward without a return, without having to be accountable back. Although Columbus kept the practice of writing *back* to Spain accounting for his discoveries, his accounts answered for the conquest and landfalls but not for the others he had actually met. Tzvetan Todorov, in his influential book *The Conquest of America*, put it like this:

> Columbus speaks about the men he sees only because they too, after all, constitute a part of the landscape. His allusions to the inhabitants of the islands always occur amid his notations concerning nature, somewhere between birds and trees. . . . Columbus discovered America but not the Americans.[4]

A couple of decades later, Magellan, first to actually circumnavigate the globe, did not even write back to account for his deeds. As far as we know, he did not even keep a journal. He was only moving forward, perennially.

What happens with globalization can be detected in the first maritime travel around the globe. It is an onward process, a progress without accountability, without responsibility. The words *responsibility* and *response* literally mean to pledge (*spondeo*) back (*re*). The Latin *spondeo* is the root of the English word *spouse*. To respond is akin to what happens in a marriage ceremony, where each partner vows commitments to the other; responsibility is to answer back, be accountable to those vows. This promissory is an adroit hermeneutic to interpret globalization. Globalization averts responsibility in the same way as Magellan averted landfall by circumnavigating the continents. His greatest accomplishment is emblematic; he bypassed what is now Latin America by being the first to cross Cape Horn without making landfall. Globalization is when rules of accountability or responsibility may be suspended. We keep surging ahead oblivious to what is left behind.

Even more insidious and pervasive is the fact that the other to whom supposedly one owes a response becomes faceless, is excluded from the conversation, is no longer taken into account, becomes what Kafka in

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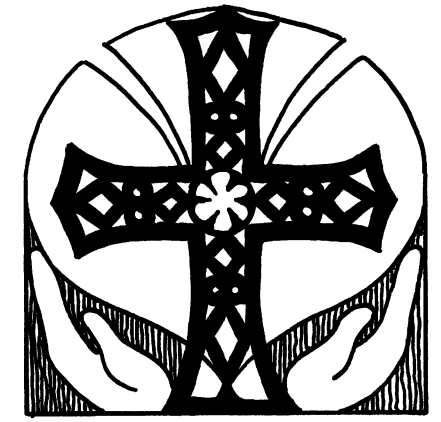
3. Arundhati Roy, *The Check Book and the Cruise Missile: Conversations with Arundhati Roy* (Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press, 2004), 40.

4. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 34, 49.

The Trial[5] called a non-person—an expression Gustavo Gutiérrez applied to describe the excluded ones in Third World societies, people who live in what he called the "underside of history."[6] These people are "invisible," in the sense Ralph Ellison in *The Invisible Man*[7] or Manuel Scorza in *Garabombo, the Invisible*[8] describe them. It is a social and economic invisibility, which is required for responsibility to be denied or excused.

Since the era of globalization began in the sixteenth century, the more the globe is crossed and circled, be it through virtual or physical travel, the more places—entire countries—are rendered invisible. Where in the world is New Guinea? Where is Guinea Bissau? Where is Guyana? In this random selection, it is more likely to miss a country or even a populous continent than it is to find Web sites worldwide. And one can be anywhere in the world in a shopping mall, a hotel, or an airport and it all looks the same everywhere. Thomas Friedman tells the story of why he titled his bestselling book *The World is Flat*. He was playing golf (something he shares with Ralph Klein!) somewhere in India, and all of the external references were about the same as if he were playing in New York or anywhere else. When he came home he confided to his wife: "Honey, I think the world is flat."[9] A flat globe is an oxymoron that has come to symbolize what globalization means.

If nonresponsibility is a feature of globalization, invisibility is another. However, invisibility as it is used in the works of literature I mentioned functions as a metaphor. It is not that these people are translucent, but their individual existence is so dispensable that one does not need to see them, to be responsible toward them, to address them. Invisibility has a Janus face; the invisible becomes also picturesque. Pictures in magazines, newspapers, television



shows, and other media make people ultra visible and only magnify the irresponsibility. One does not write back to the aboriginal people one finds beautifully portrayed, say, in *National Geographic*. You see the photograph, but you don't see the person. You remember the picture, not the person; one knows the framed photo, not the complex and multidimensional reality that exceeds any frame.[10]

The struggle for visibility is the struggle to entreat a response, to be addressed. But to be addressed is to have one's "address"

5. Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (London: Pan Books, 1977).

6. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Theology from the Underside of History," in *The Power of the Poor in History: Selected Writings* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

7. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952).

8. Manuel Scorza, *Garabombo, the Invisible*, trans. Anna-Marie Aldaz (New York: P. Lang, 1994).

9. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 5.

10. For more on this, see Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Picador, 1977).

defined. To have one's address defined is the question of affirming an identity that can be claimed and acclaimed.

This is one of the functions of a religious community that says who people are and whose they are, i.e., they are children of a god who has claimed them as his/her own. In most cultures this identity is attributed in a religious ceremony in which a person is given a name. Take the example of Christianity, which has its proper face linked to a person who received the name Jesus. Not everyone remembers this, but in the Christian tradition the date of January 1 was celebrated as the day Jesus was given his name. On that occasion, on the eighth day after his birth, he was circumcised. So that was the day, the tradition maintains, that marks the beginning of a new era some 2008 years ago.[11] That event, repeated every New Year, gave to the Christian church a unique identity; every baptism reenacts that event, and a person is given a name and is claimed to belong to the flock of Christians. That is what I mean by having an address or a claim to a recognizable visible identity.

Latin America, like Europe and the United States but unlike Asia and much of Africa, claims to have an overwhelming Christian identity, almost 90 percent of its population professing to be Christian. Therefore, Latin America should be more easily recognized than Asia or Africa because of its shared religious allegiance with the North Atlantic world. This is not the case. The two literary examples about invisibility, the North American Ellison and the Peruvian Scorza, give us a clue as to what the issue is. In both cases it has to do with race, ethnicity, or economic marginalization, or often all three together.

The obvious begging question is: Why would people claim an identity that puts them in the company of exactly those who dispense with them, rendering them invisible? One response is that they have no another option due to the early colonial imposition of the Christian religion. But their identity is viewed as not genuine, as counterfeit, very much as the "new" Christians in the Spain of the *reconquista* in the second half of the second millennium in the Iberian Peninsula were. This led to a fierce struggle to prove one's identity beyond the suspicion of having a fake claim to being a Christian.

Under these conditions, how are identities construed?

The construal of identities

1. *The co-optation by the Enlightenment.* The marginalization of those who would have a claim to the Christian identity historically has produced some side effects with confessional implications. A few, for example, have rejected the Christian faith and tried to integrate into the history of the West by adopting secularization and rejection of any form of organized religion. This would be the case of Uruguay and Cuba,[12] and in general such assimilation into the European Enlightenment and French positivism in particular has been a characteristic of the formation of the intellectual class. But for the size of Latin America and the Caribbean together this is still a small, though influential, minority.

2. *The hybrid option.* A significantly greater contingent has sought to develop

11. Hermann Brandt, "Was feiern Christen am 1. Januar? Zur Wiedergewinnung eines Christuszeugnisses älterer Gesangbücher und Zinzendorfs," *Lutherische Kirche in der Welt, Jahrbuch des Martin-Luther-Bundes* 54 (2007): 79–106.

12. Cuba more than a century before the revolution of 1959 was very secularized, which explains the persisting endurance of its regime under constant U.S. assail.

hybrid identities, moving into a syncretism with African religions that the former slaves brought and disguised under the Roman Catholic formal exterior. These religious expressions have become increasingly more distinct in the autochthonous shapes they have assumed. Comparable was the case of the indigenous communities, particularly in the Andean region of the Inca Empire, which led José Carlos Mariátegui to say that the Spaniards did not bring a religion; they brought rites, priests, religious orders, and liturgies under which the old Inca religion survived using the church as its disguise.[13] In fact, it is fascinating to examine the early missionaries' accounts of the people they met. In the Iberian Peninsula these missionaries were shaped in their religious formation by a struggle on three fronts: with the Muslims, the Jews, and the apostates who in the wake of the Reformation in the Peninsula kept the counter-Reformation busy. So, it is amazing indeed to observe that they would interpret and classify the indigenous people they met exactly along the lines of these three perceived enemies they fought in their homeland. The indigenous people often were described as descendents of Muslims, of Jews, or of renegade Christians, once evangelized by St. Thomas (!), who lost the true faith, not unlike those who were lured by the Reformation to abandon the Holy Roman Church.[14]

Christianity in Latin America

The hybrid options have been and probably will be of higher significance in the future of Latin American religious distinctiveness, to which significant attention should be given. But the task at hand is to address clashes of confession as they manifest themselves in Christianity. Before we begin, be reminded that for a subaltern population, as most of Latin America is, to have a claim for recognition (to have an "address") that waits for a response is the common characteristic. To be a subaltern[15] is to live under a hegemonic regime, a regime characterized by having control or dominion and also for mustering compliance without having normally to resort to violence.[16]

Taxonomies

Subalterns have been classified in different ways. Taxonomies, the art of drawing classifications, are always oversimplifications of facts, but they serve didactical purposes. The most common taxonomies of religious expressions are based on sociological criteria that focus on denominational or group affiliation. Denominational affiliation is a sociological way of categorizing demographic groups according to rules of institutional allegiances.[17] Thus, one would speak in broad terms about the Roman Catholic Latin America (with four main internal groupings: the Ultramontanists, the

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13. See José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas, 1990), 135.

14. Cf. Vítor Westhelle, "Conquest and Evangelization in Latin America." In *Word Remembered—Word Proclaimed*, ed. Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder (Nettetal: Steyler, 1997), 89–107.

15. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Chicago; University of Illinois Press, 1988).

16. See *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected writings 1916–1935*, ed. David Forgas (New York: New York University, 2000), 249, for an elaboration on what *hegemony* means. Gramsci called hegemony the condition under which assent is given and compliance accorded to dominant power.

17. Legion are these typologies; among the best known are the works of Ernst Troeltsch, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Avery Dulles.

Base Community movement, the popular or syncretistic Catholicism, and the charismatic faction) and the Protestant Latin America (including denominations formed by immigrants, the mission churches, and the Pentecostal movement). This typology is the result of the influence the social sciences have had in ecclesiological studies that is, or attempts to be, methodologically neutral. The claim of neutrality implies what is known as methodological atheism. Such an approach sidetracks theological claims that lie at the root of the very faith expressions of the people who are being classified. Why would that be the basis for the most widespread method for ecclesial analysis? Taxonomies are not only about knowledge; they are about control and power.

The method itself was, and largely remains, even when used by Latin Americans, a tool that inscribes the other by the ones that are already known (not unlike the missionaries of the sixteenth century who classified the indigenous people by those they knew in the Iberian Peninsula—Muslims, Jews, and Protestants). Jean Jacques Rousseau already in the eighteenth century said it perceptively:

> For the three or four hundred years since the inhabitants of Europe have inundated the other parts of the world, and continually published new collections of voyages and reports, I am convinced that we know no other men except the Europeans.[18]

A faith-based taxonomy?

Any typology by itself is the imposition of a frame in which the subject matter depicted is reduced to the parameters of the grid. Therefore it is a political practice ("I know who you are as long as you remain in the frame I devised for you"). In the case of methodological atheism the problem is compounded by the fact that what the grid excludes is the faith commitment of the communities of faith in it depicted. Taxonomies are dangerous in that they violate the integrity of the subject matter by reducing the multidimensional reality that is being studied to the frames of the grid and the evaluatory criteria devised to tabulate, catalogue, and finally label it. In the case of applying a sociological method to religious phenomena, it is a double violation as it does not even tabulate that which is central to the identity being portrayed.

Given that this identity is of a confessional nature, the confessional principle should be employed at the start in what could be called a faith-based taxonomy. Confessional identity provides phenomenological and theological ways to describe the distinctiveness of a particular group's attitude toward the content of their belief.

The one I propose groups the confessional clashes along three distinctive ways of understanding confessional identity. Confessional identity is not the same as denominational affiliation. It can better be described as an *attitude* toward the object of faith and with the goal of shaping one's identity, i.e., of having an address.

The different types of attitudes take three distinct formations. My inspiration here comes from the helpful way Philipp Melanchthon, following a tradition from Augustine through Thomas Aquinas, defined the structure of faith.[19] Faith entails, first, an object that appears as the representation of the sacred or the holy and toward which the gaze of the believer is turned (*notitia*). I call this the *theoretical attitude*. Faith is further defined by a relationship

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18. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses*, ed. Roger D. Masters, trans. Roger D. and Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin's, 1964), 210–11.

19. Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521: Lateinisch-Deutsch*, trans. Horst Georg Pöhlmann (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1993), 208–11 (*locus* 6:5–6).

that is established (namely: worship) between the believing community and the object of its devotion to which it gives assent (*assensus*). This I call the *practical attitude*. Faith is finally expressed as an existential hopeful confidence or trust to which one holds even when the external object or the worshiping practice of the community is under attack or falters (*fiducia*). This is the *poietical attitude*.

These three structural components are intimately linked, but one normally takes primacy and norms the other two, becoming the controlling principle. For lack of a better expression, these three demarcate the battleground of confessional clashes. Why? Because each reveals a distinct way of construing one's basic identity. And this is reflected in other dimensions of life, particularly politics. But how does it manifest itself?

1. *The theoretical attitude*. The first is a theoretical attitude in the etymological sense of the term (*theoreo*), which is defined by being absorbed in passive contemplation and receptiveness. The object of devotion varies. It can be a saint, an image, a vision, the eucharistic event, Mary, the Bible, a pilgrimage site, or the confessional writings of a given ecclesial tradition. In this case the believer or the believing community surrenders its autonomy to a heteronomy. One is defined by the representation of the Other, the holy other. Catholic Ultramontanism, conservatives of every stripe, traditionalists, Protestant confessionalists, and Evangelical fundamentalists, no matter how distant they are from their specific ecclesial affiliation or object of devotion, belong to this mode of defining identity. What keeps them apart as to what the object is that defines them, is much less significant than the fundamental attitude of being defined by it. This normally corresponds to the attitude toward the state, the political regime, and venerable cultural traditions. The fundamental adherence to the status quo keeps in the same fold disparate expressions of how the holy is represented. This is the type that has the most defined "address" in the worldwide scenario where they form global networks like some religious or lay orders in the RCC, some Bible societies, internationally linked Bible institutes in conservative or fundamentalist Protestantism, and confessional societies in traditional Protestant denominations.

2. *The practical attitude*. The second mode of construing a religious identity is by being actively engaged with a community that understands itself as experiencing the presence of the divine in the interrelationship of the worship community. One's identity is defined by interconnectedness. The relationship with the holy happens in the intersubjective engagement among the members of the group and also externally by engaging the world. To use Paul Tillich's terminology,[20] if in the previous type one encounters the Other as a stranger whom one receives in a passive attitude toward its representation, here one meets the other as an estranged one to whom one longs to be reunited. In this case, confessional identity is in process and dynamically defined as an ongoing act of *confessing*, of living out one's faith without any stable object or representation to anchor it; representations exist, but they are malleable, *in processus confessionis*. Identity is formed in the interface. To put it more theologically, the Gift is not that which is received but that which is being shared. McLuhan's apothegm here is normative: The medium is the message. This type of faith community can easily be recognized in many sectors of

20. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 10.

the RCC's work developed among popular masses (such as the Base Christian Communities), in most of mainline Protestant denominations insofar as ecumenical openness is being exercised, interfaith dialogues pursued, secular sectors of society engaged, and so forth. In this attitude there is political motivation to participate in the construction and transformation of society. Much of liberation theology has its birthright also in this type.

3. *The poietic attitude*. The third guiding theological motif by which one's identity can be construed is distinctively different from the others, although often it is not recognized as such. Instead of creating an identity by derivation from the representation of the holy other, or by intersubjective relations, in this case the identity is construed from inside out. It differs from the first type, where identity is created from outside in, and the second, in which it is created by communal sharing. The relation to the holy in this latter case is the result of a sense of divine indwelling that has an authoritative and authorizing power, unbound to external canons and free from societal norms of procedure or communal bonds. If the first type has a theoretical quality, and the second a practical one, this one is poietic (from *poiesis*, production, creation) in character; it is the *production* of a *sui generis* identity. The charismatic movement within the RCC, the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements, and many forms of mystical experiences are expressions of this form of inner referentiality.

This is the most difficult "address" to be recognized because, unlike the other two, it does not rely on an external common reference and also does not engage in intersubjective practice to establish a common ground for identity building. A person embodies, becomes, the other who dwells inside. In relationship to the state and politics, this type will adjust as needed by means of dissimulation in order not to expose to confrontation that which is proper to it. Dissimulation is a sort of camouflage that protects an identity from exposure. The relationship of the Pentecostal movement to different regimes in Latin America is revealing of this attitude. If the first type says that the message is what rules the means, and for the second the motto is that the medium is the message, in this type the conviction is that the message disposes of the means at its own whim.

Clashes happen between these three. With all the differences and even tensions within each type, they show some cohesion internally, because they share the same principle or attitude by which identity is construed. Hence, there is within each type a shared spirit. But between them they are at odds, if that is what is meant by clash. There is no common denominator, except one: recognition of the need for construing one's identity in search for belonging in a global reality in which accountability is that which first prompted this search—that is, the reality of globalization when "addresses" disappear, responsibility falters, and the globe becomes flat.

If the clashes are the result of the effects of globalization and the lack of accountability it engenders, the only approach to respond to the challenge these clashes pose is precisely to be responsible, to answer back when we are addressed, addressed by God and by the neighbor. To remind us of the dispatches sent to us is the work of the chronicler, the one who registers the events of the day and reminds us of what has been left behind.

(P.S.: "Retirement means no pressure, no stress, no heartache . . . unless you play golf."—Gene Perret)

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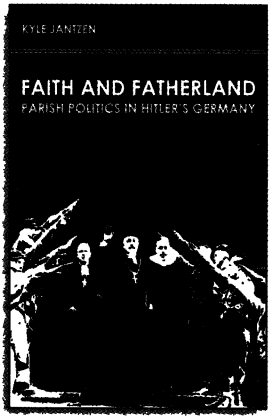

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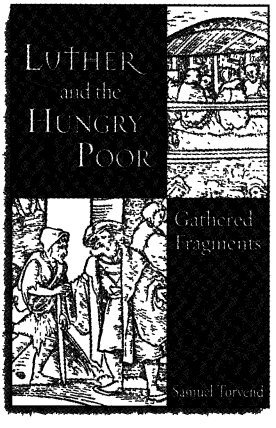

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Preaching Helps

Proper 22—Day of Thanksgiving, Series A

Judgment Wrapped in Promise

"What did you make of those pericopes?" I asked my friend **Audrey West**, who pens this series of Preaching Helps. What a privilege to be able to engage a biblical scholar with a keen mind and a preacher's heart. What joy that this kind of scholar fills the teaching positions in Bible at LSTC and our Lutheran seminaries—and many other schools, as well. Audrey's reflections, after writing these pages, are as follows:

"Most of the appointed Gospel readings in October and November come from the latter chapters of Matthew, in which two related themes dominate the narrative: eschatological judgment and conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities. At issue in the conflict is the proper understanding and interpretation of God's covenant law and how it is expressed faithfully in the lives of the people of God. This conflict over theology and practice underlies almost every Gospel text in this section of the lectionary cycle; consequently, we chose to follow the regular texts appointed for October 26, rather than those appointed for Reformation Day, so that we might hear Jesus' answer to the question about which commandment is the greatest.

"Each of the five parables appearing during these two months concludes with a warning of judgment. Wicked tenants who kill the landowner's son will come to a similar fate; a man without a wedding garment will be cast into the outer darkness, as will a servant who buries his master's talent; five foolish bridesmaids will be shut out of the wedding celebration, and the goats at Jesus' left hand will go away into eternal punishment. These are hard words, and they can be difficult words to preach. Yet, faithfulness to the gospel requires that we take the words seriously. These same parables, however, also include words of promise. The landowner has provided a vineyard with the capacity to produce good fruits for the reign of God; the king has prepared a wedding feast to which 'everybody you find' is invited; the Lord hands over magnificent gifts to the servants; the bridegroom will not be delayed forever but will return to preside at a wedding celebration; the sheep will go into eternal life. These parables function in their original contexts as warrant for moral behavior and encouragement to Jesus' followers in the face of conflict and persecution. They are not so much predictions of the end as they are lessons for 'every scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven' (13:52).

"In 1888 Adolph Jülicher argued that a proper interpretation of Jesus' parables required the discovery of 'one main point.' Many historical critics since then have agreed, even though their own interpretations sometimes diverge so widely that they give evidence against their own claims. More recently, biblical scholars have begun to

argue what preachers have long suspected: that the parables of Jesus are multivalent, suggesting 'meanings' that depend in large part on the contexts in which the parables are told and heard. The Gospels themselves give evidence of multiple interpretations, which we can see by studying, for example, the distinctions between Matthew's and Luke's versions of the Great Banquet (Mt 22:1–14; Lk 14:15–24). Further, the messages that we hear in Jesus' parables may depend also on where we see ourselves and our communities embodied in the characters and situations described in the parable. A message of judgment against evildoers will be heard differently in a community that has suffered as a result of that evil than it will if one recognizes oneself among the perpetrators."

You will notice that Audrey does not spell out for us "the one, single interpretation" of the parables. Instead, her essays are suggestive, highlighting possibilities for meanings that attempt to be faithful to Jesus' initial proclamation of the parables, to the context in which Matthew's Gospel proclaimed these stories to the early church, and the context(s) in which these parables are heard today. The same principles apply to her explication of the other lectionary texts included here. She writes: "God's Word is an active word, capable of bringing the message of God's reign wherever it is faithfully preached. Sometimes we can hear that word anew if we do not rush too quickly to nail down a single meaning."

Audrey notes that Matthew "is framed by the promise that Jesus is present with the church. He is 'Emmanuel, God with us,' the one who is 'there in the midst of them' wherever two or three are gathered. The promise of Jesus' presence runs throughout this Gospel, providing a hermeneutical key for Matthew's Christology. Whatever the conflict, whatever the announcement of judgment, whatever the situation faced by Jesus' followers and those who are coming to faith in him, this promise is sure: Jesus is with you always, even to the end of the age. These reflections take seriously this narrative context for all of the Matthean pericopes assigned during these months. Thus, we take our share in the blessings announced by Jesus in the Beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, blessed are *you.*"

Until recently, Audrey served full time as Associate Professor of New Testament at LSTC. Now an adjunct professor, she continues to teach occasionally in the ACTS D.Min. in Preaching program. A popular speaker and teacher, she is the recipient of the Associated Church Press "2004 Award of Excellence" for her study on the parables, "Everyday Surprises: The Parables of Jesus," published by *Lutheran Woman Today.* Her exegetical and homiletical essays have been published in *Christian Century* and *Lutheran Woman Today*, at *workingpreacher.org*, and in *Feasting on the Word* (Westminster John Knox), a new resource for preaching lectionary texts. Audrey lives with her spouse and several four-legged critters in Pennsylvania.

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

Proper 22
October 5, 2008

Isaiah 5:1–7
Psalm 80:7–15
Philippians 3:4b–14
Matthew 21:33–46

Just yesterday (in Matthew's narrative time), Jesus turned over the tables of the money-changers, a symbolic act that unnerved the Temple authorities. Imagine somebody walking into your sanctuary, shoving the offering plates out of the ushers' hands, and chastising you for using the church not as a place to worship the God of this world but as a place to hide out from the world (a "den of thieves," i.e., a hiding place).

Today Jesus is back at the Temple, where the chief priests and elders challenge his authority to speak and do such outrageous things. Jesus responds with this parable. Matthew has modified Mark's version, giving a distinctively Matthean ending: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

The pattern of this parable closely follows the vineyard parable immediately preceding it, in which a man's two sons go (or do not go) to work in the vineyard. Each parable is followed by Jesus' question to his opponents, their response, and Jesus' pronouncement of judgment. The earlier parable establishes the point—repeated in different ways by the parable of the Wicked Tenants and the parable of the Wedding Banquet—that God's reign conforms neither to human standards or goals nor to society's expectations: "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you" (21:31).

The story of the vineyard, leased to tenants who refuse to return the produce of the vineyard to its rightful owner, seems to be a barely veiled commentary on the performance of the Temple's religious leaders and the resulting judgment that will befall them on account of their mistreatment of God's representatives. God (the landowner) has given the Jewish leaders (the tenants) the responsibility of overseeing the vineyard (the people of God); however, the tenants have killed God's messengers (the prophets) and even God's own son (Jesus). Consequently, God's wrath will come upon them, and the vineyard will be given over to others. The allegory itself is rich with homiletical possibilities, but the parable also holds a number of meaning-making elements that suggest additional possibilities for today's audiences.

The vineyard: Vineyards, grapes, and wine are key images in the Gospels. Jesus' first public act in John's Gospel, for example, is to turn water into wine at a wedding celebration. Each of the Synoptics includes a saying about old wine and new wineskins (Mk 2:22; Lk 5:37; Mt 9:17), just as each includes a version of this parable of the wicked tenants. Two additional vineyard parables, The Laborers in the Vineyard (Mt 20:1–16) and The Two Sons (Mt 21:28), appear only in Matthew, the latter as one of the trio of parables in this section of the Gospel. Due to its importance in middle eastern agriculture, the vineyard is a significant Old Testament image, as well. As one of the gifts of God's promised land, the vineyard produces good things for the people of God (Deut 8:7–10). Excess grapes should not be harvested but should be left for the poor, widows, and orphans (Exod 23:11; Lev 19:10; Deut 24:21). This generosity on the part of vineyard owners is commanded as a faithful response to God's gifts of land and food, and it represents God's concern for the poor and marginalized. In addition to this connection between the vineyard and the promises of God, the prophets used

images of the vineyard in a metaphorical sense; e.g., in today's OT reading Isaiah depicts God as the vineyard owner who cares for the vineyard (God's people) and who also stands in judgment of it (Isa 5:1–7; 27:2–5; cf. also Prov 24:30; 31:16; Jer 12:5–13). "The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!" (Isa 5:7)

The fruits of the kingdom: Matthew's Jesus interprets the parable in verse 43: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom" (lit. "the fruits of it"). The underlying Greek repeats "fruits" (*karpos*) three additional times, although it is masked by the English translation ("harvest" in v. 34 and "produce" in vv. 34, 41). Matthew uses fruit/fruits more than any other NT writer, typically in an ethical sense; that is, in reference to deeds or actions that testify to the reality of being part of God's realm. John the Baptist warns those who come to see him at the river that they should "bear fruit worthy of repentance" (3:8). "You will know them by their fruits," Jesus says (7:16–20), for "this one [seed sown on good soil] is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (13:23). Trees (and, by implication, people) are known by their fruit: Good trees bear good fruit while bad trees bear bad fruit (7:18; 12:33); those not bearing good fruit are "cut down and thrown into the fire" (3:10). In our parable, the purpose of the vineyard—its very reason for existence—is to bear fruit for the vineyard owner, the one who has established it, protected it, and given what it needs to thrive.

The "you" from whom the kingdom is taken: As spoken by Jesus, the parable probably means that the kingdom is taken from the Jewish leaders, not from the Jewish people. Given the many points of contact in Matthew between Moses and Jesus, as well as his understanding that Jesus fulfills the law without abolishing it, Matthew's redaction of the parable also speaks against a wholesale rejection of the Jewish people. Whatever was meant in the original setting of the parable, today's preachers must beware of interpretations that fuel anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic positions. The canon itself points to a more open view, such as that found in Paul, himself a Jew (Phil 3:4b–6), who proclaimed that God's graciousness is inclusive of Jews and Gentiles alike. (On this point see, e.g., Rom 11:17–21.)

Insofar as the parable speaks a word of warning to the religious authorities of Jesus' (or Matthew's) day, it also speaks to all who have responsibility for the people of God today, and not simply to rostered leaders or other "professional theologians": church councils, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, paid and volunteer staff with leadership responsibilities, choir members, ushers, sacristans, readers, acolytes, etc.—all who are in positions of responsibility or authority wherever the people of God are gathered. Even a house church needs somebody to read Scripture, or to arrange for the place to meet, or to lead others in prayer. At church, at home, in the workplace, wherever Christians engage in daily life, the parable is a reminder that those who receive the gifts of God also bear a responsibility to nurture those gifts and to serve with hands open in offering the "fruits" of the harvest. We are empowered to do so by the one who has established us in (and as) the vineyard, so that we might join together with the apostle Paul in proclaiming, "Not that I have already obtained this, or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own"

(Phil 3:12). The vineyard and everything within it is God's gracious gift. It is ours so that we might return it, ultimately, to God. AW

Proper 23
October 12, 2008

Isaiah 25:1–9
Psalm 23
Philippians 4:1–9
Matthew 22:1–14

Jesus has entered into Jerusalem, center of economic, political, and religious control (21:1ff.), where the powers-that-be have challenged his authority (21:23). The parable of the Wedding Banquet is the third parable in a series of three (following the Two Sons and The Wicked Tenants) told in response to this conflict with the authorities. All three parables portray improbable folk who receive the benefits of the kingdom after the "regulars" reject its promises and responsibilities. A verse from the second parable is programmatic: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom" (21:43). Could it be that the powerful and the mighty (whoever these might be in your context), confident in their positions of privilege, will discover that God has a different plan in mind?

The king gives a wedding feast for his son, sending advance invitations to business owners, wealthy landowners, and other people of high regard. The religious authorities to whom Jesus told this parable (as well as the first hearers of Matthew's Gospel) would have recognized on the guest list folk from the upper levels of the king's realm, a "who's who, A-list" of invitees. One would expect such classy guests to show up to a banquet to which they had previously been invited and to which they had, presumably, given their RSVP. As is the custom, the king sends his servants to call the invitees when the meal is ready, and then again a second time. Apparently, the invitees' money-making endeavors are more important than this feast, for they refuse to come, their collective "No" smacking of conspiracy and rebellion. Putting an exclamation point on their revolt, they harass and murder the king's servants, just as people before and since have killed the prophets of God.

However well-regarded were the A-list invitees, it is obvious that the cutoff for the king's B-list is quite generous in the other direction. The single characteristic mentioned by the king, when he sends servants to find additional guests, is "everybody you can find" off of the main streets of the city. Like trees that bear good or bad fruit (Mt 7:17), the streets produce good and bad guests. Were they beggars, dependent on the generosity of the merchants passing by? Were they teenaged runaways, scrounging in the trash for something to eat? Were they prostitutes or gamblers or tax collectors? Extortionists, thieves, and murderers? Were they businesspersons or teachers or pastors or soccer moms or crack addicts or college students or artists or farmers or gang bangers, or elderly or mentally ill or socially inept folk? Which of these were the good, and which the bad? Up to this point in Matthew's Gospel Jesus has already pointed out that God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good alike (5:34) and that one might draw out treasure that is good or bad (12:35). Even the weeds and wheat are left to grow together for a time (13:30), perhaps because it is so difficult to tell them apart before they set seed. The open-endedness of the king's invitation suggests that human categories of good and bad are not necessarily the same as God's categories. It also suggests that our own self-assessments of which category we are in—Am I the good? or the bad?—might

bear further scrutiny in light of Jesus' parable. We think we know who God wants in and who God wants out. But do we?

Whenever I have discussed this parable with seminarians, pastors, or lay persons in various settings throughout the church, someone complains about the ending, and the poor guy without an appropriate jacket: "How can he be expected to have a wedding garment if he was hauled into the banquet from off the streets? It is not fair!" Not fair, indeed. We may recall that the invitation itself was not fair, if we judge fairness by human standards. Is it fair that the heavenly promise is offered to "everybody you can find" (Mt 22:9), a "feast of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear" (Isa 25:6), for the "good and the bad"? Is it fair that a metaphorical feast fit for a king's son is offered to the common folk as well, or that "the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Isa 25:8), whether or not we actually deserve it?

Consider one possible way of "hearing" the episode of the guy without a garment. Invited off the street, a wedding guest mingles with the crowd: drinking the wine, munching the roast beef, chatting up the other guests. Folks are surprised to see him there, as he does not usually hang out with their crowd; the guest is a little surprised himself, seeing as how he had forgotten there was even a banquet in the works. Never mind that the wedding had been the talk of the town for months, with the king's son getting betrothed and all. Of course there would be a banquet, although none of them had known the exact date. In fact, the guest's invitation had come so suddenly that he figured it was a "come as you are" affair. Surely it would not matter, just this once, to ignore the niceties of reciprocal hospitality and to show up in the stained clothes he'd been wearing all week. He had another garment—the one he used for special occasions—all but forgotten beneath a pile of grain sacks, but he assumed that nobody would notice if he didn't wear it.

He assumed wrong. The two-stage invitation process and the man without a wedding garment are reminders that we cannot take for granted that we know who is "in" and who is "out" of God's realm. God's expectations run counter to our own complacency and to the dominant culture's expectations of what constitutes the "good and bad" (Mt. 22:10). On the one hand, we like (even need) to be recognized and applauded for those things we do well; on the other hand, we often act as though we deserve a ribbon just for showing up. Our own mixed responses make it difficult to take comfort in the idea of a king who would wish that we'd wear something befitting the joy and celebration of a banquet.

The bad news is that we too easily kick ourselves out of the party by our own choices and assumptions. The good news? We have been invited to the feast, to a banquet table prepared for all. This is God's gracious gift to us: the unlikely, B-list guests, gathered off the streets and invited into a party larger and more generous than we can imagine. May we then, as other NT writers suggest, clothe ourselves in the garments of Christ (Eph 4:24; 6:15; Col 3:12–14;) so that we can respond to the invitation with the joy and celebration it deserves. AW

Proper 24
October 19, 2008

Isaiah 45:1–7
Psalm 96:1–9 (10–13)
1 Thessalonians 1:1–10
Matthew 22:15–22

Jesus has already had it out with the chief priests and elders, the scribes, and the Pharisees (21:15, 23, 46), and now he goes toe to toe with the Herodians (government loyalists) and the disciples of the Pharisees. According to Matthew's narrative this is an ongoing conflict that ultimately leads the officials to conspire to arrest Jesus and kill him (26:4; cf. 12:14). For now, the question they put to Jesus—whether it is lawful (i.e., according to Torah) to pay taxes to the emperor—is not simply a conversation starter. It is a test (πειράζετε, v. 18), just as they have tested him previously (16:1; 19:3) and will again (22:35).

The NRSV's heading, "The question about paying taxes," implies that the issue at stake is a matter of one's relationship to the government—certainly an important topic today in the weeks leading up to the U.S. presidential election. Evidence that it is more than this comes from the way the questioners attempt to "butter up" Jesus with their slavish praise of his character. "Teacher," they begin, addressing him by a title that in Matthew is used only by those who are not Jesus' followers, while his disciples and those who are coming to faith address Jesus as Lord, κύριος. "Teacher, we know that you are sincere [even though we do not believe you], and you teach the way of God in accordance with truth [which 'truth' we do not believe, or we wouldn't be testing you right now], and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality" [but we think you should give us more respect and deference]. The sarcasm is palpable. They do not believe their own claims, but they speak more truly than they know. Their words do not match who they are at the core, which further betrays them as the hypocrites Jesus calls them (v. 18; see also ch. 23).

Jesus asks to see the appropriate coin, and then asks a question of his own, its impact obscured by the NRSV translation: "Whose head (εἰκών, image) is this, and whose title?" The coin's image was the Emperor, including an inscription with the phrase "son of the deified one." It would be no surprise if the Herodians, collaborators with Rome, had pockets full of such coins. Imagine the irony, though, of pietistic Jewish Pharisees (or their disciples) standing in the Temple precincts and holding up a coin bearing a human image and an inscription to the son of (a) God!

At stake in the exchange is the proper interpretation of the Jewish law—a key issue throughout Matthew, in which Jesus is portrayed as the New Moses. Indeed, Jesus' first public act in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, is reminiscent of Moses coming down Mt. Sinai to deliver God's covenantal law to the people. Only Matthew contains Jesus' statement about "every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven" (13:52). The conflict with religious authorities that runs through chapters 21 and 22 is fundamentally a conflict about the right interpretation of the law and probably reflects the realities of Matthew's own time, post-70, as much or more than it reflects the earthly ministry of Jesus. When the chief priests and elders challenge Jesus at the Temple, asking by what authority he is acting (21:23), they are demanding a justification from Torah. Before long in the narrative Jesus will be challenged by the Sadducees, who raise a legal question about marriage (22:23), and then by a lawyer (that is, a professional Torah-expert), who wants to

know which commandment is the greatest (22:34).

By the time Matthew was written, after the destruction of the Temple (and, hence, the demise of Temple-related groups, such as chief priests and Sadducees), Pharisaic Judaism was on the rise, fueled by a concern for how to live out the covenant with God when there is no longer a Temple in which to offer sacrifices. Matthew's community is affected by these realities, and his Gospel reflects a strong claim for Jewish identity over against rival claims. If their question was "What does it mean to be Jewish in this context?" perhaps our question is "What does it mean to be Christian in our context?"

"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and to God the things that are God's" (22:21). Jesus' answer marks the end of this test, but it does not mark the end of our discernment about the proper relationship among competing authorities or competing loyalties. The emperor has authority to issue coins and demand taxes, so it is "lawful" (in a religious sense) to pay them. On the other hand, the emperor is not God, despite the coin's inscription. As Isaiah reminds us, God proclaims: "I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no god" (Isa 45:5). We do well to remember that all things belong to God (Ps 24:1; see also today's OT reading, Isa 45:5–7).

Ultimately, then, the issue is less about taxes than it is about allegiance. Will we worship the image on the coin? or will we worship the one who is the image of God?

How we answer that question, or even what our answer will look like in daily practice, is a matter for ongoing discernment. Jesus offers no oral or written commentary, no recipe book, no step-by-step instructions to delineate those things that rightly belong to the political authority (or to our employers, or city officials, or neighborhood groups, or even to our families or relationships or congregational leadership) and those that do not. The task of reflecting on and wrestling with those questions is a task for the church through the ages and those who constitute it, called and empowered by the one "who calls you by your name" (Isa 45:3). The question "What belongs to Caesar?" must always be asked and answered in juxtaposition with the question "What belongs to God?"

In the end, the opponents to Jesus "were amazed and left him and went away" (Mt 22:22). Typically in Matthew, people are amazed when Jesus demonstrates his authority and power: to control nature (8:27), to cast out demons (9:33), and to heal the mute, the maimed, the lame, and the blind (15:31). Within the narrative world of Matthew, amazement is a door that opens to the possibility of a faithful response: Will their amazement lead people to walk through the door and follow Jesus or to slam the door and reject him? Will it empower them to think differently about the world and their place in it, or will they remain stuck in old ways of seeing? Will it lead them to join those who are "trained for the kingdom of heaven" (13:52) and focused on the things of God, or will they remain trapped in the kingdom of this world and focused on the things of Caesar?

One of the gifts of the gospel is the invitation to be amazed once again: to be baffled and confused by the words of the Savior, to ponder his message, to reflect together, to wrestle with the good news of God's reign in our midst. AW

Proper 25
October 26, 2008

Leviticus 19:1–2, 15–18
Psalm 1
1 Thessalonians 2:1–8
Matthew 22:34–46

According to Matthew, everybody who is anybody in Jerusalem power circles is out to get Jesus. Chief priests, elders, scribes, lawyers, Sadducees, Pharisees—folks who would not necessarily agree with one another about the proper interpretation of the Scriptures—all want to take this teacher to task, to trip him up in questions on the law. If they cannot nail him on political grounds ("Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor?"), maybe they can do so on religious ones ("Which commandment in the law is the greatest?").

They could have ignored this character from the backwoods of Galilee. After all, he has no political clout, and he is not preaching violent rebellion, given that he teaches people to love their enemies (Mt 5:44) and turn the other cheek (5:39). But still, there is the matter of all of these people in Jerusalem for the festival, with crowds gathering around Jesus and proclaiming him a prophet (21:9–11). And everybody knows what prophets do, how they rail against religious leaders, challenging the status quo. A prophet in the city during festival-time is certainly a nuisance, probably a problem, and possibly a danger.

It must have been frustrating, the way that Jesus bested his opponents at every turn. When they question his authority (Mt 21:23ff.) he rebuffs them with riddles (The Two Sons, The Wicked Tenants, The Wedding Banquet). When they challenge him directly (22:17, 23:24–28) he responds with enigma. Whenever they try to defeat him with the Torah, they end up feeling defeated themselves. Tired of watching this Galilean overcome his opponents at every turn, the Pharisees take matters into their own hands by sending one of their best—a professionally trained theologian ("lawyer")—to test Jesus with the ultimate rabbinic question: "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?"

The question is important to the Pharisees. A relatively small Jewish sect at the time of Jesus, Pharisaic Judaism rose in prominence after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The notoriety of the Pharisees in the Gospel narratives, as well as the polemic against them, probably reflects the authors' own time more than it does the historical Jesus. In any case, questions about the law were at the heart of Pharisaic Judaism, particularly questions about how—exactly—one might best love God by one's adherence in daily life to the commands of Torah. They did not have to agree on the answers; indeed, the rabbinic writings testify that opposing views could be (and were) sustained, side by side. The dialogue that results from the lawyer's question tells us less about who gets it right (since there is nothing in Jesus' answer that would be opposed by the Pharisees) than that Jesus' mission cannot be undone by any challenge, whether political, professional, legal, religious, or personal. Jesus lives out the "greatest commandment" by his consistent focus on God and "the things that are God's" (Mt 22:21).

When put to the test, Jesus answers with reference to the Old Testament. The first line of his two-part answer ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind") quotes the Shema (Deut 6:4–5 LXX), the purpose statement of the Jewish people of God. The second line, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," is a quote from Lev 19:18, part of today's reading. Thus,

Jesus does not create his answer out of whole cloth; his answer derives fully from the Jewish Scriptures and would be affirmed by his Jewish interlocutors. What is new is the claim that these two commandments constitute twin aspects of a single hermeneutical key for understanding the Scriptures ("the law and the prophets"). Do you want to know how to love God? Love your neighbor. Do you want to know how to love your neighbor? Love God. Love in this context has to do with one's actions, not with a feeling or sense of affection. After all, Jesus teaches that love of neighbor includes love of enemies (Mt 5:44), and not many of us can say we feel affection for our enemies. Nonetheless, we are empowered to engage in deeds of love by the presence of Christ among us ("where two or three are gathered," Mt 18:20).

Having responded to the question put to him, Jesus turns the tables and asks a question of his own: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" It is a simple question, with a simple answer, an answer the Pharisees know with certainty. The Messiah is the son of David, the offspring of David's line (e.g., Ps 132:17). Even the genealogy of Matthew's Gospel says so (Mt 1:1; cf. 9:7; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15). But these theologically trained challengers are about to see their theological certainties come undone. Jesus complicates their answer and shows them that it is not so simple. He turns the questioners on their heels by turning their question on its head. From that day forward, no one dared to ask him any more questions (22:46).

Perhaps we should not be too critical of the Pharisees' desire to assess Jesus based on his answers to their questions. How often do we do the same thing, using questions and answers as a litmus test: "Where do you live?" "Which church do you attend?" "What do you think about the war?" "Which presidential candidate do you support?" "Do you tithe?" "What's your stance on the ordination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons?" "Are you saved?" "Are you supporting [insert important cause here]?" "Do you have a job?" "Do you oppose casino gambling in your town?" "Do you eat organic food?" Too often we presuppose that if we know a person's answers to one or more of these questions we will know their answers to the rest. Jesus overturns our efforts and demonstrates the narrow vision of such an approach.

It is worth asking what it might look like to love God and love neighbor in the particular contexts to which and within which God has called us, freed as we are by the power of the gospel. According to Matthew, Jesus met people where they were, on street corners or in the Temple precincts, engaging their need, whether for healing or for debate. The apostle Paul, according to his letter to the Philippians, related to the Thessalonians like a nurse tending to her own children (1 Thess 2:7), to share "not only the gospel of God but also our own selves" (1 Thess 2:8). The Scriptures are full of examples of people of God who have loved God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their mind, and their neighbors as themselves. No doubt our own churches and communities are full of examples as well. AW

All Saints
November 2, 2008

Revelation 7:9–17
Psalm 34:1–10, 22
1 John 3:1–3
Matthew 5:1–12

As is true for most of the Bible, each of the readings for today was originally written for people at the margins, outsiders to the dominant culture. These people were suffering, sometimes because of their faith in Christ. The book of Revelation, like most apocalyptic literature, is grounded in a community's experience of distress and persecution under a more powerful foe. Matthew's Gospel, written at around the same time, within a couple of decades of the destruction of Jerusalem and the enslavement and exile of many Jews from Palestine, gives evidence of a Jewish Christian community under stress that is defining itself over against other expressions of Judaism under the domination of Roman imperialism. The language of 1 John suggests that it was written in response to significant opposition as well, in a conflict that appears to have originated within the community itself.

The experiences of opposition, conflict, persecution, discrimination, and, at least for some, poverty shapes these writings in such a way that our hearing of them will be enhanced to the extent that we are able to share in those experiences, whether vicariously or in actuality.

The passage from Revelation describes a gathering of saints before the throne of God, where the multitude "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev 7:9), who "have come out of the great ordeal" (θλῖψις, suffering, distress) worship day and night. It is a scene of heavenly consolation, where the suffering endured on earth is made right as "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev 7:17). The focus here is on the martyrs—those who have died for the sake of Christ—and on a future promise, when the dead will see God face to face: "They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life" (Rev 7:17).

The Beatitudes in Matthew also offer a promise, available in the future and, in a more limited way, also available now, in the "already" of our "not yet." The blessings outlined in Mt 5:3–10 are framed by an *inclusio* of present-tense verbs: promises fulfilled now, in the already. "Blessed are the poor in spirit (or, "the poor in spirit are blessed"), for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3); and "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven" (5:10). This framing technique gives a context for the remaining blessings outlined in the middle of the passage (vv. 4–9), each of which includes a *future* promise (they will be comforted, they will inherit, they will receive, they will see, etc.). Jesus' followers can trust in these future promises because they are already receiving the kingdom of heaven in the present. Indeed, the promises for the future enable us to call the present "blessed," though not with the fullness of the future envisioned in Revelation. In Matthew, and in our own lives, we still have tears in our eyes.

In the scene from Revelation, the promises are given to those who have come through the "great ordeal." Throughout the world and in too many places Christians live in danger to themselves and their families precisely because of their confession of Jesus as Lord; many of them will join the martyrs in heaven for the sake of their faith. Likewise, people around the globe and in our

own cities and communities and within our faith tradition suffer extreme poverty, disease, lack of medical care, lack of clean water, and limited or no job prospects because of systems of oppression that prevent their access to these things. Surely the promises of these texts are promises for them.

But what is the promise for those who do not suffer these inequities in such a direct way? The Beatitudes expand the promises so that even those who are not persecuted, who do not risk their lives when they worship publicly, who have not been killed for the sake of Christ, even these have a share in the promises. The "How long?" of the martyrs is not limited to the martyrs. All who have ever mourned, hungered for righteousness, felt a poverty of spirit, or sought peace in their heart, their home, their neighborhood, or their world can find themselves in these Beatitudes, these promised blessings.

Indeed, all who stand in need of blessing and wonder how long they must go without it are themselves part of this story of promise. Many in our congregations have worked for justice (Mt 5:6); many have stood for peace (5:9); many have engaged in acts of mercy (5:7). On the day of All Saints, for which these passages are appointed, many will be remembering loved ones who have died: the saints who have gone before us, whose passing we grieve. On this day, and on all days, the promises belong to these as well: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (5:4).

One could take these passages in a very different homiletical direction. The Sermon on the Mount, to which the Beatitudes serve as introduction, is the first public act of Jesus (after the baptism) narrated in the Gospel of Matthew: not an exorcism, demonstrating his power over the demons (as in Mark), or a prophetic sermon identifying himself with God's anointed one who brings a message of release to the oppressed (as in Luke), or a miraculous sign designed to extend the festivities (as in John), but an extended time of teaching that reveals Jesus as the new Moses for the people of God. He is the compassionate Messiah who calls his followers to "strive first for the kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33). The insistence on moral perfection remains firm, but so does the promise that Christ is Emmanuel, God with us.

The teaching Jesus shares through the Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the Beatitudes, is a vision of a countercultural community—described by some interpreters as a "contrast society"—that is out of step with the dominant norms and expectations of the surrounding culture. The Beatitudes reveal a reversal of social values, announcing blessings upon the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice (δικαιοσυνη), the peacemakers, and so on. They make clear, as well, that the cost of following Jesus into such a life is likely to be persecution (5:10–12).

The martyrs before the throne and the blessings outlined in the Beatitudes remind Jesus' followers that there is always a reason for hope. The promise that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev 7:17) is a promise that is fully satisfied only at a future time, and it creates for God's people a new lens through which to see the world in the present. Blessed are they who cling to the promise, despite the pressures brought by the world and its claims to the contrary. As First John suggests, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." AW

Proper 27
November 9, 2008

Amos 5:18–24
or Wisdom 6:12–16
Wisdom of Solomon 6:17–20
and Psalm 70
1 Thessalonians 4:13–18
Matthew 25:1–13

The readings appointed for this day show vastly different pictures. The "day of the Lord" for Amos is like a sketch in charcoal, "gloom with no brightness in it" (5:20), while First Thessalonians paints a bright image of a celebratory procession to meet Jesus at his return (4:16–18).

So which is it: gloom and doom, or a rousing parade? These two pictures are displayed throughout the canon, as the twin aspects of God's judgment and God's mercy, characterized in terms of punishment and reward. The parable of the ten bridesmaids in Matthew combines the two images, depicting the procession to a middle-of-the-night party with half the people left standing on the wrong side of the entry door, the other half welcomed right in.

Very little is known with certainty about wedding customs at the time of Jesus, other than what we might glean from the parable itself. Commentators debate the details: Were the women carrying torches, made of rags soaked in oil and held aloft, or were they holding small oil lamps in their hands? Who would have participated in the procession? Was this a procession prior to the wedding, so that the young women are waiting with the bride at her parents' house? or were they waiting after the wedding for the groom and his bride to return to the groom's parents' house?

Historical details about weddings may help to flesh out the picture that is drawn by the parable, but they are not necessary for attempts to capture the gist of its message.

The figure of the bridegroom is known from the OT as a metaphor for God, with the people of Israel represented by the bride; e.g., "For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isa 62:5); or, "Thus says the LORD: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (Jer 2:2).

The image carries forward into the NT, although the emphasis shifts; the bridegroom is Jesus Christ, while the bride is the people of God. "Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Rev 19:7; cf. 21:9). Matthew recounts a scene in which followers of John the Baptist approach Jesus and ask, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus' response identifies himself as a bridegroom: "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast" (Mt 9:15). A second parable in Matthew compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who gives a wedding feast for his son (22:1ff), while Paul identifies the church as a bride engaged to be married to Christ, her bridegroom (2 Cor 11:2).

Despite the consistency of the metaphor (groom = Jesus/God; bride = church/people of God), it is striking that the bride does not appear in the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids, forcing hearers/readers to ponder their own place in the story. Most interpreters suggest that the bridesmaids (*parthenos* = "young woman") represent the church, "standing in" where the bride would normally function in the metaphor.

A homiletical expansion of the parable might build on the role of Jesus as bridegroom, and how that image gives flesh to one's understanding or experience of Christ's relationship to the church, to believers, to the world; e.g., the celebratory nature of most weddings or civil unions; the promises and commitments made by each member of the couple to be faithful to one another; the public sealing or binding of a relationship that takes place at a wedding.

Faithfulness to the parable itself and to its place in Matthew's Gospel will consider the eschatological emphasis of the story. The parable appears in the fifth and final discourse of Matthew (24:1–25:46), which is prompted by the disciples' question, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (24:3). Jesus' answer, throughout the section, repeats the injunction that the day and hour are unknowable (24:36; cf. 24:23–27, 44, 50).

Each of the Synoptic Gospels reports Jesus' pronouncement about the *parousia*: "this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place (Mt 24:34; parallels in Mk 13:30, Lk 21:32). What Jesus meant was the subject of concern with the earliest Christians, and many were (apparently) anxious to figure out exactly when he would return. 2 Peter 3:3–10 gives evidence that this concern remained strong well into the second century. Again and again Matthew emphasizes that the question is not when Jesus will return but what difference it makes in the meantime. What does it look like to "keep awake," as the ending of the parable enjoins (25:13; cf. 24:42; 26:38; 26:40–41), especially when every one of the ten bridesmaids actually falls asleep? Being ready with sufficient oil to keep the lamps lit when the bridegroom is delayed is clearly a metaphor for such watchfulness, but still we must interpret what "keeping awake" or "being ready" means for the people of God today.

The parable is less a pronouncement of the future and more an invitation to do things differently in the present. Matthew's eschatology is inextricably tied to his Christology: Christ is Emmanuel, "God with us" (Mt 1:23; cf. 28:20), who is present "wherever two or three are gathered." In the resurrected Christ, the Son of Humanity is already present, wedding feast at the ready, even as we await his coming into a future that is not yet. Throughout the days of waking and sleeping (note that all ten bridesmaids slept while they waited and all ten awoke at the announcement of his arrival), as we await Christ's *parousia*, we risk missing his presence among us if we become distracted by the things we lack (our sinfulness?). Jesus desires to welcome all into the feast, but if we are out "shopping for oil," metaphorically speaking, we may well shut ourselves out of the party. In short, we risk taking ourselves away from access to the gifts of the celebration that are available now, available even to those whose spirits are flagging (Mt 5:3), to those who mourn (5:4; cf. 1 Thess 4:13b), to those who are meek (5:5), to all those for whom the blessings of the kingdom of heaven have already been prepared (5:1–11). To be sure, the banquet for the Son of Humanity is a heavenly one, but it has an earthly incarnation as well. AW

Proper 28
November 16, 2008

Zephaniah 1:7, 12–18
Psalm 90:1–8 (9–11), 12
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11
Matthew 25:14–30

Recent interpretations of the Parable of the Talents have tended in one of two directions. The traditional interpretation follows an allegorical reading: The man going on a journey is God/Christ, the servants are Christians, and the talents represent gifts for the people of God. (A talent is worth at least 15 times the annual wage for a laborer; as such, it might represent gifts of faith, hope, love, grace, or any of the other magnificent blessings of God.) The servants who put God's gifts to work are rewarded, while the servant who buries his gifts is punished by being cast into the outer darkness. Presumably, even his fear of judgment has not motivated him to multiply what was entrusted to him. In short, God has given bountiful gifts, and we are called to multiply those gifts for the sake of God's kingdom.

The "surprise" in this interpretation is the figure of the third servant, and we would do well to recognize ourselves in him. Perhaps the hole he digs is not the first hole he has gotten himself into. Perhaps the messages of his life have told him to hold back, to protect and defend, to stay safe . . . to be afraid. Or perhaps nothing has prepared him for what to do with such a gift. If he cannot do something great with it, he can at least try not to lose it. One can never tell who might want to steal what he has been given, so he takes no chances. He keeps his head down, stays quiet, and starts digging the hole. Haven't we found ourselves in the pit with him—timid, fearful, unable to take risks, even for the sake of God's realm?

The Gospel of Matthew as context gives warrant for this first, traditional interpretation. The servant who buries the money is like a tree that does not bear good fruit (3:10; 7:19; cf. 21:19), while the servants who double their money are like the faithful servant in the parable of 24:45–51, whom "his master will find at work when he arrives ("when the lord comes," 24:42; cf. 25:19). . . . [And] he will put that one in charge of all his possessions" (24:47; cf. 25:14).

The second interpretation sees a realistic picture of the limited-goods society in which the parable was first told. In this reading, the master is a wealthy person—not a representation of God—who has become rich unjustly, on the backs of others, "reaping where [he] did not sow, and gathering where [he] did not scatter seed" (Mt 25:24, 26). The first two servants buy into his methods, multiplying his money by dishonest means. The third servant refuses to participate in this system of exploitation (e.g., he follows the Jewish injunction against usury rather than investing the master's money with bankers, v. 27), and so what little he has is taken from him. Thus, the parable restates the reality of the world: The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Like Jesus, the servant who acts in ways counter to cultural norms is "cast out" to a place of suffering for his refusal to participate in a system of oppression.

Readers might ask where God is in this interpretation of the parable. Perhaps God, through Jesus, is with the third servant. Perhaps Jesus is kneeling beside him as he digs the hole, keeping the gift unstained by the world's corruption, refusing to participate in the oppressive practices of the powerful. Perhaps Jesus is beside him as he works and sweats, doing the right thing, respecting the enormous value of the gift. Perhaps Jesus knows and understands what will happen to this man: The powers-that-be will cast him out and give to somebody else

what rightly belongs to him. The dominant culture can do that to a person. As it entices with promises of bigger and better and richer and more important, it diminishes those who suffer under its systems of oppression. Jesus challenges the ways of that culture, and it costs him his life. He stands with the third servant as Emmanuel—God with us—even into the depths of that deep hole.

Contextual warrants for this second interpretation derive from the eschatological focus of Matthew and especially the discourse that runs through chapters 24–25. The money hidden in the ground is like a treasure hidden in a field (13:44); the day will come when Jesus "will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world" (13:35). The two servants who make money on the arrangement may have "gained" more wealth (25:20, 22), but it is an empty gain: "what will it profit if they gain the world but forfeit their life?" (16:26). Immediately following the parable this Gospel proclaims that when the Son of Humanity comes in his glory, the world will be judged accordingly (Mt 25:31ff.).

These two different readings of the parable convey two different understandings of the nature of God. The traditional view portrays a God who judges according to the standards of prudent investment and metes out sentences accordingly. If preaching from that perspective, one should be careful not to present a picture of a God who is just like the boss at work, or just like the hard-hearted corporate world that rewards those who make profits and fires those who don't. Scripture speaks of God's judgment, but typically in ways that sharply contrast with the ways of this world. Even in Matthew, the laborers in the vineyard (20:1–16) and the pearl of great price (13:45) fly in the face of traditional business practices. The stringent judgment of this passage should not be stressed to the point that it obliterates the grace found in the rest of the Gospel.

The newer interpretation of the parable sees God as one who calls people in the midst of oppression and struggle and is "with them always, even to the end of the age." Those who are weary and heavy laden in the face of a world that seeks to crush them will find their rest in a God who judges not the oppressed who have to hunker down but the oppressors who see the oppressed only in terms of domination and elimination.

Both interpretations pick up Matthew's strong ethical bent and the necessity of watchfulness and faithfulness as we await the Lord's return. Both fit well within the emphasis on eschatological judgment so prevalent in these chapters of Matthew's Gospel. They do so for very different reasons, however. The traditional interpretation calls us to be watchful and faithful in the face of impending judgment, because we do not want the judge to return, find us wanting, and punish us. The other calls us to be watchful and faithful in the face of forces and powers arrayed against us (and against God) by our culture. It calls for the patience and endurance of the saints, faithfully hoping for the day when the judge will return, find us faithful to God, and vindicate us. AW

Christ the King/ Reign of Christ November 23, 2008

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24
Psalm 95:1–7a
Ephesians 1:15–23
Matthew 25:31–46

The promise is sure. God will search for the sheep and seek them out. God will rescue them, gather and feed them. God will bring back the strayed ones, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak. God will be their shepherd (Ezek 34:11–16).

One does not need to know much about sheep or even about the job of a shepherd to hear the words of comfort and encouragement in Ezekiel's prophecy. The pastoral image woven into the tapestry of Ezekiel's words is an image of peace and security, of compassion and care, even in the face of exile, abandonment, hunger, loss, and weakness. The image engenders hope and confidence in the promise that God does not abandon God's people, no matter what.

The verses that are excised from the reading (34:17–19) represent a significant part of this tapestry of promise. From them we learn that there are some sheep who respond to God's gracious gift by eating and drinking in such a way that others cannot share in the food and water provided by the shepherd's care. As the lectionary text continues we learn that some sheep become fat at the expense of the starving ones and are abusing the weaker members of the flock. The terms are metaphorical, but they sound a realistic note in this age of consumerism, overconsumption, and destruction of the environment, whether by individuals, corporations, or nations. Ezekiel convicts many of us with the charge that some among God's own are behaving in ways that prevent others from experiencing the fullness of the promise. And, yet, the promise remains sure.

The scene at the heavenly throne room in Matthew 25 shares some images already familiar in Ezekiel, most notably the metaphors of shepherd and sheep. The passage draws together several christological titles known from earlier in Matthew's Gospel: Son of Humanity (or Son of Man), Shepherd, King, Lord. As Son of Humanity Jesus is the one who is to come (10:23; 16:27) but also the one who has already walked the earth, who has suffered and died at the hands of others (17:12, 22; 20:18; 26:2, 45), giving over his own life as a ransom for many (20:28). He has the ability to forgive sins as well as judge by repaying whatever has been done (16:27). He will be seated in glory (29:28) at the right hand of God (24:64). As Shepherd he is the compassionate leader of his people (9:36), the one who willingly goes after the single stray sheep (18:12). As King he stands in the line of King David, distinct from the rulers of the world (2:1–3; 27:29, 37, 42), and as Lord he has the power of God to heal (8:2, 8, 9:28, etc.) as well as to welcome (or not) others into the reign of heaven (7:21).

More important than these titles, however, is their convergence in the person of Jesus the Messiah, giving content to the christological import of the throne room scene. Thus, the ethics outlined in this pericope are inextricably bound to Matthew's christological understanding: This one who separates the sheep from the goats is Jesus the Messiah, who was crucified, who has the power to forgive as well as to judge.

Given the christological themes of the passage, it is notable that the criteria on which the "sheep and the goats" will be judged do not include confession of Jesus as Lord. There is no discussion of justification by faith, no mention of forgiveness, no ex-

plication of key doctrinal themes—none of the heady, intellectual wrangling often preferred by those of us who are professional theologians. Mentioned, rather, are works of mercy: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting those who are imprisoned. Even the righteous ones among the nations (τὰ ἔθνη, nations, people, Gentiles, others) who stand at the Son's right hand seem surprised enough by the criteria to ask the question, "When did we do these things?" The answer: Whenever you did them to "the least of these who are my family (ἀδελφοί, siblings), you did them to me."

If we listen hard enough, perhaps we will hear in the background Jesus' earlier debate with the Pharisees, when they asked him which is the greatest commandment (Mt 22:34–46, Proper 25). His answer can be summarized this way: Love God and love neighbor. As suggested in the discussion of texts for that day, the implication of this two-sided commandment is that we love God by loving neighbor and love neighbor by loving God. Similarly, according to the throne room pronouncement, those who love their neighbor (the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger) are showing their love for Jesus. In the end, then, the ones who stand at the right hand of the Son of Humanity are those who have acted in ways that are consistent with the confession that Jesus is Lord.

Readers familiar with the rest of the Gospel of Matthew will recognize that the judgment taking place in the throne-room is consistent with Jesus' teaching throughout his ministry. The separation of the righteous (25:37) from the accursed (25:41) mirrors the distinctions between good and evil or insiders and outsiders that we have seen in several of the parables included in the lectionary readings during the past two months. The new and former (wicked) tenants, the guests who are welcomed to the king's banquet and the one who is booted out, the wise and foolish bridesmaids, the servants who acted appropriately or inappropriately with the master's talents—each of these stories reflects the ethical demands placed upon any who would be trained for the kingdom of heaven (13:52). As Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16, 20).

With all of this ethical teaching it may be tempting to get caught up in trying to determine who gets to sit on the right side of the throne. Surely, we think, we will be there with the good sheep, the ones who have done all those good deeds! And those other folk (whoever they may be in the varieties of contexts in which we preach), certainly they are over there on the left, with the goats, lining up for punishment because of the many ways they have fallen short on the scale of merciful deeds.

As tempting as it is to jump to such judgments, we are reminded by the gospel not to make that call. At nearly every turn of Jesus' earthly ministry we have been reminded that our ways are not the ways of God, that Jesus' criteria for judgment are not the same as the world's criteria, and that Jesus came "not to call the righteous but the sinners" (9:13). The scene in the heavenly throne room is a call for faithful response, not a blueprint for our own judgmental predictions. Will it be disciples (cf. the request of the mother of James and John, 20:20ff.) or will it be bandits (who were crucified with Jesus, one at his right and one at his left, 27:38) who sit closest to the Messiah in the *eschaton*? Will it be us, or will it be others for whom the kingdom has been prepared from the foundation of the world (25:34)? Or will it, perhaps, be everyone? The call is not ours to make. Instead, with the writer of Ephesians we confess that "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right

hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come" (Eph 1:20–21). AW

Day of Thanksgiving November 27, 2008

Deuteronomy 8:1–18
Psalm 65
2 Corinthians 9:6–15
Luke 17:11–19

The encounter between Jesus and the ten lepers represents one healing among many in Luke; indeed, Luke mentions healing (ἰάομαι) more than all the other Gospels combined (eleven times in Luke vs. eight times in the others). In addition to general statements about Jesus' power to heal (Lk 5:17; cf. 6:18; 9:11), Luke narrates several episodes in which Jesus heals individuals (e.g., the centurion's servant, 7:17; the woman with the hemorrhage, 8:47; the man with dropsy, 14:4), and he tells us that Jesus sent his own disciples to "proclaim the kingdom and to heal" (9:2). Jesus' gift of healing is one element of the text that may provide a sermon's launching point. Other possibilities appear below.

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (Lk 17:11). He had intended to visit a Samaritan village on the first leg of the trip, but the Samaritans refused to offer hospitality (they did not "receive" him), so he left that place and went elsewhere (9:51–56). It is striking that his encounter with the ten men with leprosy takes place as he enters another village, this one on the border between Samaria and Galilee (17:11–12), neither fully inside Jewish territory nor fully outside. Jesus has crossed a boundary into a "no man's land" between rival groups that have been in conflict for decades. A long time ago they were one people, but after generations of exile and return, after changes in the political scene and conflicts about the right way (and place) to worship God, Samaritan and Jewish men were more likely to call one another "other" than they were to call one another "brother." (One wonders if their shared adversity provided an opportunity for the ten lepers to cross these boundaries in order to band together for support in the face of their separation from families and friends. There is probably something to be learned from their example.)

The ten call out, "have mercy on us!" (17:13; cf. the man who was blind in Jericho, who asks the same, 18:38–39). After seeing them (and without touching them, in contrast to almost every other healing encounter), Jesus commands the men to go and show themselves to the priests. It is only while they are on their way that they are "made clean" (καθαρίζω, in Luke used primarily with reference to leprosy). In an earlier leprosy cleansing (5:12ff.) Jesus first heals the man and then tells him to go to the priest. This time, the men are sent first and healed second. To their credit, and even before they have evidence of results, the men take steps in the direction that Jesus has told them to go. Insofar as the passage teaches by example, in what ways might we be called and empowered to do the same thing?

When one of the ten returns to Jesus after being healed, he does more than say "Thank you." Thanksgiving is the last of a whole series of acts in response to the healing he has just experienced: He turns back (ὑποστρέφω, "return"), he praises God (δοξάζω), he worships (lit. "fell on his face,") and he gives thanks (εὐχαριστέω). When Jesus comments on what has just happened, with his implied criticism of "the other nine," the emphasis falls on two of the man's actions: turning back and praising

God. "Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" (17:18). Jesus seems to be focused less on the thanksgiving than he is on the returning and giving glory to God. (Or, perhaps he understands the thanksgiving to be constituted by returning and giving glory to God.) In any case, these two aspects of the Samaritan's response bear further investigation.

"Return" and "praise" provide a literary frame for the whole of Luke. In the beginning of the Gospel, the shepherds, after traveling to Jerusalem to see the infant Jesus, "returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen" (2:20). At the end, the disciples, having witnessed Jesus' ascension, "worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem in great joy and they were continually in the Temple blessing God" (24:52). Thus Jesus' birth and his ascension are marked by the responses of returning and offering praise, glory, or blessing to God. The crucifixion is also an occasion for glorifying God: the centurion "when [he] saw what had taken place, praised God and said, 'Certainly this man was innocent'" (23:47). With ties to the birth, death, and resurrection (ascension) of Jesus, "returning" and "giving praise" to God become hermeneutical lenses through which we are invited to see (and hear) the good news of this Gospel.

During our celebration of Thanksgiving, what might it look like for us, as individuals and as congregations, to return and give praise to God for the gift of Jesus?

All ten lepers approach Jesus. They call him by name (they know who he is). They ask him for mercy (they know what he is able to do). When Jesus tells them to "go," to show themselves to the priests, they all respond in obedience, and every one of them is healed. Some interpreters suggest that it was their obedience (something they did) that healed them or brought about the conditions for their healing. I think not. Jesus does not comment on their obedience, nor does the episode culminate with their healing (as if the healing and how it happened were the most important aspects of the event). Rather, Jesus puts the focus on God. The OT reading emphasizes this point: "Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God" (Deut 8:11) and "Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth'" (Deut 8:17). The Samaritan leper knows where his healing has come from; he recognizes that God is the one who has done this thing, and so he returns to Jesus and gives glory to God. These are the actions Jesus commends by his question in 17:18.

Finally, Jesus says to the Samaritan, "Get up and go." In Luke-Acts this phrase indicates that a significant change is about to occur, a change that is grounded in God's plans. Mary "gets up and goes" to Elizabeth after the annunciation (1:39); the prodigal son of the parable determines to "get up and go" back to his father (15:18); the angel tells Philip to "get up and go" to meet up with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 9:11); God tells Paul to "get up and go" to Damascus (Acts 22:10). The words "get up and go" represent more than just a command; they represent a promise that one is being empowered to step across boundaries and move forward into God's way, to move with confidence even if there is not yet evidence for the end result. As with the instances where people "return" and praise God, the command (or the invitation) to "get up and go" punctuates the Gospel and illustrates the journey of faith to which we all are called. AW

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