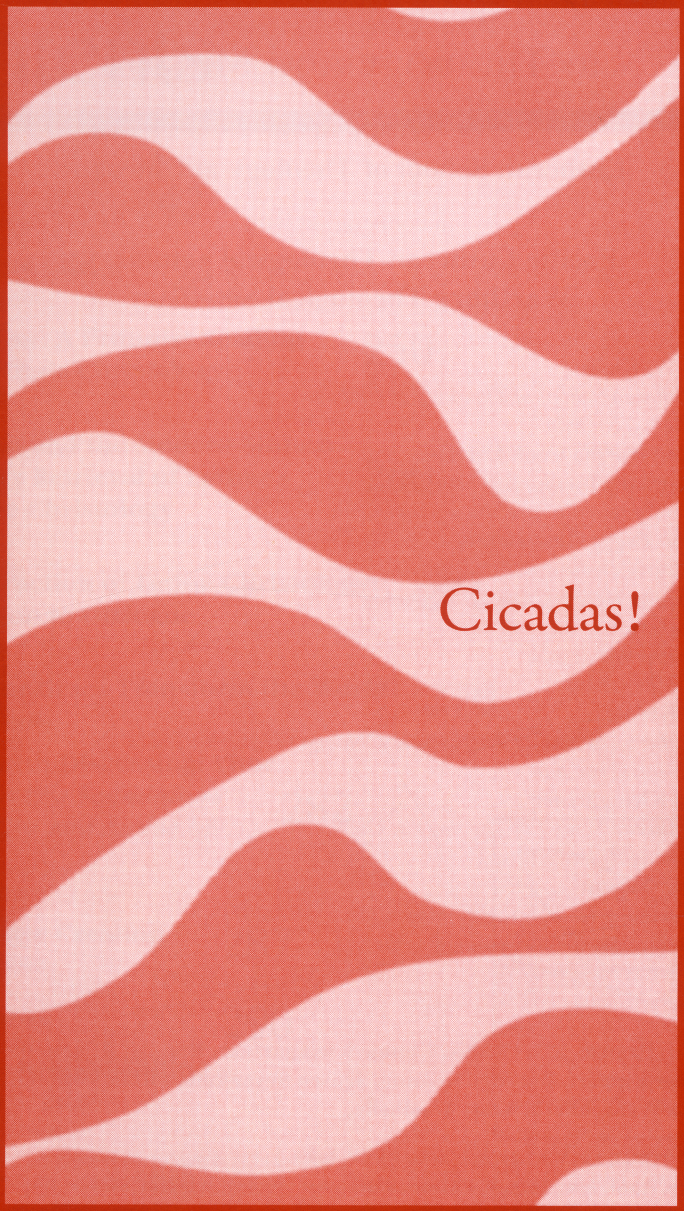
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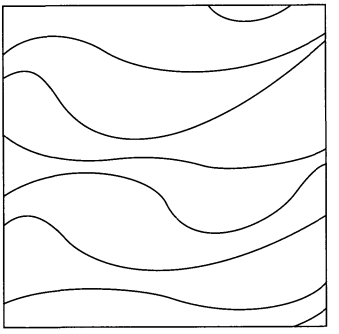
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Cicadas!

It is late May in Chicago. The old oak trees in our yard are covered with hundreds of cicadas' exoskeletons and with the newly born insects that are perched on the leaves drying out before experiencing their fifteen days of fame. A high persistent roar echoes throughout our neighborhood as these creatures exit from the underground and celebrate life and hope, only to go back underground, at least through their offspring, for seventeen more years. I live nearly ten miles from Lake Michigan, but sea gulls soar through the neighborhood looking for fast food. Grandsons scoop up the shells and play with the live insects, proving that apples do not fall far from the trunk—though that was several cicada-generations ago.

It is forty-five years since Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, and the ecological crisis has only deepened in the meantime. The myriad cicadas mask the fact that we live on a fragile planet, with hundreds of species threatened with extinction. Only diehards today deny global warming, yet we struggle as a people to marshal the necessary financial and governmental resources and the alternative sources of power to address the crisis. Perhaps the song of the cicadas can be a wakeup call.

Larry Rasmussen gave the graduation address, in 2007, at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. He spoke of two tipping points: the transformation of Earth-human relations with the fossil-fuel avalanche of the Industrial Revolution, and a counter tipping point dealing with an Earth-honoring rather than an Earth-abusing faith. He spoke of us Christians as dreamers, dreaming of the divine domain come on Earth as it is in Heaven. Just as we breathe the same air Jesus did, so we are baptized in the same water as Jesus the Lamb was. Would the many ministries gathered at this graduation ceremony become that second tipping point, creating, with the grace of God, a way of life that is set, like a bulwark never failing, against the slow tsunami of planetary degradation? The clean water of baptism can wash away any indifference, despair, or fear that clouds one's vision. How can we, the baptized, gathered at table, *keep* from singing about the river of the water of death being replaced by the river of the water of life?

Lisa Dahill attempts to bring together Bonhoeffer's Christology and the psychological and spiritual needs of women in abuse. From the beginning of his writings Bonhoeffer identified "the other" as the locus of transcendence, and he found authentic life in surrender to the absolute demands of the other. In one's becoming a person for others he believed one participates in the very

being and mystery of Jesus Christ who was himself the consummate person for others. Yet Bonhoeffer's psychological starting point differs from many, especially from that of (abused) women. If Bonhoeffer was tempted to deny the other, many women are tempted to deny the self. Their spirituality necessarily takes with ultimate seriousness the sufferings of God in their own flesh and hearts. Selflessness and Christlike martyrdoms by abused women only reinforce the cycle of abuse and are far from redemptive. Jesus' unceasing devotion makes a person no longer merely "other," but a holy center, able to receive him and the outpoured life he offers. Toward the end of his life Bonhoeffer himself recognized that a life of self-sacrifice cannot be made into an absolute. Bonhoeffer wrote for those who, like himself, are in positions of domination and whose sins are those of domination. How can Bonhoeffer be transformed for others who do not share his origins?

Amy Marga points out that Karl Barth absorbed aspects of Luther's theology that allowed him to articulate Christian theology in deeper ways over against modernity. Luther's theology, as enunciated in his Galatians commentary, provided Barth with the resources to pull Christology out of the grip of Enlightenment understandings of the individual as an autonomous agent. Luther was committed to the Chalcedonian formula and saw human salvation as the central purpose of Christ's person and work. Christ is in us and for us but remains a reality outside of us. The Enlightenment brought with it a sustained focus upon the human individual as an independent, rational, and moral agent and made it difficult to accept the theological anthropology of Luther's theology. The face and life of the historical Jesus was enough for natural human reason to discover and know God in God's fullness. Contrary to his Lutheran contemporaries, Barth established that Christ's work cannot be understood on the basis of the historical figure of Jesus alone. Barth demonstrated that a substantive Christology of Jesus Christ the mediator functions as a critique of the Enlightenment understanding of the human as a rational, moral agent. The exercise of reason cannot bring us insight into God's activities. Taking Barth's retrieval of Luther's Christology seriously means bringing to light the falsity that lies in the concept of an autonomous "good will" that accompanies modern individuals' sense of self.

Alicia Vargas holds that Latinas recognize in each other the tension generated by the continuous construction and self-affirmation of their beings. Latinas live at the intersection of their countries of origin and the United States. Latina women suffer the socioeconomic and sexist oppression that render them doubly marginal in the country where they now live. Latinas' faith in Jesus Christ empowers them to take action for individual and communal self-affirmation and to deconstruct the oppressive categories that attempt to

trap them. A first step in transforming reality would be to "adjectivize" every person and every christological claim. Those currently in the center should leave it vacant, and when the center is vacated so will be the margins automatically (no center, no margins). This call to dialogue is also a call to transform the church and theological education.

Jack R. Lundbom shares reflections on the theme of the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches: "God in Your Grace Transform the World," drawing particularly on resources from the Old Testament. He points out that grace cannot coexist with divine anger or judgment, but grace can be sought and found. Hence the address to God in the WCC theme is appropriate. Grace is promised and can be expected to come to individuals and to a church that leads a life of obedience to God's commands. Grace will surely abound when the church emulates God and carries out active grace to the poor, the needy, and those in distress.

Mark Thomsen offers thoughts on Vítor Westhelle's recent book *The Scandalous God* as a "Book Worth Discussing." He points out that the theme that God died and dies and lives is central to the book's proposal. Westhelle's reading of Luther is informed by his own deep knowledge of Hegelian philosophy. In pain, death, poverty, marginalization, and oppression we experience living in the abyss. A theology of the cross rips away that façade that attempts to hide pain and death and invites one into the abyss where in the darkness there is the possibility of light and life. Love in the shadow of the abyss makes the return of God possible. Westhelle's use of Luther texts to call for truth-telling is profound. His imagery of sharing the fragrance of love with the smells of death is truly hope.

Howard S. Olson wrote the tune and words for a hymn titled "A New Creation," published for the first time in this issue. A former missionary to Africa and long-time contributor to *Currents*, Olson points out that this hymn would be particularly appropriate for August 5, 2007, when the Second Reading is Col 3:1–10.

Where will we be as church, nation, and world when the cicadas emerge from their underground in 2024? We in the church are blessed with two doctrines—creation and baptism—that offer life and hope and mandate. Will we have become, as Larry Rasmussen asked, that second tipping point, creating, with the grace of God, a way of life that is set, like a bulwark never failing, against the slow tsunami of planetary degradation? Will the fragrance of our love for planet Earth and the God who made it win out over the smells of death? One thing is sure: We dare not simply go underground for the next seventeen years.

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

The Baptized Life

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Address at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago graduation exercises, May 20, 2007

Ours is a thrilling, dangerous moment for ministry and the baptized life. We stand, a bit off-balance, at two "tipping points." The "great transformation"[1] of Earth-human relations set in motion with the fossil-fuel avalanche of the Industrial Revolution creates the first tipping point. It pits the big human economy against the great economy of creation. That transformation transported generation upon generation from "an organic, ever-renewing, land-based economy to an extractive, non-renewing, industrial economy," the one now reigning as "a controlling presence throughout the entire planet."[2] While much of the human world grew rich beyond imagining, the biosphere and atmosphere were fatefully altered. Stored energy in the form of fossil fuels meant that humans no longer needed to live in sync with the rhythms and requirements of the renewables—with solar and hydrological cycles, or the imperatives of fickle seasons, lazy flora, and unimproved fauna. Stored energy let us conjure up a built environment to replace our more immediate dependence upon the unbuilt environment, or so we thought. "City" replaced "country" and "organization" displaced "nature" as our environment, our habitat, our home.

The churches' ministries tagged along, as though on a leash. How many of your ministries, present or prospective, are not carbon-based? How many are automobile-free, air conditioner–free, styrofoam- and fast-food–free? How many of your churches have not moved all sacred space indoors? Your ordination vows will not include "I pledge myself to fossil-fuel ministry," but that's the pledge you will soon be asked to make.

But now we are at that "transitional moment when small changes make huge differences" and "predictable processes" give way to unpredictable, nonlinear outcomes.[3] A couple degrees warmer and liquid turns to steam, a couple degrees cooler and it turns to ice, though all the while we thought our ministries would never leave the liquid state of our baptisms.

Thomas Edison once chatted up Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone, and this is what Edison said: "I'd put my money on the sun

1. The reference is to Karl Polanyi's famous work, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Times* (Boston: Beacon, [1944] 2001).

2. Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (Sierra Book Club, 2006), 107.

3. *Ecospirit*, ed. Laura Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), xi.

and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that."[4] Ford and Firestone (that is, cars and tires, smokestacks and tailpipes) were admittedly a poor choice of audience. Edison badly underestimated what oil, coal, and natural gas made possible and the sun did not. None, including Edison, could resist the fossil-fuel interlude.

The downside is way up, and we are now of necessity at another tipping point, poised for an ecological reformation, poised for "a root change in human outlook" and practice, poised for a "spiritual phase transition"[5] that effects a counter tipping point, a tip toward Earth-honoring faith rather than Earth-abusing faith.

But who are we, the baptized, in this thrilling and dangerous moment? 'Fess up: we are Joseph the dreamer, and we are rebuked by the brothers who say "Here comes [the] dreamer" again (Gen 37:19). Moreover, we find ourselves dreaming in Egypt where we, too, may well be prospering in Pharaoh's court, or trying to do so, happily seduced by the glitter and glamour of evil and fortune. Yet "way down in Egypt Land" is not our true habitat, and these good neighbors are not the pilgrim people to whom we belong. So we sure sinners dream on, dreaming of the divine domain come on Earth as it is in heaven. It's a brave and startling, and inconvenient truth.

This we know. We have been here often before with the ancestors, through other reformations and transformations. We dreamed different dreams then, but they, too, were dreams of faith.

This time we dream of Ecumenical and Ecological Earth. And we dream of the baptized life as Earth-honoring Christian faith.

"The baptized life". . . so of course we must talk of water, the waters of life of baptism and the waters of life of the planet.

Did you hear echoes in the texts read at today's service?[6] Paul and Silas land in jail because they crossed the slave-girl's owners by casting out her demon. (You shouldn't do that when the devil puts money in your pocket.) But Paul and Silas saved their jailor, too, together with his house. Paul and Silas had in fact been tortured in their own little Abu Ghraib. But here is what happened when the good news broke: "[The jailor] took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God" (Acts 16:33–34). Washed, baptized, fed, and rejoicing. Bath and table, water and the breaking of bread. "Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again, pass the word around, loaves abound!" (*With One Voice* #754) Or, in John's Revelation: "Blessed are they who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates" (Rev 22:14). More in a moment about the waters of the New Jerusalem and the trees of life along the river.

Meanwhile, do you know the scene in Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead* where the old pastor writes this:

> You and Tobias are hopping around in the sprinkler. The sprinkler is a magnificent invention because it exposes raindrops to sunshine. That does occur in nature, but it is rare. When I was in seminary I used to go sometimes to the Baptists down at the river. It was something to see

4. Andrew C. Revkin, "Budgets Falling in Race to Fight Global Warming," *The New York Times* (30 October 2006), www.nytimes.com

5. Kearns and Keller, *Ecospirit*, xi.

6. Acts 16:16–34; Revelation 22:12–14; 16–17; 20–21; John 17:20–26.

the preacher lifting the one who was being baptized up out of the water and the water pouring off the garments and the hair. It did look like a birth or a resurrection. For us the water just heightens the touch of the pastor's hand on the sweet bones of the head, sort of like making an electrical connection. I've always loved to baptize people, though I have sometimes wished there were more shimmer and splash involved in the way we go about it. Well, but you two are dancing around in your iridescent little downpour, whooping and stomping as sane people ought to do when they encounter a thing so miraculous as water.[7]



The waters of life. Sane people should do some good whooping and stomping, with a little shimmer and splash, when they encounter a thing so miraculous as water! You were born in it, your mother's warm womb waters, and it's surer than taxes that that you die without it. Millions have lived without love, but no critter in all creation has lived without water. Life itself likely emerged from the waters of the sea, and most life is still in the salty brine. Water births, it cleanses and purifies, it heals, it revives, it transports, it rains down and wells up. The planet, in fact, should be dubbed "Water," not "Earth," since it's 70 percent H_2O. And all the rest—that other 30 percent—depends utterly on this minuscule molecule sent from heaven above.

The waters of life. Maybe, just maybe, all waters are sacramental, even the great lake on your seminary's doorstep. You can be pardoned for confusing it with grace, as Denise Levertov does:

As swimmers dare to lie face to the sky and
the water bears them,
As hawks rest upon air and air sustains them.
So would I learn to attain free fall,
And float into [the Creator's] deep embrace.
Knowing no effort earns that all-surrounding
grace.[8]

But when will you know that God has been raptured to Earth and the New Jerusalem has descended from heaven? Not by houses of worship planted on every corner. There is no temple in that redeemed city, as there was no temple in Eden—and no "minstrel show of hate" and "no sanctimonious piety" and no "bruised and bloody grass" (Maya Angelou);[9] just the throne of God and "the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:1–2).

"Flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb," the baptized Lamb, baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptizer. And did you know that just as you breathe the same air Jesus did, so, too, you were baptized in the same water as Jesus the Lamb, just a different river or a different Samaritan well.

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7. Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 63.

8. From the opening choral movement of the cantata *Believers*, using Levertov's *The Stream and the Sapphire*.

9. See her wonderful poem published in Maya Angelou, *A Brave and Startling Truth* (New York: Random House, 1995).

The sum of water has been fixed since prehistoric times, far longer than we late-arrivers have been spilling it, splashing in it, and baptizing with it. So be on guard: Jehovah's not making any more of the waters of life.

I am not by nature an alarmist—Lutherans don't get alarmed, they just go quiet and take to prayer and beer and choral music. But I live in the droughted Southwest. No one is towing melting ice caps to Santa Fe, and I can sense Edna Jacques' lament from the Dirty Thirties:

> Let the clean water of baptism "wash away any indifference you have, any despair you feel, any fear which clouds your vision."

The crop has failed again, the wind and sun
Dried out the stubble first, then one by one
The strips of summer fallow, seared with heat,
Crunched, like old fallen leaves, our lovely wheat.
The garden is a dreary blighted waste,
The very air is gritty to the taste . . .[10]

Yet we, the thirsty, gather in worship in Santa Fe. Here is our Call to Worship:

We gather to worship God, the Lord
and Giver of Life
God gives us the waters of life.
In the deserts of our lives, in the wilderness
within,
God gives us the waters of life.
To give us hope when our lives run dry,
to give us strength when our world
seems barren,
God gives us the waters of life.
To let peace flow like a river and love spring
forth like a fountain,
God gives us the waters of life.
To make justice roll down like waters and
righteousness like an everlasting stream,
God gives us the water of life.

And here is what greets us in the sanctuary as we answer the call.

The nave on one side is a wall of glass, adobe, and timbers. It is the eye's passageway into the high mountain desert of which the sanctuary is a part: piñons and juniper scatter themselves across sandy loam like the sower's seed on arid ground; chamisa and cottonwoods await the next rush of rain in the arroyo; the Sangre de Christo Mountains rise close in; and the desert sun floods yellow into the sanctuary. The sunrays glisten at the base of the glass, dancing on the moving water that runs the full length of the eastern wall. The long trough is the baptismal font, if "font" isn't too feeble a word for an acequia, the desert irrigation ditch of a thousand years of Pueblo Indian peoples and four hundred years of Hispanic farmers in this valley. Acequias bear waters of life to this day. The desert blooms along them like an Isaiah vision. Without them, we do not eat or laugh.

The waters of life of the font and the acequia waters flowing in the desert: something sacred, something essential from womb to tomb, is borne by the waters precisely as water, and we know it in every watery cell of our bodies. It is the Creator's presence, incarnate and full of life.

So, friends, will the many ministries gathered in this place today become that

10. Cited by Marq de Villiers, *Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 155.

second tipping point, creating, with the grace of God, a way of life that is set, like a bulwark never failing, against the slow tsunami of planetary degradation? Will our spirits and ministries join the ecological reformation for a different Earth-human community? Will we Joseph dreamers be Joseph the wise dreamer who, yes, right in the midst of Pharaoh's court, conserves and preserves Earth's bounty in the fat years so as to sustain Earth's life in the lean years?

For this is where our ministries are now, trembling in the balance between two tipping points in what former Secretary of State Madeline Albright expects will be the century of the environment, the century of religion, and the Asian century [of the economy]. One tipping point is physical and social change of, well, biblical proportions. It is geophysical change bearing a strong human imprint, and it is underway. The other tipping point is our long-delayed conversion to Earth-honoring faith for the century of the environment, of the economy, and of religion.

I close with a charge to the graduates borrowed from the sermon of a pastor friend in Virginia. Let the clean water of baptism

> wash away any indifference you have, any despair you feel, any fear which clouds your vision. And let it symbolize the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon a transformed people. Let it remind us of the thirst of the earth and the thirst of the people in many parts of the world who live parched lives. Let it remind us of the dream of children to dance and bathe and drink clean water. Let it remind us of the promise of scripture that streams will break forth in the desert, and that the river of the water of death will be replaced by the river of the water of life.[11]

The throne of God is in the midst of the city, with the rivers of the waters of life flowing from it. How can we, the baptized, gathered at table, keep from singing?

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11 Janet Parker, "From Apocalypse to Genesis," sermon available from the NCC Eco-Justice Programs, *www.nccecojustice.org/awardsermon.html*.

Jesus for *You:* A Feminist Reading of Bonhoeffer's Christology

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In a previously published essay I outlined how I see Dietrich Bonhoeffer's spirituality related to his upbringing as a dominating, aggressive self and how naive reading of his work can prove disastrous when uncritically applied to people in very different social locations, such as women in abuse.[1] In the present essay I move on to explore how Bonhoeffer's strong Christology in particular speaks to women in abuse and others with degraded self-conceptions. This essay derives from several overarching questions having to do with Bonhoeffer's own spiritual experience of Jesus Christ, his articulation of this experience in formal Christology, and the conversation arising when this Christology encounters people living in power relations different from those that shaped Bonhoeffer.

So: What is the transformation Bonhoeffer experienced in his encounter with Jesus Christ? What are the contours of redemption women trapped in the shadows of reality need? And how—both with and against the grain of his legacy—can Bonhoeffer's Christology provide an authentically Lutheran spirituality of transformation for people in social locations very different from his own?

I attempt here to bring together into one conversation Bonhoeffer's Christology and the psychological and spiritual needs of women in abuse. Such a specification in no way limits the relevance of this inquiry to victims or survivors of abuse. But women in abuse represent an extreme instance of the selfhood that characterizes many women to some degree, as well as those men who have internalized familial or social rejection into the self-silencing, self-attacking submission characteristic of soluble selves. Thus, the essay may prove germane to central aspects of the experience of a wide audience. We see revealed the recurring biblical motif of the paradoxical and surprising centrality of precisely those persons regarded (by their oppressors, by society, and even by themselves) as marginal, failed, invisible, or worthless.

That the experience of battered women could shed new light on the teachings of the great Bonhoeffer in ways that prove illuminating for many beyond themselves may seem improbable. Yet, were he alive today, Bonhoeffer might be among the first to acknowledge the Christian mystery at work here: that attention to these bruised and bleeding bodies and spirits, despised and rejected by the powerful, both radically contextualizes (or even subverts) the best wisdom of the wise, and in fact reveals

1. "Reading from the Underside of Selfhood: Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Formation," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 249–66.

the very heart of God for the world.[2] I begin with an overarching critique of Bonhoeffer's notions of the relation between self and other; this will make possible a more nuanced exploration of his Christology.

Self and other

Various scholars have commented on the striking other-orientation in Bonhoeffer, finding it a salutary Christian alternative to the self-indulgent pieties of American consumerism and privilege, and locating him within a developing tradition of philosophical alterity manifest also in such thinkers as Adorno and Levinas[3] as well as in subsequent liberation theology.[4] From the beginning of his writings Bonhoeffer identifies the "other" (whether divine or human) as the experienced locus of transcendence, drawing a person's attention away from one's own self as "totally claimless," sterile, and isolated to find authentic life and

2. It is no coincidence that Bonhoeffer's love and grasp of this mystery deepens precisely as he himself moves into the place of the marginalized, the captive, the tortured—as he too learns the revelatory power of the "view from below" ("After Ten Years," *Letters and Papers from Prison* [hereafter *LPP*], enlarged edition, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald Fuller et al. [New York: Macmillan, 1971], 17). Perhaps sensing his own imminent relegation to this position, but clearly growing in his sense of its central hermeneutical significance for Christians, Bonhoeffer wrote in this essay, shortly before his imprisonment, "We have to learn that personal suffering is a more effective key, a more [fruitful] principle for exploring the world in thought and action than personal good fortune."

3. See, e.g., Wayne Whitson Floyd Jr., *Theology and the Dialectics of Otherness. On Reading Bonhoeffer and Adorno* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988); Lori Brandt Hale, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Question of the Other," paper presented to the International Dietrich Bonhoeffer Society, Berlin, August 2000; Tiemo Rainer Peters, "Der andere ist unendlich wichtig. Impulse aus Bonhoeffers Ekklesiologie fur die Gegenwart," in *Die Präsenz des verdrängten Gottes: Glaube, Religionslosigkeit und Weltverantwortung nach Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Christian Gremmels and Ilse Tödt (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1987), 166–84; Elias Bongmba, "The Priority of the Other: Ethics in Africa: Perspectives from Bonhoeffer and Levinas," in *Bonhoeffer for a New Day*, ed. John de Gruchy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 175–89; and David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), which draws together themes of self and other from Levinas, Jüngel, and Ricoeur; see especially the chapter "Polyphonic Living: Dietrich Bonhoeffer," 241–65. An interesting subject to explore would be the shifts in usage between the (predominantly male) postmodern and/or Christian language of the newly "decentered" self; feminist and other attempts to reclaim notions of "self-centering" for those who have traditionally struggled with all too fragmented selves; and Bonhoeffer's own key notion of "Christ the Center," developed most fully in his Christology lectures (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke* [*DBW*] 12, ed. Carsten Nicolaisen and Ernst-Albert Scharffe-north (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1997), 279–348). A recent overview of these motifs especially in feminist writings, making prominent use of the image of the "center," is Lucinda A. Stark Huffaker, *Creative Dwelling: Empathy and Clarity in God and Self*. AAR Academy Series, ed. Barbara A. Holdrege, no. 98 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

4. On Bonhoeffer's importance for subsequently emerging liberation theology, see Gustavo Gutierrez, "Theology from the Underside of History," in *The Power of the Poor in History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 169–221; G. Clarke Chapman Jr., "Bonhoeffer and Liberation Theology," in *Ethical Responsibility: Bonhoeffer's Legacy to the Churches*, ed. John D. Godsey and Geffrey B. Kelly (New York and Toronto: Edwin Mellen, 1981), 147–95; and Julio de Santa Ana, "The Influence of Bonhoeffer on the Theology of Liberation," *The Ecumenical Review* 28 (1976): 188–97.

What for Bonhoeffer was the liberating experience of surrender, joy, and solidarity with others is for these women a grinding day-to-day suffocation.

reality in surrender to the "absolute demands" of the other.[5] From the philosophical categories of *Sanctorum Communio*, through the powerfully enacted surrender to Christ in *Discipleship* and to the human other in confession and service in community (*Life Together*), he continued to develop this motif of the priority of the other over the self for Christian maturity. And at the end of his life, even as he was beginning to notice problems with this "unconditional surrender" of self to other, nevertheless the dominant tone of his writings in this regard is still that of the sheer joy and freedom he experiences in radical self-surrender, a process simultaneously sacrificial and redemptive. That is, in one's own becoming a "person for others" one participates in the very being and mystery of Jesus Christ himself, the consummate person for others. Thus for him

> a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that "Jesus is there only for others." His "being there for others" is the experience of transcendence. It is only this "being there for others," maintained until death, that is the ground of his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a "religious" relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable—that is not authentic transcendence—but our relation to God is a new life in "existence for others," through participation in the being of Jesus.[6]

This statement from August 1944 could stand as a summary of his lifelong reflection on and practice of the transcendence of the other and the transparency to Jesus Christ thereby disclosed.

We find similarly moving reflections in these late writings on the relative place of the self as well, showing again how for Bonhoeffer this focus away from the self and toward the needs of others draws him into the heart of the paschal mystery itself:

> It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life. That is *metanoia*: not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event (Isaiah 53) . . . living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world—watching with

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5. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, ed. Clifford Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English* (hereafter *DBWE*), vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 54. In language typical of the studies of Bonhoeffer and alterity, for instance, Hale writes, "Bonhoeffer . . . embraces the recognition that both divine and human otherness . . . genuinely transcend the subject, the 'I'" ("Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Question of the Other," 4). Also, the Editor's Introduction to *Sanctorum Communio* asserts: "The other transcends the self in ethical encounter—indeed, the human You is a form and analogy of the divine You in precisely this present otherness. This personal-ethical model of transcendence . . . is found throughout Bonhoeffer's theology" (p. 5f.).

6. *LPP* 381.

Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith: that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes a human being and a Christian (cf. Jeremiah 45!).[7]

Clearly this is the way of life for him; and to turn away from it, in self-protective repudiation of the other, would mean a denial of Jesus Christ himself and thus of one's own authentic existence. For him, to the end, the overall shape of sin ultimately remained the same: the selfish denial of the transcendent claims of the other.

Yet, as difficult as it is to dispute the Christian truth of these assertions, these faith statements emerge not from some universally valid human reality but from a specific psychosocial stance: that of the separative self, the traditionally socialized male. In contrast, Carol Gilligan's studies at Harvard have revealed a very different configuration of human selfhood and reality. In longitudinal studies of girls growing into adolescence, she and her colleagues noted pervasive problems having more to do with a silencing of oneself, and over-orientation to others' judgments, than with the ignoring of others that Bonhoeffer so feared in himself.[8] As psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin asserts,

> The complement to the male refusal to recognize the other is the woman's own acceptance of her lack of subjectivity, her willingness to offer recognition without expecting it in return. . . . The female difficulty in differentiation can be described almost as the mirror image of the male's: *not the denial of the other, but the denial of the self.*[9]

Thus, while many Christian women throughout the past half-century have found powerful resonance with Bonhoeffer's prison writings, being drawn into participation in the very being of Jesus through attention to the sufferings of God in others, even these lovely writings assume a stance all too familiar to women in abuse. For them, "being there for others" manifestly fails to redeem. It is not a window opening into the experience of transcendence. Instead, this focus on others and their needs, desires, and demands to the exclusion of oneself is the shape of an excruciating life, indeed the pattern of sin.[10] What for Bonhoeffer was the liberating experience of surrender, joy, and solidarity with others is for these women a grinding day-to-day suffocation.[11] Not taking one's own sufferings seriously is for them the hallmark of

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7. *LPP* 361f. (July 18, 1944) and 370 (July 21, 1944).

8 Cf. Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan, *Meeting at the Crossroads. Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992). See also Gilligan et al., *Making Connections* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Gilligan et al., *Women, Girls, and Psychotherapy: Reframing Resistance* (Binghamton, NY: Haworth, 1991); and Jill McLean Taylor, Gilligan, and Amy M. Sullivan, *Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

9. Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love. Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 78; emphasis added.

10 For an overview of contemporary Christian feminist thinking on the subject of sin, especially as to its characteristically female manifestations, see Mary Elise Lowe, "Woman Oriented Hamartiologies: A Survey of the Shift from Powerlessness to Right Relationship," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 39/2 (Summer 2000): 119–39; and Brita Gill-Austern, "Love Understood as Self-Sacrifice and Self-Denial: What Does It Do to Women?" in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed. Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 304–21.

11. Bernice Martin, "Whose Soul Is It Anyway? Domestic Tyranny and the Suffocated Soul," in *On Losing the Soul· Essays in the Social Psychology of Religion*, ed. Richard K. Fenn and Donald Capps

daily life. It is what makes continued submission possible, but it is in no way a path to freedom and life in Jesus Christ. Quite the opposite: What feels liberating and lifegiving to Bonhoeffer merely seals the prison doors for his abused sisters in Christ. For them, what is revolutionary, breathtaking, and truly illuminative of reality would be a spirituality that in equally compelling terms invites them to "be there for themselves" and asserts that such unheard-of presence to themselves is precisely their means of *participation in Jesus who is there for them.* And what opens those prison doors for Christian women in abuse is the obverse of Bonhoeffer's, namely, to learn at last, perhaps for the first time in their lives, to cease denying themselves, to take with ultimate seriousness the sufferings of God in their *own* flesh and hearts, and to tune out the overwhelming clamoring needs and demands of the abuser.

I earlier suggested that Bonhoeffer, writing from the perspective of the separative self, knew well the lonely emptiness and rages of the dominating ego manifested in its extreme form in abusers. I suggested that this is the voice that needs to be "turned down" for both abusers and victims: for abusers or others in positions of privilege or dominance in learning to look away from their own egos and attend to others (here Bonhoeffer can be helpful to them), and for victims in learning similarly to look away from the abuser's demands, to see and attend to themselves.[12] In both cases, all attention is initially focused on the abuser's face and voice; in both cases, both parties learn to turn away from this and attend for the first time also to the victim—here, the woman as primordial "other"[13]—and find God there.

The question underlying this shift is, therefore, What happens when the "other," the "non-self," is *oneself?* When soluble selves read Bonhoeffer, I suggest, they do not find their position reflected in that of the "self" he assumes but in the "other." Thus they must often learn to substitute "self" for "other" and "other" for "self" in his writings in order to make the redemptive move analogous to his—that is, in their case from focus on the abuser/other to focus on oneself.[14]

For women taught their entire lives that their goodness and survival depend on their focus on others and service to them,

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(Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 69–96. Janet Jacobs explores the "endangered" self with particular attention to women suffering violence in "The Endangered Female Self and the Search for Identity," in *The Endangered Self*, ed. Richard K. Fenn and Donald Capps (Princeton, NJ: Center for Religion, Self, and Society, 1992), 37–46.

12 Cf. Dahill, "Reading from the Underside." To use the language of *Sanctorum Communio* (65–80), the abuser needs to grow in the direction of the "openness" of the self toward others, while the abuse victim needs to learn to recognize and protect her own "closedness."

13 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1952).

14. For instance, in a 1932 essay Bonhoeffer writes (in English—the "man" language is his own): "Man 'in' and 'after' the fall refer[s] everything to himself, puts himself in the center of the world, does violence to reality, makes himself God, and God and the other man his creatures" (*DBW* 10:425). A person reading Bonhoeffer against the grain, substituting "other" for his use of "self" categories and vice versa, reads of the paradigmatic sin of submission: "*Woman* 'in' and 'after' the fall refer[s] everything to *the other*, puts *the other* in the center of the world, does violence to reality, makes *the other* God, and God and *oneself the other's* creatures." The fact that such a sentence reads as an obvious overgeneralization (how can one possibly speak of "woman" as a single category?) highlights again the even greater magnitude of Bonhoeffer's original generalization intending to speak for *all* people (as "man").

this shift in attention toward the self feels terrifying and impossible, if not downright un-Christian. We see how important, then, the development of a powerfully *Christian* alternative to spiritualities of self-renunciation is, as well as the capacity for mature discernment of the sufferings and life of God courting our attention in any given context, even if those sufferings are one's own and not only those of others. For many women in abuse, "watching with Christ in Gethsemane" might turn out to have a great deal to do with learning *not* to turn away from oneself toward others but, contra Bonhoeffer, to begin to take seriously their own sufferings, perhaps for the first time. I am suggesting that, for them, precisely that "is faith; that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes a human being and a Christian."

The work of Christ

As is well known, Bonhoeffer's spirituality is highly christocentric. A crucial element of any Christology is of course its conception of Jesus' redemptive work,[15] which Bonhoeffer treats under the heading of *Stellvertretung*, or "vicarious representative action." This term describes for him both Jesus' role and how Christians are to imitate him. Just as Jesus was the "person for others," so the Christian is to be a person for others, and "the church is the church only when it exists for others."[16] Christians are to be Christ's *Stellvertreter* (representatives) in similarly self-sacrificial devotion to others; for Bonhoeffer, this is a central means of participation in Jesus' own cruciform life in the world. In a context where, by 1940, even the Confessing Church was struggling for its own survival rather than speaking out on behalf of the Jews and other Nazi victims, Bonhoeffer considered such ecclesial focus on self-preservation a sign of badly skewed vision, a striking failure to discern and participate in the form of Christ in the world. It is precisely this shape of Jesus' own life poured out for the world that underlies Christians' *Stellvertretung* and Bonhoeffer's risky move in solidarity with victims of Nazi evil into the conspiracy opposing Hitler. In his *Ethics* he writes,

> Jesus—life, our life—the Son of God who became human, lived as our vicarious representative [*Stellvertreter*]. Through him, therefore, all human life is in its essence vicarious representation. . . . His entire living, acting, and suffering was vicarious representative action [*Stellvertretung*]. All that human beings were supposed to live, do, and suffer was fulfilled in him. In this real vicarious representative action, in which his human existence consists, he is the responsible human being par excellence. Since he is life, all of life through him is destined to be vicarious representative action.[17]

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15. The other primary heading of traditional Christology is the person of Christ. Although I do not develop this topic here, it is crucial as well for feminist appropriation of Bonhoeffer's spirituality. See my dissertation, "Reading from the Underside of Selfhood: Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Formation" (Princeton Theological Monograph Series [Pickwick Publications/Wipf & Stock], in press), chap. 5, section C.1. On Bonhoeffer's Christology generally see Hans-Jurgen Abromeit, *Das Geheimnis Christi: Dietrich Bonhoeffers erfahrungsbezogene Christologie*, Neukirch-ner Beitrage zur systematischen Theologie, vol. 8 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991); Andreas Pangritz, "'Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today?'" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. deGruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 134–53; Harry Aveling, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christology," *Colloquium* 16/1 (October 1983): 23–30; and John A. Phillips, *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

16. *LPP* 382.

17 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss et al., *DBWE* vol. 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 258f.

Thus Bonhoeffer sees the primary significance of the outpouring of Jesus' life in being a model for our lives of similarly devoted love toward others and action on their behalf. This allows him to restate at the end of his life themes first sounded in *Sanctorum Communio*. For he goes on immediately to write, "Vicarious representative action and therefore responsibility is possible only in completely devoting one's own life to another person. Only those who are selfless live responsibly, which means that only selfless people truly *live*."[18]

All we know about the very different context of women in abuse indicates that this Christology is not adequate for them. Selflessness and surrender, Christlike martyrdoms in imitation of Jesus' suffering for and with others, only reinforce the cycle of abuse and are far from redemptive. The new translation of *Stellvertretung* may well use the term "*vicarious* representative action," but in regard to Jesus' work very little emphasis for Bonhoeffer falls on its truly vicarious nature. His interest is in developing the implications for Christians of their own vocation to Christlike action in the world. This is obviously in no way unbiblical; yet by his great emphasis on Jesus as essentially "for others," making us "persons for others" as well, he tends to overlook Jesus as, crucially, *for me*. The *pro me*-ity of Lutheran christological spirituality is not entirely absent from Bonhoeffer's thinking, but it clearly takes a back seat. He seems to speak from a place already among the inner circle and is interested then in how he, with Jesus, should relate to others.

Again, this is to my mind an instance of Bonhoeffer's gendered tendency to locate himself and his presumed audience as selves, rather than others. For those who have been forced into the "other" location, however, the description of Jesus as the person for others could read differently. That is, it could mean that he is fundamentally "for *me* as an 'other.'" When Bonhoeffer is read against the grain, when Jesus' focus on others turns out to include *oneself*, the significance of this other-centeredness of Jesus is not first that it requires one's own ongoing other-focus like his. Rather, for those who are "others" it points out Jesus' great love of *oneself*, his embrace of one's *own* alienated or suppressed self through every dimension of his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus' unceasing devotion makes a person no longer merely "other" but a holy center able by grace to receive him and the outpoured life he offers.

For women in abuse, then, a liberating christological spirituality of *Stellvertretung* must include the truly vicarious aspect of Jesus' life and death. Prior to any statements about enacted responsibility toward others, Jesus is simply gift, "for me." The full *pro me*-ity of Jesus' attention enacts spiritually what the patient-focus of truly healing therapeutic relationships does psychologically: both create the attentive and unwavering focus of transformative "holding space."[19] First and foremost, contra Bonhoeffer here, the life and death of Jesus are not merely a model to follow on behalf of others, keeping women (or anyone) continually crucified and focused on their oppressors' needs. Jesus' death is once and

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18 Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 259. The earlier translation used the language of complete "surrender" of one's self to another. The German term here is *Hingabe*, or "giving oneself over" [to another person or reality]; dictionary definitions include also "dedication," "devotion," "sacrifice," or "self-abandon/ment."

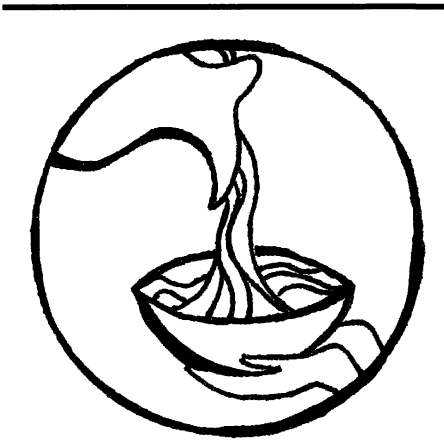
19 On the image of "holding space," see, e.g., D. W. Winnicott, "The Capacity to Be Alone," in *The Maturational Process and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965).

for all, completely vicarious in its redemptive power. This death ends death and bursts forth into resurrection. These wounds heal wounds and do not inflict them. This One for others is, always, for me, and the blood and water flowing from his body, his heart, are meant to birth and nourish, not to justify continuing hemorrhage. Marginalized and rejected, Jesus himself becomes "other" in solidarity with all "others," in order to redeem each one for holy new *self*-centering, for conformation to one's own authentic being in him, for selfhood that is able to love in freedom and abundance.

This is very far from the complete surrender of oneself that Bonhoeffer names as the heart of Christian *Stellvertretung*, the radical selflessness long associated with his courage and martyrdom and taught widely in his name. Yet, interestingly, in the very next paragraph of the *Ethics*, after Bonhoeffer states that *Stellvertretung* consists of "completely devoting one's own life to another person," he makes a striking assertion. For the first time in his published writings he posits *two* ways the relation between self and other can go awry: one may "absolutize *either* my own self *or* the other person."[20] The first of these, of course, is the problem Bonhoeffer has deplored in himself for years, against which so many of his writings inveigh. But the second is new here and quite revolutionary. He is asserting the equal dangers that can result from the absolutizing of another person—the very problem that befalls soluble selves. He goes on to assert that in this case

> the welfare of the other person for whom I am responsible is made absolute while ignoring all other responsibilities. This leads to an arbitrariness in my action which makes a mockery of my responsibility before God, who in Jesus Christ is the God of all people.[21]

Bonhoeffer is beginning to name the possibility that complete surrender to other



people may actually not be such a good idea in all circumstances. That is, he suggests that even "responsibility" can be taken too far if a single commitment or relationship throws out of balance a person's obligations to the full scope of his or her responsibilities, including (one might suggest) one's own health, vocation, desires, conscience, and worth. This echoes the Harvard researchers' findings that just such an imbalance characterizes the lives of contemporary U.S. adolescent girls, who learn to overvalue relationships (especially the romantic type) at the cost of connection to their own bodies, selves, and voices.[22]

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20. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 259; emphasis added.

21. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 259. This sentence follows his description of the evil that results from an absolutizing of one's own ego, which "leads to violation and tyranny" against others. The word translated "violation" here is the German *Vergewaltigung*, which literally means "rape." In my earlier essay I traced this use of the language of rape in Bonhoeffer to describe the sins of domination he considers paradigmatic.

22. Cited in note 8. See also Lori Stern, "Disavowing the Self in Female Adolescence," *Women and Therapy* 11/3–4 (1990): 105–17.

Such an imbalance in favor of one overblown responsibility signals for Bonhoeffer the neglect of one's ultimate responsibility to God, who is the God of oneself as well as of the other person. Overresponsibility toward a particular person or situation therefore is a form of idolatry, attempting to set up an absolute principle (i.e., an abstraction) and denying the ever-shifting concreteness of well-discerned vocation in every new situation. He goes on to say that, whether a person absolutizes one's own ego or another person, "the origin, essence, and goal of responsible life is denied in both cases, and responsibility [itself] has become a self-made, abstract idol."[23]

This is an important distinction to be heard among those for whom responsibility has indeed become an idol, those whose devotion to an abusive other blinds them to the profound costs for themselves and others of such overresponsibility and distracts them from the fearsome yet liberating necessity of discerning God's call to them and their true responsibilities. In other places, Bonhoeffer's ethics of responsibility can sound like an echo of the self-abnegating focus on others that often marks women's lives, especially in situations of abuse. These words, therefore, come as an important caveat that one's ultimate responsibility, always, is to the living God, to whose call even the most central responsibilities must yield. And they make possible an embrace of responsibility that takes seriously all the interwoven obligations and relations of a human life, learning to weigh them against one another in an ongoing process of balance and discernment according to the ultimate responsibility of faithfulness to God.

I have hypothesized that it was Bonhoeffer's own movement out of safety and privilege that made possible his increasing awareness of the needs of the self toward the end of his life, along with the dangers of some of the more one-sided formulations of his earlier career. We see this in the passage above, where the responsible life of *Stellvertretung* comes into clearer focus late in his life within this new, broader awareness of abuses against both others and oneself. The same tentatively emerging awareness appears in regard to the vicarious nature of Jesus' own suffering. In Bonhoeffer's last writing preserved before his arrest, an unfinished circular letter to the scattered Finkenwalde community, he seems to perceive for the first time the danger of seeing *Stellvertretung* solely as a Christ-shaped model for our own parallel action:

> . . . we must guard ourselves against confusing ourselves with Christ. Christ endured all suffering and all human guilt himself in full measure—indeed, this was what made him Christ, that he and he alone bore it all. But Christ was able to suffer along with others because he was simultaneously able to redeem from suffering. Out of his love and power to redeem people came his power to suffer with them. We are not called to take upon ourselves the suffering of all the world; by ourselves we are fundamentally not able to suffer with others at all, because we are not able to redeem. . . . We are called only to gaze full of joy at the One who in reality suffered with us and became the Redeemer. Full of joy, we are enabled to believe that there was and is One to whom no human suffering or sin is foreign and who in deepest love accomplished our redemption. Only in such joy in Christ the Redeemer shall we be preserved from hardening ourselves where human suffering encounters us, and from becoming resigned under the experience of suffering. Only to the extent we believe in Christ, to the extent we . . . to Christ.[24]

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23. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 259.

24. *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940–1945*, *DBWE* 16, ed. Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 378. The letter breaks off at this point.

A great myth that keeps people in abusive relationships is that the suffering endured is somehow holy, even redemptive, in its Christlikeness. Bonhoeffer's reflections here are important in helping people release that misconception: Only Jesus is God, not I. For those struggling to love an abuser, these words can release them from the temptation to be the Messiah trying to redeem the beloved's agony by suffering it with or even somehow for him or her. Instead, Bonhoeffer gives permission to let Jesus be the one to go deep into the abuser's heart and pain, for he is the only one whose *mitleiden* (compassionate shared suffering) can ever, however slowly and mysteriously, prove redemptive. This frees the partner to let go, to release the impossible responsibility of the other's salvation, and to turn for salvation to this same com/passionate One. There a woman in abuse can meet at last the One who is truly present *for her*; and there she can begin, in time, to discern the deeper contours of her own authentic responsibility to herself, to others, and to God.

I have argued that Bonhoeffer's implicit view of human selfhood and its characteristic forms of sin, and thus his view of Jesus' redemptive work, emerge from a social location of privilege. He writes for those who, like himself, are in positions of dominance and whose sins are those of domination; for them, Jesus liberates from the tyranny of violation and frees them to take notice of others, to be "persons for others" in sacrificial and transforming ways. Such configurations of self, sin, and redemption are hardly universal. To preach them as such, even (or especially) in the name of Bonhoeffer, does incalculable damage in obscuring the ways the Spirit might be desiring to move in persons whose selves and needs are very different. Because Bonhoeffer is such an important Lutheran conversation partner, I am committed to a more careful retrieval of his life and legacy. Using his own insistence on discernment anew in every new situation, I find him an incarnational Lutheran pray-er committed to resisting evil and helpful as a resource even against his own blind spots and those of the tradition. Bonhoeffer really is a treasure of our heritage. A reading that takes account of his biases, even as it appreciates his gifts, will let his legacy shine with the liberating presence of Jesus Christ for our time as well.

The term translated "suffer with" here is *mitleiden*, the verbal form of the German word for compassion, *Mitleid*. Bonhoeffer is creating a juxtaposition between *leiden* and *mitleiden* that is beautiful and crucial to his meaning. I originally translated *mitleiden* with "have compassion." This carries the implied connection to *Mitleid*-as-compassion and also echoes the use of *Leiden* (suffering) in Jesus' own Passion: so, "passion/compassion" for *leiden/mitleiden*. But this translation does not encompass the other primary, and more literal, meaning of *mitleiden*, namely, "to suffer with." This carries Bonhoeffer's meaning better, that Jesus is the only one who can truly "suffer with" others because he is the only one who can redeem them. Our compassion, he asserts, while essential, is not able to reach the level of shared suffering that alone is redemptive.

Jesus Christ and the Modern Sinner: Karl Barth's Retrieval of Luther's Substantive Christology

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Despite Karl Barth's lasting commitment to the Reformed tradition of John Calvin, it is the thought of Martin Luther that casts a long shadow over Barth's theology. As George Hunsinger points out,

> At certain vital points Barth follows Luther not only, broadly speaking, against Calvin and the Reformed tradition, but also against the main lines of the Lutheran tradition. There are points, in other words, where Barth actually retrieved Luther in order to stand with him not only against modernity, but also against the rest of the Reformation.[1]

If we refocus the historical lens upon Barth and Luther, they can be seen to stand like bookends on the shelf of the modern age, with Luther standing at the beginning of what historians now call "early modernity" and Barth standing at its end.[2] Barth looked back for the sake of looking forward and in so doing engaged in intense study of Luther. Barth absorbed aspects of Luther's theology that allowed him to articulate Christian theology in deeper and more sophisticated ways over against modernity, which had through the course of the Enlightenment set the criteria for how we know what we know and thus how we articulate the sinner's relationship to Jesus Christ. As Hunsinger has noted, Barth "almost alone among modern theologians" granted "uncompromising precedence to the Reformation over modernity itself." He did not reject modernity, but he "refused to allow secular epistemologies to set the terms for the validity of the gospel."[3]

Barth's mature Christology, seen in his *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, published in the early 1950s, has been a central channel into comparisons of his theology with that of Luther. Both Karin Bornkamm and Gerhard Ebeling have demonstrated that Luther and Barth share a Christocentrism in the best sense; clearly this was one thing Barth learned from Luther. Bornkamm has shown how Barth transformed Luther's conception of the offices of Christ as priest and king for the sake of forging a relationship between Christology and soteriology.[4]

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1. George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 282.

2. W. Stacy Johnson, among others, has even suggested that Barth's theology contains the seeds for postmodern theology. See his *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

3. Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 293.

4. Karin Bornkamm, "Die reformatorische Lehre vom Amt Christi und ihre Umformung durch Karl Barths," in *Luther und Barth*, Veröffentlichung der Luther-Akademie Ratzeburg, Vol. 13, ed. Joachim Heubach (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1989), 144.

Ebeling traces the christological impulses that Barth took from Luther, even while Barth formed his own criticisms of the Reformer in the *Church Dogmatics*.[5] But Barth had already begun retrieving aspects of Luther's Christology almost thirty years earlier. One example of this is a lecture that Barth gave in 1929 in Münster on theology and ethics titled "The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life." After a decade that included two lecture cycles in dogmatic theology and intense engagement with Roman Catholic theology, Barth dove into the works of Augustine, Calvin, and Luther. The result was a lecture on theology and ethics titled "The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life" that displays Barth's deepening understanding of Luther's Christology.

In this essay I briefly present Luther's Christology from his 1535 *Galatians* commentary[6] and show how Barth reached back to retrieve this for his own theology despite the drastically different epistemological landscape of the two thinkers brought about by the Enlightenment. Barth reached over Enlightenment notions of rationality and morality to retrieve Luther's substantive Christology, and in so doing he left behind the psychological and historical interpretations of the person and work of Christ by thinkers such as Werner Elert and Karl Holl. Luther's theology provided Barth with the resources to pull Christology out of the grip of Enlightenment understandings of the individual as an autonomous agent and show that reconciliation of the human to God by God and through God alone need not be beholden to modern theories of rationality or morality.

Martin Luther's Christology in the *Galatians* commentary

The richness of Martin Luther's Christology has provided scholars with a wide variety of angles from which to analyze it. Ebeling has tried to capture its expanse under the terminology of a "forensic-antithetical" Christology.[7] Finnish scholars such as Tuomo Mannermaa have focused their attention on the aspect of deification in Luther's early work.[8] Bernhard Lohse, and in more detail Ian Siggins, have approached Luther's Christology from a more inductive angle,[9] laying out the wide span of images that Luther employed, from his appropriation of motifs of Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux to his borrowings from medieval piety and the New Testament.[10]

This variety, however, does not weaken two fundamental commitments visible in all aspects of Luther's Christology: his commitment to the Chalcedonian formula and his commitment to human salvation as the central function and purpose of Christ's person and work. These two commitments are summed up in the Small Catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being."[11]

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5. Gerhard Ebeling, *Lutherstudien*, vol. 3 (Tubingen: Mohr, 1985), 495–506.

6. Luther wrote this commentary in 1531, but it was not published until 1535.

7. Ebeling, *Lutherstudien*, vol. 3, 539–46.

8. See, for example, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus. Rechtfertigung und Vergottung* (Hannover: Lutheran-Verlag-Haus, 1989).

9. See Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), and Ian D. Kingston Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

10. See Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 220, notes 8, 9.

11. Luther's Small Catechism, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 355.

The first commitment, seen in the words "true God and true human being," points to the ancient christological dogma from the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which established that the one person of Christ is constituted by two natures, divine and human, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, and inseparably. The second commitment is to soteriology, seen in the words "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being." Luther rarely speaks of the person of Christ without referring to his saving work on our behalf. The name *Christ* means reconciliation of the sinner to God; Christ *is* reconciliation.

Luther's double commitment to the Chalcedonian formula and to the explicit salvific function of Christ has been called by Hunsinger a "substantive" Christology.[12] Christ as very God and very human is the sole agent who initiates and fully completes the reconciling action that takes place between God and the human. No other component or action is necessary in a substantive Christology for reconciliation to be "real" for the human individual.

An account of the substantive nature of Luther's Christology can be seen in his *Galatians* commentary, where he writes,

> For you do not yet have Christ even though you know that He is God and man. You truly have Him only when you believe that this altogether pure and innocent Person has been granted to you by the Father as your High Priest and Redeemer, yes, as your slave. Putting off His innocence and holiness and putting on your sinful person, He bore your sin, death, and curse; He became a sacrifice and a curse for you, in order thus to set you free from the curse of the Law. (*Luther's Works* [hereafter *LW*] 26:288)

When Christ steps before God in our place as the sinner to be punished, he not only initiates but also completes *our* being made righteous in God's eyes. There is no other process outside of Christ alone that initiates and completes the justification of sinners. Neither the sanctification of the sinner nor the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life functions the way that Christ's saving work does—a saving work that is embodied in Christ's very person. Christ's person embodies the precedence of God's grace over any "good works" of our own. Luther states, "Christ took the initiative. . . . He did not find a good will or a correct intellect in me, but He Himself took pity on me. . . . By a mercy that preceded my reason, will and intellect, He loved me . . . so much that He gave Himself for me" (*LW* 26:175).

Reconciliation begins with Christ alone. And it is completed in Christ alone: ". . . victory over sin and death, salvation and eternal life . . . come . . . by Jesus Christ alone" (p. 138). There is no gradual getting better or gradual transformation in the sinner. Justification is not completed by a process of sanctification. It is this once-and-for-all sense of Christ's person and actions on our behalf that makes Luther's Christology a substantive Christology. His actions need no enhancement or outside aid and do not continue upon some gradual scale within the human being. What Christ began, Christ fully completes for us.

The righteousness that comes to us through Christ's reconciling act is a righteousness that brings with it its own new life. We are given a life that is not our own, for Christ's own righteousness *acts upon* us, *takes us over*. It decenters and destabilizes the center of our own egos, for it is the righteousness of Christ's person and not of our own person. Luther claims, "I do indeed live in the flesh, but I do not live on the basis of my own self" (*LW* 26:170–71). When we live in Christ, we are no longer the one who controls this reality in our lives. The presence of the person of Christ

12. Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 284.

displaces ourselves as the center of our lives. We cannot scale this reality in our lives down to a size that we can grasp and thus control, for the righteousness of Christ does not become a quality that inheres within the human being (cf. *LW* 26:127), nor is it somehow infused into the human to give him or her a new identity as non-sinner. It is a reality that remains distinct from us and greater than ourselves.

Indeed, the new life in Christ thrusts individuals into an existence of contradictions: We are now saints while still being sinners. As Luther states, when we believe the good news that Christ died for us, we "are reckoned as righteous, even though sins, and great ones at that, still remain in us" (*LW* 26:234). Thus, although Christ starts and finishes our reconciliation with God, we, living in the here and now, do not shed our old sinful ways. *We* are not rid of our sin. Luther writes,

> These two things are diametrically opposed: that a Christian is righteous and beloved by God, and yet that he is a sinner at the same time. For God cannot deny His own nature. That is, He cannot avoid hating sin and sinners; and He does so by necessity, for otherwise He would be unjust and would love sin. (p. 235)

This is the heart of Luther's classical doctrine of the *simul iustus et peccator*. In this life, we live a life of opposites, of being a saint and sinner at the same time.

God does not abandon us to the tension of saint and sinner, however. Christ's own *presence* to the reconciled sinner never ceases. It is an ongoing event. He is our "'pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night' [Ex. 13:21] to keep God from seeing our sin" (p. 232).

In that Luther emphasized Christ as the mediator, he was able to express the work of Christ in both the past, what he did as mediator for us on the cross, as well as in the present, what Christ does for us today:

The new life in Christ thrusts individuals into an existence of contradictions: We are now saints while still being sinners.

"Christ Himself is the life that I now live" (p. 167). The mediator comes to us continually. "Today Christ is still present to some," Luther states, "but to others He is still to come. To believers He is present and has come; to unbelievers He has not yet come" (p. 240). Thus, there is a clearly actualistic element in Luther's Christology that modern theology can draw upon. Christ does not remain in static, Aristotelian categories but spans the divide between God and human, between past, present, and future, between action and substance, between saint and sinner. Luther's Christ is the One who comes, who is coming.

The mechanism that binds the reconciled sinner to Christ is faith. This is a core aspect of Luther's Christology in the *Galatians* commentary. "Through faith, the human participates in this saving reality of Christ who is present in the Word. This faith is a union with Christ."[13] Luther writes,

> . . . these three things are joined together: faith, Christ and acceptance or imputation. Faith takes hold of Christ and has Him present, enclosing

13. Marc Lienhard. *Martin Luthers christologisches Zeugnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973), 217.

Him as the ring encloses the gem. And whoever is found having this faith in the Christ who is grasped in the heart, him God accounts as righteous. (*LW* 26:132)

This faith is inseparably connected to Christ's personal presence to us and to the destabilized lives that we live as the *simul iustus et peccator*. Faith is the epistemological underpinning of Luther's understanding of the "I yet not I" in Christ. "The life I live, I live on the basis of faith," Luther states. "For the time of life that I am living I do indeed live in the flesh, but not on the basis of the flesh and according to the flesh, but in faith, on the basis of faith, and according to faith" (*LW* 26:170).

But this inseparable connection to Christ's personal presence is not depicted as some kind of mystical union with Christ or "spiritual" faculty that then allows the believing human to make inspired statements about God (*LW* 26:28–29; 287). Although Christ is present to us through faith, he still remains beyond the reach of natural human reason, in the "cloud of faith" (p. 287). Luther states, "how [Christ] is present —this is beyond our thought; for there is darkness" (p. 130). Thus, it is precisely the concept of faith that maintains the distinction between Christ and the reconciled sinner. It maintains the *distance* between Christ's mediating activities and the natural activity of our human intellect, which, finally, are still under the control of sin, death, and the devil. As Marc Lienhard puts it, "Christ is a reality 'pro nobis' and 'in nobis' but he is and remains 'extra nos.'"[14] Christ is in us and for us but remains as a reality outside of us. And, because Christ remains outside of us, he is beyond our rational and moral control.

Thus, faith cannot be understood to be identical with human reason. For Luther, faith is a "mode of cognition" that is not identical to human reason.[15] Faith is not the natural human capacity to understand or to comprehend in the way it understands objects around itself. Luther disputes the "Sophists" on this point, arguing that even though the "natural endowments" of human reason are capable of mastering physical, civic, and political matters, the intellect is in fact corrupt and inept in matters of the knowledge of God. A completely other form of "comprehending" is necessary in order for knowledge of God to arise in the human being. When we discuss faith, Luther states, "we are in an altogether different world—a world that is outside reason" (*LW* 26:234).

Nonetheless, faith neither destroys reason nor renders it impotent in its own sphere. Faith is essentially a different kind of rationality, an "understanding" that moves beyond reason; it has its source and function in a manner different from natural human reason.

Karl Barth and the modern challenges to Christology

The Enlightenment's turn to the subject. The period of the Enlightenment brought with it a sustained focus upon the human individual as an independent, rational, and moral agent. The intense scrutiny upon the workings of the human mind and the rise of science in the Enlightenment made it almost impossible for twentieth-century theologians to bring together in theological anthropology the incompatible opposites of the "I yet not I," the saint-sinner of Luther's theology, or even the Chalcedonian formula of Christ as very God and very man, and still be taken seriously. Further, theologians no longer could claim that hu-

14. Lienhard, *Martin Luthers christologisches Zeugnis*, 290.

15. See Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), 82.

man knowledge of God was a distinct but still true and valid "knowledge," for it does not arise from logical thinking, scientific experiment, and mathematical reasoning.

"Faith" as a form of knowledge proved no match for the Enlightenment concept of human rationality. Indeed, the distinction that Luther made between faith and reason was possible because the concept of natural human rationality had not yet been elevated to the normative status that it was in the Enlightenment. Before the Enlightenment insistence that morality and rationality obey certain rules of logic and science, there was still room for Christ to be an "effective Subject" in the rational, moral agent.[16] As the effective Subject in humans, Christ imputed *his* righteousness to us through faith. He was the reference point for rational thinking and moral decision making in faith. In Luther's theology, Christ was the reference point for every "good work" that came from the human individual, and good works were understood as a consequence of the immediacy and activity of Christ within the believing sinner. This immediacy and activity kept the human rational ego decentered, allowing it to be a moral subject only by virtue of the "I yet not I." It did not stand on its own two feet.

The Enlightenment transformation of the understanding of human rationality hustled Christ the effective Subject out of theories of knowledge. This can be seen clearly in the thought of Descartes. Although the Christian tradition was no stranger to a sense of inwardness (Augustine had already found a way to God through a flight inward), it was anchored in the human subject's connection to God—in Luther's case, to the effective and personal presence of Christ in faith. Descartes loosed the inwardness of the human subject from its divine mooring, making it no longer necessary for human reason to operate solely by virtue of reference to the divine presence. He assigned a power—the power of "self-mastery"—to human reason that excluded any possibility of conceiving the human ego as decentered.[17] Human reason was unified, and effective in and of itself; no other effective Subject operated within it. The "I yet not I" central to Luther's Christology was lost.

Immanuel Kant took Descartes' understanding of the autonomy of reason one step further, proposing that the very nature of "reason" meant that one behaves in an *ethical* manner as well.[18] He pulled morality into the orbit of the Enlightenment notion of reason, endowing the human with an unprecedented sense of *moral* freedom. This autonomous morality was "accessible and accepted by every moral agent:"[19] the human individual him- or herself, without any mediating presence from a divine subject, had the capacity to act according to one's "good will." The moral nature of humans became rooted in autonomous reasoning, thus excluding any need or possibility that an external force or being could work upon the human to *make* one into a moral being.

Charles Taylor has judged Kant's moral theory to be "a powerful, . . . revolutionary force in modern civilization. [His idea] seems to offer a prospect of pure self-

16. Bengt Hagglund, "Luthers Anthropologie," in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526 to 1546. Festgabe zu seinem 500. Geburstag*. Vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 74.

17. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 147.

18. See Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Row, [1785] 1964).

19. Manfred Kuhn, *Kant: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 285.

activity, where my action is determined . . . ultimately by my own agency as a formulator of rational law."[20] Natural reason itself is an instrument that formulates and sets moral principles; it alone obligates humans to do good works. It alone produces righteousness.

The philosophical consensus about human rationality and morality ushered in by Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Descartes was worlds apart from the early modern understanding of the human of Luther's era, where rationality reached its limit in relationship to the divine being and where morality was made possible by nothing other than the divine action.

Lutheran theology and the "face" of Jesus Christ. While the Enlightenment granted a new autonomy to human reason, it could do so only by limiting reason to the sphere proper to it, namely, the sphere of history. "Reason" could no longer draw credible conclusions about anything that lay outside history and the logical sequence of events that make history. Speaking of Jesus as true God and true man became impossible. Credible speaking of Jesus Christ was restricted to speaking of Jesus the man, Jesus the historical figure, the divinity of whom could be established only from what we know about his humanity "from below."[21] Throughout the nineteenth century into the early twentieth, leading thinkers such as Elert promoted Christologies based solely on Christ's historical appearance, on the "face" of Christ. His physical presence—his 'face'—was the only reality of God that humans needed to see. In the life of Jesus as a purely historical figure, humans have the full, visible, complete face of God directly and immediately before them. Jesus Christ did not reveal a God behind and beyond himself. His person and work were not considered revelation.[22]

Because modern Protestantism did not think in terms of the God outside history, the Christology of a Lutheran like Elert did not seek a Christ who mediated between humans and a God who was perceived as an ultimately unknowable metaphysical "Father." The face and life of the historical Jesus was enough for natural human reason to discover and know God in God's fullness. This kind of intense focus upon history, and the rather uncritical and naive trust in history and human reason that accompanied it, was prevalent among Protestant thinkers of Barth's day. The substantive Christology of Luther lay buried deep in the layers of history, which makes the fact that Barth retrieved this aspect from Luther all the more remarkable.

Barth's retrieval of a substantive Christology. Already in Barth's early theology from the decade of the 1920s, before he even considered writing the massive *Church Dogmatics* (first begun in 1932), he displayed a keen interest in the theology of the Reformation, but he harbored doubts about the accuracy of his Lutheran contemporaries' representation of Luther's theology.[23] The Protestantism of the era, with its strong historicizing and psychologizing tenden-

20. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 364.

21. Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century 1870–1914*, vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 157.

22. Werner Elert, *Die Lehre des Luthertums im Abriß* (Münich: Beck, 1924), 29. For a similar Lutheran perspective, see Paul Althaus, "Theologie und Geschichte. Zur Auseinandersetzung mit der dialektischen Theologie," in *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* 1 (1923/24): 771. See also Barth's *Unterricht in der christliche Religion*, vol. 2 (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1990), par. 15:22, for his references to Elert and Althaus. (Hereafter *Unterricht*)

23. *Unterricht* 15:23; 28:29–30.

cies evident in thinkers like Elert, was completely inadequate for truthful talk of the God of Jesus Christ. After the outbreak of World War I and the profoundly disturbing involvement of leading Protestant theologians in justifying the aggression of the German nation, Barth could no longer accept a doctrine of revelation that read God's actions and intentions directly from the events of history. The Lutheran view that only the humanity of Jesus Christ was a positive and direct revelation of God on the surface of history became unacceptable to him.[24] If Jesus Christ was the true Savior, *God* had to be at work in him. The historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth needed to be part of something greater than himself.

In his preparations for his seminal cycle on dogmatic theology, begun at the University of Göttingen in 1924, Barth discovered for himself the ancient Chalcedonian Christology by which Christ was truly God, truly human, unmixed, undivided, unconfused, and unseparated.[25] What this discovery did was allow Barth to move his theology beyond the historical, psychological ghetto of modern Christology and closer to that of Luther,[26] closer to a substantive Christology in which Christ's own person and work starts and completes our reconciliation with God.[27] Precisely because humans come to know Jesus Christ as both God and man, his saving actions on our behalf are a real and effective reconciliation:

> That Jesus Christ is *this one*, the incarnated Logos God, is the absolute decisive presupposition for his work. . . . One can not interpret the officium mediatorium, the *completion* of reconciliation between God and the human, one will always misinterpret it if one does not previously know who the mediator, who the completer is in this act, who the representative of this officium is. The work of Christ has its very particular character, its very particular qualification, its very particular gradient determined through that which is effective here, through *the very* union with God which Christ finds himself in.[28]

Contrary to his Lutheran contemporaries, Barth established that Christ's *work* cannot be understood on the basis of the historical figure of Jesus alone. Knowing who Christ is and what Christ does comes only from knowing that he is united to the Father as very God and very human.

"The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life." In 1929, five years after his first lectures in Göttingen, Barth pushed even more against psychologized, historicized Christology in a lecture he gave at a theological conference in Elberfeld, Germany, titled "The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life." Using Luther, Barth demonstrated here how a substantive Christology of Jesus Christ the mediator functions as a critique of the Enlightenment understanding of the human as a rational, moral agent. Barth's targets were soteriologies like that of Holl, whose emphasis on Christianity as a religion of "conscience" essentially canceled out any need for a substantive Christology.

In an essay on Luther's doctrine of justification, Holl argued against the traditional substantive Christology of Luther. To Holl, the contradiction between the holy God and the sinful human could not be solved by simply pointing to Christ's person and work as the mediator between them.[29] God meets the sinner with the *in-*

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24. *Unterricht* 15:22.
25. *Unterricht* 6:169, 193; 28:46.
26. *Unterricht* 6:169, 193; 28:46.
27. *Unterricht* 29: 75.
28. *Unterricht* 29:75. See also Bruce McCormack's work on this aspect of Barth's dogmatics in his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 327ff.
29. Karl Holl, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre in Luthers Vorlesung über den Römerbrief mit besonderer Rückblick auf die Frage der Heilsgewissheit* in *Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 1: *Luther* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1921), 91–130.

tention to forgive and transform "the human into his own image."[30] Christ does not represent this intention and therefore does not function as a mediating "third thing" in the meeting of God and the sinner. God's intention can turn into actual forgiveness only when the human's own intentions and actions turn toward the good. Thus, God actually meets not the sinner but rather the human as moral agent who strives to fulfill the Law—as a doer of good works. Reconciliation of God and the human is therefore not an event where the enmity between God and the sinner is resolved; it is merely a "meeting of good wills." God justifies the one who is already justified.[31] The completion of reconciliation depends, finally, upon the moral fiber of the autonomous individual. The transformation of the individual into the *imago Dei* may or may not take place; justification is the "foundation for a new life," but it is up to the individual to gradually get better.[32]

Such a moralistic soteriology rejects the central role of Christ as mediator between God and the sinner. It has no need for a substantive Christology because "sin" is no longer perceived as a devastating ontological force. Sin is a misguided good will, but a *good* will nevertheless. The human rational agent remains rational and able to make moral decisions, even as a sinner, for rationality contains morality within itself. Sin is merely a discrepancy between rationality and morality whereby sinful actions occur when human moral intentions do not follow reason.

To Barth, however, the rational and moral constitution of the autonomous individual does *not* help us get better and better. Sin brings the rational, moral agent to his or her knees. Sin is about the rational, moral agent's own struggle against God; it is human resistance to grace, not a description of intentions. The struggle against this enmity toward God is undertaken by Christ and Christ alone, the Reconciler Spirit. Using Luther's *simul iustus et peccator*, Barth expresses the *externality* of Christ's work upon us. The human

> will never cease to acknowledge and confess, in all seriousness, that one's having been justified is utterly not in oneself, and consequently not in one's human unbelief. Indeed, the Christian is *simul peccator et justus* and the surmounting of this irreconcilable contradiction does not lie in the Christian . . . but is the action of the Word of God, the action of Christ, who is always the One who makes one out to be a sinner, in order to make one (though a sinner) into a righteous [hu]man.[33]

Not we but Christ conquers our "radical evil and hate" toward the living God.[34]

This retrieval of a substantive Christology had implications for both human reason and human morality. Barth countered the rationalism in contemporary theories of justification using the terminology of reason itself. He argued that the only activity that humans can ever really know is our own. Human rationality, therefore, only perpetuates our enmity toward God. Our insistence upon our own limited, self-enclosed rationality, and on controlling everything through our reason, does not bring us knowledge of God's work in Christ.

In "The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life" he writes that reason, "in its unbelief, in its stubbornness, in its meek self-righ-

30. Holl, *Die Rechtfertigungslehre*, 99.
31. Holl, 97–98.
32. Holl, 98.
33. Holl, 31; Barth, "Der Heilige Geist und das christliche Leben," in *Karl-Barth-Gesamtausgabe, Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925–1930*, III (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag Zurich, 1994), 495.
34. Barth, "The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life," trans. R. Birch Hoyle (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 19, 20.

teousness, in which it wishes to remain by itself . . . does not wish to hear of something radically different from its own workings" (pp. 19, 20). The exercise of reason does not bring us insight into God's activities: "What we can make evident to ourselves is always our own activity. Even when we set this under the prefix of grace, it still remains our own working" (pp. 24–25).

With these claims, Barth locates a "blind spot" in human rationality that can be filled only by Christ, for it is Christ alone who mediates himself to us through a "continual giving" of himself into faith, whose righteousness is "established as true in our flesh" (p. 29). In so doing, Barth reintroduces Christ as the effective Subject, so significant to Luther's theology, into an understanding of the modern sinner in relation to God. The rational agent is indeed subject, but a subject whose agency has limits in relation to God's reconciling activity. It is "I yet not I" who comes to know God.

Barth further buttresses his argument against the abilities of human reason before God by qualifying the ability of *faith* as a mode of cognition, lest it too be swallowed up by the all-encompassing Enlightenment conceptions of reason. Even faith is "*hidden* from itself" (p. 30; emphasis added). Rational thought cannot not make "faith" into a living knowledge of God. This is the task of the Holy Spirit: "but the two things, the acknowledgement of this contradiction [sin] and the knowledge of its being surmounted, are not our own business, but are the Holy Spirit's" (p. 31). Here, too, Barth does not allow the human "I" to take control of one's own faith. Faith is mediated to the human by God and cannot be swallowed up by one's sense of self as agent. The destabilizing "I yet not I" remains central to the identity of the believing Christian.

Barth reintroduces Christ as the effective Subject, so significant to Luther's theology, into an understanding of the modern sinner.

In his retrieval of a substantive Christology Barth also challenged the Enlightenment conception of a reasonable, autonomous *morality*, and destabilized the human as a moral agent. When Christ is understood as the sole effector of our reconciliation to God, the individual "*person must be left out of consideration*" (p. 26; emphasis added). Although human individuals are indeed agents of actions, any and every good work that we see as being "ours" is canceled out, and the "I yet not I" comes into effect. As Barth states, the work of Christ the Reconciler Spirit must be seen

> in its fundamental and immutable [*unaufhebbar*] restriction of everything that is our own work. Wherever the action of humans in themselves, in whatever pretense or form, is made into a condition of the human's fellowship with God, there the Holy Spirit is forgotten, and there sin is committed in order to overcome sin. (p. 20)

Where human morality, the human will or conscience, is seen as the way to mediate the relationship between the sinner and God, the two aspects of reconciliation that need to be held together—justification and sanctification—fall away from each other. Justification turns into a slow, gradual

process by which the sinner thinks he or she could become a nonsinner through the good works that he or she performs (p. 21). Reconciliation then becomes a matter of the "'divine gift and man's creative action combined in one'" (p. 22, quoting Augustine). The "I yet not I" collapses into the willful human ego, and a substantive Christology is dissolved.

Barth was well aware of the implications of his modern epistemological interpretation of Luther's substantive Christology. When it is properly understood, first, as being fully undertaken, begun, and completed in Christ's person and work as the God-man, and further, as an event that is outside the control of our reasoning skills and moral abilities, the term "Christian" must take on a very particular meaning.

> Supposing we decide to side . . . with Luther . . . to proceed with caution when we use the adjective "Christian" and to use the word in a way quite other than is the vogue in our victorious modern Christendom. What, then, is meant by such phrases as "Christian" view of the universe, "Christian" morality, "Christian" art? What are "Christian" personalities, "Christian" families, "Christian" groups, "Christian" newspapers, "Christian" societies . . . ? Who gives us permission to us the adjective so profusely? (pp. 37–38)

Concluding remarks

What Barth gained from Luther's substantive Christology was a way to express the work of Christ upon the sinner that overcomes the human drive to relate to God as beings who are autonomous, reasonable, and good-willed. Luther's tight unification of Christ's person and work highlights that Christ's action as the God-man and mediator is something that is started and finished in our lives by Christ alone. In that Luther closely connected the person and work of Christ with the creation of faith as a mode of cognition that is distinct from natural human reason, his Christology limits the capabilities of natural human reason to comprehend and therefore control what God's actions are toward us. To Barth, this meant that when it comes to the God-human relationship, human reason has a distinct blind spot. Taking this blind spot seriously means that Christians, especially Lutherans, maintain a healthy critical distance to the process by which we weigh matters of moral weight using our everyday reason and common sense. The "I yet not I" as the foundation for rational thinking provides us with a critical check upon the way we go about trying to lead lives we would like to call Christian. Sustaining the faith that is beyond the reach of our control requires that Christ continually mediate himself to us as a Subject working within us.

Finally, taking Barth's retrieval of Luther's Christology seriously means bringing to light the falsity that lies in the concept of an autonomous "good will" that accompanies modern individuals' sense of self. Morality never arises out of ourselves, and moral actions always have enfolded within them some other hidden motive and external influence, whether it be economic, personal, idealistic, or practical. It is clear in the theologies of both Barth and Luther that the only external factor that can actually *make* our good actions *good* is the divine influence, which comes from beyond our ability to rationalize and control, which is mediated to us in the person of the crucified Christ who continually works upon us as God's Reconciling Spirit.

The Construction of Latina Christology: An Invitation to Dialogue

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But who do you say that I am? (Mark 8:29)

Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable: let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name. (Jean-François Lyotard)[1]

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

The discourse of the life of Latinas in the United States is an ever-continuing project of de- and reconstruction, of shifting contextual identities. The simultaneously painful and life-giving experience of perennially critiquing, confronting, and constructing new personal and communal perspectives on our continuously conflicting contexts is especially enfleshed for Latinas in the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The human pain of Jesus on the cross accompanies the pain of Latinas at deconstructing our own inheritance as Latin American and American cultural products and the racist systems that render us marginal both within the secular community at large and in the community of Christians in the U.S. Christ's resurrection makes itself manifest in us, too, as we continuously reconstruct our fragmented identities to live abundantly in the *simul* world of our deaths and new life.

To refer to Latinas as a general category is risky if we pretend to ignore the different origins and socioeconomic modes of existence of an enormously varied group in its geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic extractions. Nevertheless, in our own diversity, we Latinas do recognize in each other the tension generated by the continuous construction and self-affirmation of our beings. Very often, upon encountering one another, Latinas engage precisely in the mutual sharing of the diverse delineations of our identity contours. Even though they are not exact, the contours of the identity of any two Latinas overlap sufficiently to allow amply for their mutual identification and understanding. This mutual recognition is a key determinant in the affirmation of the constructed identity of Latinas. It is in this communal recognition within an otherwise uninterested or even hostile environment that Latinas rest in a cultural home of our own.

That home, however, is not cemented in a particular ground of our own. It is a collage of random clippings from our Latin American *mestizo*[2] cultural backgrounds and the U.S. cultural melting pot.

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1. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 82.

2. See Virgilio Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

In the U.S., Latinas share with others a similar continuous project of simultaneous de- and reconstruction of identities and social location. Latinas work in their construction project alongside Latino brothers, African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians, and other U.S. volunteer or forced immigrants who do not and will not melt in the U.S. melting pot. Latinas, as part of the so-called "colored minorities," are not alone in the U.S. in their perennial struggle to find their place and their definitions in this country. The struggles of Latinas also overlap somewhat those of our white Anglo American sisters. In other words, many of the struggles of Latinas overlap the struggles of our siblings in race, ethnicity, gender, and class. The particular recipe of Latinas' struggle for self-identification and societal localization, however, is, as for the other groups, particular to us.

A Latino brother and recognized biblical theologian, Fernando Segovia, titles both the identity condition of Latinos and Latinas in the U.S. and one of his theological articles "Two Places and No Place on Which to Stand. . . ." Virgilio Elizondo, another esteemed Latino theologian, expands on this *mestizo* condition that both Latinos and Latinas share in common. He recounts that in his own experience as a Mexican American he "was not, and could never be, even if he tried, a real American, or a real Mexican."[3] In Elizondo's own words:

> These were identities that I knew that I was and was not at the same time. Nevertheless, I was something. My own being was a combination. (I was a rich mixture, but I was not mixed up!) In fact, it was becoming increasingly clear to me that my own interior identity was new and exciting. I was neither an American, nor a Mexican, but fully both, and exclusively none. I knew both perfectly even when I remained a mystery for them, who did not wholly know me.[4]

The loneliness and alienation of the *mestizo* condition is permanent and irreversible. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, main proponent of *Mujerista* theology and a first-generation Cuban immigrant, says:

> *Mestizaje* is grounded in the fact that we live in between, at the intersection of our countries of origin and the U.S.A. In the U.S.A. we are mostly marginalized people relegated to the outskirts of society, not really fully belonging. Regarding our countries of origin, we know that even if or when we do return, it is never really possible to go back.[5]

This describes my exact existential experience in this country and when I went back to visit Cuba, my country of origin, as well.

In addition to the profoundly ambiguous identity and social location that Latinas share with Latino men in the U.S., Latina women suffer the soci-economic and sexist oppression and discrimination that render them doubly marginal in the country where we live and have our being. Vast is the statistical material documenting the poverty rates and the dismal higher education levels of Latinas and Latinos. Plentiful are also the statistical studies of the results of sexism and its Spanish equivalent, *machismo*, which adds its particular sting to the life of the Latina population. Latinas are socially divided in economic classes and educational levels among themselves, with a great number of Latinas living below the poverty level in this country. At any

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3. Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 26, as referred to in José David Rodríguez, "Unidad e identidad: En busca de la unidad de la Iglesia desde la perspectiva Hispano/Latina Luterana," paper read at the ELCA Consulta sobre Identidad Latina (Chicago, 1999), 8.

4. Elizondo, *The Future is Mestizo*, 26, as cited in Rodríguez; the translation is mine.

5. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha. In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 33.

socioeconomic level, Latinas are more than likely to be discriminated against. All over the United States one can find Latinas holding the most menial and low-paying jobs in society. Middle-class Latinas have to contend with discrimination, cultural irrelevancy, and paternalism from their bosses or colleagues on their jobs.

We Latinas are keenly aware of our irrelevant status in society and even in the church in the U.S. Such awareness causes us a great deal of alienating resentment and pain. However, as Latina theologian Isasi-Díaz points out, "oppression frames us [but] does not define us."[6] What defines Latinas, for Isasi-Díaz and for me and many others, is the daily praxis of survival (*sobrevivir*) of the struggle (*la lucha*). In our daily existence, Latinas suffer, struggle with, and survive the oppressive socioeconomic conditions, the constant attack of sexism in our environments, and the perennial ambiguity of our own identity at the same time.

Isasi-Díaz describes the beginning of the process by which Latinas deconstruct the alienating and marginalizing forces and oppressive systems that attempt to trap us:

> In order for our struggle to be effective, we start by analyzing deeply the situation in which we live, taking into consideration the ethnic and sexist prejudices and the economic exploitation. We do not suffer the various forms of oppression separately, but we experience the various prejudices and economic exploitation simultaneously —as a complex oppression with many layers, that affect all aspects of our lives. It becomes obvious to us, then, that racial or ethnic prejudice is linked to the economic domination that we suffer here as much as the economic exploitation in our countries of origin. And we know that our oppression as women cannot be separated from the ethnic and economic oppressions.[7]

The suffering that we experience as a result of oppression and marginalization does not lead Latinas to give up the struggle or to feel merely as objects that are victimized by the oppressor. To the contrary, the suffering of Latinas empowers us to engage in what Isasi-Díaz terms "our historical project."[8] The deconstruction of the oppressive contexts that threaten to diminish Latinas' lives happens precisely in, with, and under the praxis of the life of Latinas. Latin American Liberation Theology already pointed us to the liberating potential of our daily praxis (as the intentional and inseparable combination of action and reflection) and to the here-and-now nature of salvation.



Latinas' faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior empowers Latinas to take action for individual and communal self-affirmation and responsibility and to deconstruct through our diverse praxis the oppressive categories that attempt to trap us. Jesus Christ is the constant companion of Latinas in our struggles and our de- and reconstruction project. He is our Redeemer because his resurrection was victorious over his suffering on the cross and his death, but for

6. Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 39.

7. Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 46; the translation is mine.

8. Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 189.

Latinas it is most significant that he suffered. He did not suffer just for the sake of suffering, and we don't, either. U.S. Latinas don't like to suffer, and we don't celebrate or romanticize suffering. Latinas look to Jesus Christ as the one who, having already set the captive free through his suffering and death and resurrection, still walks with us in our very real everyday suffering and death toward our daily resurrection and abundant life. We find Christ coming to us hidden in, with, and under our suffering. The causes of the daily suffering relentlessly keep causing pain daily, no doubt, and hence the need of "surviving" it, part and parcel of the *Mujerista* theology of Latinas. Jesus Christ accompanies Latinas with his redemptive presence, empowering our social and cultural survival in the U.S.

> The people at the margins are doing their part. They are speaking up.

So, as has been said, the christological perspective of Latinas empowers us to survive the indeterminacy of cultural and social identity and even our marginalization by racist and sexist systems. The experience of fragmentation of Latinas can help to give confidence to others that, accompanied by Jesus Christ, it is indeed possible to survive and live abundantly in a diverse context, even when marginalized and subjugated by the center. White Anglo theologians in the multicultural U.S. who are recognizing the value of diverse voices in their disciplines are now invited to step away from the center, to abandon it, and to risk stepping into the multivocal collage of contextual theological interpretations bringing their own interpretation to the collage. In so doing, such theologians would be entering into a real dialogue with the diversity of voices of the people of God, one of them being the Latina voices.

In good postmodern style, real dialogue on an equal footing would not have as its goal the legitimating of some interpretation, nor would it strive to delegitimate others. The key of the real dialogue would be the interaction among all the voices. Isasi-Díaz imagines this interaction in the case of white Anglo and Latina women:

> Interaction is not just adding Hispanic women to the pot—the melting pot—in order not to feel guilty or to avoid being accused of not being inclusive. Instead, real interaction is embracing the other women because they are important in themselves and not because we can use them. This requires a knowledge of Hispanic women and our struggles and the acknowledgement that our oppression is directly related to the privileges enjoyed by the dominant class.[9]

The contribution of Latina theologians to a real dialogue, whose honesty and equality and indeterminacy could prove painful at times, is that Jesus Christ will accompany us whatever pain or anxiety it causes us all. From the Latina perspective, Jesus Christ will be there with all of us in our dialogical project of theological interpretation. We will live in the tension of indeterminacy, for there will not be any privileged interpretation among all the contextual ones. Instead, we together would have a Christology even richer than ours alone, a Christology responsive to the common diversity of the people of God in the diverse contexts of this country and the world. Thus we

9. Isasi-Díaz, *En la Lucha*, 207; the translation is mine.

would all approach a multicultural Christ, and we would enjoy being, as Paul calls us to be, "one in Jesus Christ"—each one of us and others as we truly are and in the same degree; each one of us united in Christ within the diversity of our interpretations and experiences.

As, in the praxis of Latinas empowered by Jesus Christ, our reality is transformed, it is then that I concretely propose that, as a first action item to engage in the real dialogue, we all "adjectivize" every person and every christological claim. For example, "women" would be reserved to refer specifically *to the wide spectrum of the diversity* of women, but "African American women," "Latina women," "Asian American women," and "white Anglo women" would designate those particular racial, ethnic, and cultural groups of women. White Anglo women would have to get used to the inclusive and sometimes bothersome practice. Other groups of women are already used to being designated, and designate themselves, by their race and ethnicity. Also, some Christologies are commonly adjectivized, such as "Womanist," "Asian American," and "Latino/a" Christologies, among others. However, it is rare to see "white Anglo Christology" adjectivized. My proposal is that we use adjectivization equally for all Christologies or otherwise indicate the contextual perspective in which the particular Christology is molded. "Feminist Christology" would then explicitly refer to the christological interpretation of white Anglo women.

There are still many who, although welcoming voices from the margin that for them enrich interpretation, resist the challenge to see themselves having the privileged place of reading, interpreting, and teaching from the center. They insist on the universal nature of *their* Christology. Justo González, Latino theologian and mentor of many U.S. Latino/a theologians, states that

> North Atlantic male theology is taken to be basic, normative, universal theology, to which then women, other minorities, and people from younger churches may add their footnotes. What is said in Manila is very relevant for the Philippines. What is said in Tübingen, Oxford, or Yale is very relevant for the entire church.[10]

For those who are sympathetic to González's criticism here, I submit the challenge of taking concrete action steps against the perpetuation of such marginalizing state of affairs.

The people at the margins are doing their part. They are speaking up, and such notable white male Anglo theologians as Walter Brueggemann are slowly hearing their voices and hesitantly trying to accommodate them in a less invisible way, albeit still in the margins.[11] There is a lot more to do, a long, long way to go, especially by theological and religious educators. Loida Martell-Otero tells us that

> The ongoing challenge for academia, then, is to create an environment that is as welcoming and nurturing to Latina and Latino theological scholars as it has been to more traditional groups in the past. It will not suffice to include a book on Latin American Liberation Theology in a class list of required reading. It will not suffice to grudg-

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10. Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 50, as quoted in Loida Martell-Otero, "The Ongoing Challenge of Hispanic Theology," in *Teología en Conjunto*, ed. José David Rodríguez and Loida Martell-Otero (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 150.

11. See Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 711, n. 13. Brueggemann is still preoccupied with the process of adjudication of the "provisional" interpretations and the danger of an "uncritical embrace of autonomy . . . as costly as the alternative of authoritarianism."

ingly accept two or three Hispanics who have had to jump through the hoops just to apply. The tent must be enlarged. Seminaries must become truly multicultural centers of learning. What is said in Manila, the South Bronx, or San Juan must be seen as relevant to all the church. For theological discourse to become truly engaging, truly challenging, truly dynamic, all voices must be heard equally, with the same respect.[12]

Furthermore, as Robert Pazmino has pointed out, "an educational institution demonstrates true multicultural equity when all representative groups are granted the same access to resources, respect, space to be heard, appropriate role models, and shared power."[13] If concrete equalizations such as these are not systematized and institutionalized, the so-called theologians of color and the people of God that they represent will continue feeling and being marginalized, excluded, and ignored—even if the specters of a few of us walk around the corridors of white Anglo–dominated academia every day.

We will survive the oppression, accompanied by Jesus Christ every step of the way, and we will continue being "difficult," "of one-track-mind," "trouble makers," "too sensitive," and sometimes even "paranoid," as one or another professor or student of color has been termed. We, the few of us who elect to enter and stay in the marginalized conditions of our vocations, will continue gathering strength through our praxis and our historical project. And we will continue knowing that there is no authority in privileged unadjectivized interpretations. That is one way in which the people at the margins ignore the center that marginalizes them. That is *a* way of dethroning the oppressive center. I have colleagues who do not talk to the center, who speak only in gatherings of color, because they see no point, and I can see their point clearly.

A better way of unseating the center would be that those in the center themselves leave it vacant, and not in order to come join those in the margins, because when the center is vacated, so will the margins automatically: no center, no margins. A lofty and naive idea, perhaps, and one that Brueggemann does not think will be coming soon, nor should it:

> I know of no way to bring resolution to the growing tension between what I have called centrist and marginated readings of the text, nor is it clear that resolution is desirable. It is not likely that the established community of reading—ecclesial and academic—will be displaced. These communities of reading will continue to dominate our discernment of the text. Nor is it possible to imagine that marginated readings will be silenced, even though the silencing capacity of dominant reading communities—ecclesial and academic—is considerable. . . . Our interpretive theological situation is, and will be for the foreseeable future, one of conflict and contention, and no maneuver of self-proclaimed authority will be able to silence the challenge to the hegemony.[14]

So, according to Brueggemann, and according to ample confirming evidence in our colleges, universities, divinity schools, and seminaries, it seems that the current conditions will not change much if something is not done differently.

Kwok Pui-lan asks the naked-king question about the discipline of biblical studies:

> Why are there so few racial and ethnic minority scholars in the field of biblical studies in the United States? African American churches love the Bible, but there are only about twenty-five African American scholars teaching the Bible in

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12. Martell-Otero, "The Ongoing Challenge," 152.

13. Class conference by Robert Pazmino, quoted in Martell-Otero, "The Ongoing Challenge," 152.

14. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 102.

this country. The number of Asian and Asian American scholars is fewer than ten, while the numbers for both Hispanic and Native American scholars are even smaller. What can this tell us about the training of biblical studies in general and about the perpetuation of Eurocentrism in the discipline in particular?[15]

To even think of vacating the center may produce much fear. One could think that others could jump into it to fill it again, but only if the structures of current power realities are not transformed in a new dialogical interaction but merely substituted one for another. The tyranny of hegemonic truth will have to be abandoned by those who treasure it and are privileged by it. Leaving the center to become "just one more voice" within a diversity of voices could be confusing and anxiety-provoking. All those separate voices . . . could anybody hear anybody else over the cacophony of them all? But the majority of the Two Thirds World hear each other with no trouble; hearing and being heard from the center has been the only thing that is difficult. Deconstructing one's own center space could produce too much tension, but tension is not new to Lutherans who thrive on such paradoxical doctrines as *simul justus et peccator*, the Word as law and gospel, *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus*, and the two kingdoms.[16] Deconstructing conversations are already happening at the margins, so those vacating the center would have the witness of those whom Jesus Christ has been accompanying during confusing identity and alienating oppression.

The tyranny of hegemonic truth will have to be abandoned by those who treasure it and are privileged by it.

Just imagine: no center, no margins; no male, no female; no Jew, no Greek; no slave, no free; no binary oppositions to define us as center (male, Jew, free), or as "the Other" at the margin (female, Greek, slave), just all of us in our diversity as *one in Christ*, interacting together and dialoguing as one (not as two opposites) about who Christ is.

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15. Kwok Pui-lan, "Jesus/the Native. Biblical Studies from a Postcolonial Perspective," in *Teaching the Bible: The Discourses and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*, ed. Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 69–85.

16. See Giacomo Cassese, "Identidad luterana," paper read at the ELCA Consulta sobre identidad luterana (Chicago, 1999), 1.

God in Your Grace Transform the World

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Lecture given at Thomas Mar Athanasius Memorial Orientation Centre Seminar, Kottayam, Kerala, India, August 12, 2005

The theme for the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Porto Alegre, Brazil, "God in Your Grace Transform the World," consisted of a prayer by the church that God in his infinite grace transform his world and ours.

The New Testament witness that God graciously sent Jesus Christ into the world has to be the preeminent transforming act overshadowing every other transformation, past or future. The Gospel writer John says: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Paul, too, tells the church at Rome that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23–24).

We may say then at the outset that God has already transformed the world, continues to transform the world, and will in the future transform the world through the living Christ, making our first word on the WCC theme of 2006 also our last.

But I should like to give our theme a bit more specificity, and to do this I think it useful to have a look at some foundational teachings in the Old Testament on "grace," also "favor," which translates the same Hebrew word *hen*. It is the Old Testament that gives us the basic meanings of grace and favor, providing us also with contexts in which these concepts are seen to be operative. There we see grace at work in human relationships, gracious activity within Israelite society, and grace both sought and found in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, God of heaven and earth.

Grace, at base, is a term of beauty. It denotes a pleasing aspect or presentation of someone or something and is the quality that this someone or something possesses. The Old Testament speaks of a graceful doe bounding through the field, also a graceful woman, or woman who is gracious (Prov 5:18–19; 11:16). It speaks about gracious words befitting kings (Ps 45:2) or words that please kings along with other people (Prov 22:11; Ecc 10:12).

Even more important than possessed grace is grace finding its way into the eyes of the beholder. Here grace becomes favor. The common Old Testament expression is "to find favor in the eyes of" someone. In our modern world we look for a smile on the face, having now even a stylized face with upturned mouth to display when we are favorably disposed to this or that.

But in the ancient world people looked into the eyes to find favor or a lack of favor. The other Hebrew word most often translated "favor" in the Old Testament is *panim*,

meaning "face." One conveys favor by showing the face; one hides the face to withhold favor. The psalmist knows well that divine anger is conveyed in a "hidden face" (Pss 13:1; 27:9; 30:7; etc.).

Grace is a totally positive response in personal relationships. It is so with human beings; it is so with God. Grace cannot coexist with anger or judgment (Prov 28:23), being unlike "love" (Heb *'ahab)* in this respect, which can coexist with anger and judgment. Proverbs 3:12 says: "The Lord reproves him who he loves." How the multifarious dispositions of God are harmonized remains a grand mystery, but in humans it appears that love resides at a deeper level of the inner being where conflicting emotions are allowed a coexistence. Grace lies closer to the surface.

Grace is freely given and is thus in the nature of a gift (Gen 33:5–11; Judg 21:22; cf. Rom 3:24; Eph 3:7). Grace can also be freely withdrawn. One is under no obligation to show favor or to continue showing favor. Here it is unlike "steadfast/covenant love" (Heb *hesed),* which is a bonding virtue that presupposes rights and obligations. Steadfast love must be kept, demanding as it does positive attitudes and positive actions from both parties to a relationship.

Grace may also and usually does find mutual expression in relationships, but in a different way. It is given freely by one to another, and a relationship in grace is sustained only so long as the giver desires. Grace and favor can be lost (Deut 24:1).

Finally, grace is *active* acceptance, both with human beings and with God. In the psalms God's grace is paralleled to his "mighty works" (Pss 111:4; 145:4–9). To be gracious means to aid the poor, feed the hungry, deliver those in distress from defeat and death. It also means not oppressing the same and executing justice on their behalf (Exod 22:22–27). If Israel fails to so act, distressed souls in their helplessness will cry to God, and he will hear them, for God says, "I am gracious" (v. 27). Proverbs 14:31 says that (human) grace to the needy honors God.

Elsa Tamez, a Mexican theologian and biblical scholar, wrote recently on the WCC theme calling for "God's Grace and Human Dignity":

> Grace is not only experienced in a passive way. Grace is a gift that invites us to radiate it from our spirit, mind and body, to manifest it through our attitudes and practices and not just through what we say. *(Ecumenical Review* 57 [2005]: 276–77).

Grace in the Bible is active grace. In the book of Deuteronomy it translates into benevolence to the sojourner, orphan, and widow, also the Levite in town who is out of a job (Deut 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19–21; 26:12–13). Israel is to care for these because they are objects of Yahweh's special care (Deut 10:18–19; cf. James 1:27).

Yahweh reveals himself first and foremost in the Old Testament as a God of grace. In fact, graciousness is nothing less than a divine attribute (Exod 34:6; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Pss 86:15; etc.). But because of this and other grand testimonies regarding God in both Old Testament and New—and I am thinking here of (a) God's initiative in electing Israel, and later the Church as the "new Israel"; (b) God's saving of Israel in the Exodus, and his saving of the world in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; (c) God's profound love for the world in general, and sinners in particular; and (d) God's unconditional covenants to Noah, Abraham, David, and the Church—we are likely to overestimate the scope of God's grace and favor.

A danger of misunderstanding occurs at the following points. First, because God's grace is entirely positive in nature, it cannot coexist with divine anger or divine

judgment (Ps 77:9; Exod 34:6–7). Solomon anticipated this in his prayer of dedication for the Temple, telling God in the people's hearing that when the people sin and are judged they will have to make supplication to God (1 Kgs 8:28–53). Supplications are pleas for divine favor. In the theology of Deuteronomy, sin leads to a loss of divine favor and issues in judgment upon young and old (Deut 28:50; Lam 4:16). Israel understood the loss of nationhood as a loss of divine favor.

Second, because God's grace is freely given and freely taken away, we may come to think that human actions are irrelevant or at least marginal in importance. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not only does meritorious behavior figure into God's dispensation of grace; it is also true that because of sin, divine grace must be sought from the human end. Grace is therefore sought and found, which gets to the heart of our WCC prayer. We are seeking divine grace when we pray "God in your grace transform the world."

Favor can be sought and found by the righteous. While it is certainly true that God loves us and is gracious to us even when we are undeserving, it is similarly true that God gives grace to the righteous and the humble (Ps 84:11; Prov 3:34). Noah, we are told by the Priestly writer, received favor in the eyes of the Lord because he was righteous (Gen 6:8–9). The psalmist too knows that he can seek God's favor not only because he is poor and needy but because he is godly and trusting (Psalm 86). Proverbs 3:1–4 says that those who keep God's commandments will find favor with God and with other people.

Favor can be sought and found by the sinner. David seeks divine favor to blot out his transgression (Ps 51:1–2). More often, the psalmist seeks divine favor when he is sick, when he is threatened by enemies, and when he fears death (Psalm 116). Here he may be conscious of having sinned, or he may claim to be righteous. The psalms are filled with the supplication "Be gracious to me" (Pss 6:2; 9:13; 31:9; etc.), which appears only there. They are also filled with the plea "Turn and be gracious to me" (Pss 25:16; 86:16; 119:132; cf. 2 Kgs 13:23), where the psalmist imagines that God has turned his face away in anger or in judgment.

In Exod 34:1–9, the great revelation of Yahweh as "a God merciful and gracious" comes immediately after Israel's preeminent sin in the wilderness: the crafting of a golden calf. Moses in response to this divine self-disclosure pleads for God to pardon the people's iniquity and continue the journey with them (Exod 34:9).

After people have sinned, God will again be gracious and merciful if they return to him (Isa 30:19; Jer 31:9; Joel 2:13; 2 Chr 30:9). Sometimes individuals and Israel as a whole have to wait for God's favor (Pss 26; 102:13; 123:3; 140). The prophet Isaiah says:

> Therefore the LORD waits
> to be gracious to you;
> therefore he exalts himself
> to show mercy to you.
> For the LORD is a God of justice:
> blessed are all those
> who wait for him. (Isa 30:18)

We need then to know that favor can be sought and found, on the ground of righteousness or on the ground of unrighteousness—the latter if it is accompanied by a confession of sin.

In light of what has been said thus far, what more can we say about our prayer that God in his grace transform the world?

1. We can say, first, that God can indeed transform the world by his grace, no matter what we or anyone else does. Our God is a God of grace, and we can always

pray for transforming grace, expecting that it will be given as God chooses, despite all worldly forces working against the divine will.

2. We cannot expect that divine grace will coexist with divine anger or divine judgment. Even with the transforming gift of Christ to the world, there is still the divine wrath to contend with, which Paul says is kindled against all manner of wickedness. In the chilling passage of Rom 1:18–32, Paul says that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth." The modern church, particularly in the West, would do well to heed this sobering word if it hopes to be an agent of God's grace in today's world.

From Paul we learn also that, in spite of salvation by grace alone (Rom 3:24), there is a judgment of God meant to lead people to repentance, also another judgment to be revealed on the final day of the Lord's coming, where every person will be rendered according to his works (Rom 2:1–11). Luther appears to have read right past the important verses 6–8 in Romans chapter 2: "For [God] will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury" (NRSV). So, if God does not transform the world by his grace, he will transform it by his wrath, and, once again, the modern church will ignore this correlative truth only to its great sorrow.

3. We can say that divine grace is promised and can be expected to come to individuals and to a church that leads a life of obedience to God's commands, that seeks the higher righteousness Jesus talks about in his Sermon on the Mount. God desires



righteous living, and our world will experience great transformation if both individuals and the corporate body of Christ live up to their calling to be God's holy people. The bar of Christian living needs to be raised considerably higher than many have it at the present time.

4. We can say that divine grace will surely abound when individuals and the church repent of their sin. Enormous transformation can come about in our world if those who bear the name of Christ will simply humble themselves and repent rather than seeking to justify, as they so often do, evil and evildoers.

5. Finally, divine grace will surely abound when the Church emulates God and carries out active grace to the poor, the needy, and those in distress. Here we become channels of the divine grace, allowing ourselves to be used by a God who cares deeply for all who suffer in our world.

A Book Worth Discussing: Vítor Westhelle's *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross*

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The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross. By Vítor Westhelle. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. xii and 180 pages. Paper. $22.00.

Vítor Westhelle's *The Scandalous God* might be entitled "Reflections from the Abyss." His text is a series of profound reflections upon life marked by absurdity, pain, suffering, horror, meaninglessness, the experience of chaos, and the abyss. For Westhelle the Cross is the lived reality of hell and darkness. Furthermore, he incisively describes how Christians continually hide, deny, and decorate the reality of the Cross, the abyss. Westhelle will not allow his readers to escape the Cross.

But, he argues, life is not only the abyss. There are also unexpected signs of light and life within the darkness. These surprising events of hope are only to be found in the midst of the abyss when people live out expressions of love in the shadow of the Cross. For Westhelle the theology of the Cross is not a theological articulation of some objective truth. Rather "it is a practice [a journey] of solidarity with the pain of the world, which follows the encounter with Christ Crucified" (p. 112).

One does not read Westhelle's text; one meditates, is challenged and blessed.

Westhelle's primary perspective

Theologies of the Cross begin from a variety of experiential and theological perspectives. The most dominant perspective within our Christian communities is rooted in a medieval world in which royalty was to be given due respect. If the laws of the realm were violated—if, for example, a king's deer was illegally killed and eaten by a poverty-ridden family—royalty was offended and the realm dishonored. The "world" had been thrown out of joint by the offense. The balance of justice had to be restored and the king's wrath assuaged. The violator in some way had to pay the price so that royalty's honor might be restored. This is often called the Anselmian perspective. Mel Gibson's *Passion* film portrayed in bloody horror the price that had to be paid for human violation of God's cosmic law. We have sinned; a price had to be paid; we are incapable of paying such a price. However, through the suffering of God's Son God pays the ultimate sacrifice, and by his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53).

Martin Luther, although accepting a portion of this medieval tradition, dramatically changed the perspective from which one could see the death of Jesus. Luther found this new radical perspective in the apostle Paul. Faith did not only contem-

plate the Cross of Jesus as an objective reality, but the believer in faith personally entered the reality of death and resurrection (Rom 6:1–6). One dies to sin and rises to life in the Spirit.

We are all sinners. Sin is that which throws the world out of joint. For Luther sin is being centered in self rather than in God. When the axis of life moves from God to our own desires, the world begins to shake. Salvation for Luther takes place when the obsessive self is put to death and God performs a contemporary resurrection. Through the power of the Spirit we are raised as new creations—people who in trust live with God as the center of life. Luther emphasizes that this work is God's work and is a free gift received in faith. We are right with God—justified—by God's grace through faith. Being a theologian of the Cross, for Luther, is not a quiet, academic study of Jesus crucified. Rather it is experiencing the wrath of God burning through our guilt against our sin. In angst one's pride-filled ego is annihilated in preparation for life centered in God.

Westhelle lives, breathes, and thinks in this theological world of Luther. However, he radically transforms the perspective and vocabulary. For Westhelle, as for Luther, the Cross is a contemporary experience. But for Westhelle it is not limited to an individual experience of death and resurrection. It involves the very death and resurrection of God. Westhelle's primary motif is not found in medieval Europe with Anselm or in the Epistle of Romans with Paul and Luther but in the post–New Testament world of Melito of Sardis (150 A.D). He quotes Melito: "He that hung up the earth in space was Himself hanged up; He that fixed the heavens was fixed with nails . . . God put to death!" (p. 2)

The death of God, the resurrection of God. This is the perspective of Westhelle. This perspective has its beginning in the Hellenistic Christian Church where assertions of the deity of Christ were presupposed. This theme—God died and dies and God lives—is central to Westhelle's reflections.

Having written his Ph.D. dissertation on G. W. F. Hegel, Westhelle finds Hegel's thoughts helpful. He quotes from Hegel's *Christian Religion: Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

> *God has died. God is dead:* this is the most frightful of all thoughts, that everything eternal and true does not exist, that negation itself is found in God. . . . However, the process does not halt at this point, rather, a reversal takes place . . . God arises again to life, and thus things are reversed. (p. 70)

For Hegel, religious language is true but takes the form of immature pictures rather than the form of mature abstract philosophical categories. Theology said God died and God lives. As a philosopher, Hegel changed from this theological imagery to abstract language and described all reality as a cosmic rational system, *Der Geist* (The Absolute Mind or Spirit). For Hegel this cosmic system was not static but was a vital living organism that progressively moved toward a goal. First there was the Absolute Mind/Spirit, and then this Absolute (God) annihilated itself and died into a world of matter. The Absolute God dies. Transcendent Spirit becomes immanent in a material process. Nevertheless, the Absolute Spirit lives again and begins to think and become self-conscious of itself through the human process and mind. In human thought the Absolute Spirit that died is lifted and lives again in the human spirit.

Westhelle finds the religious thought of Hegel, although not the rationalistic system, helpful in articulating his own vision of the Cross. For him the phrase "God died" points not just to the Son of God's

death on the Cross but also to a cosmic experience and expression of reality, similar to that found in Hegel. Death, suffering, alienation, conflict, and oppression are present realities. They are the manifestation of God's death, the death of everything that is life, love, and truth.

Westhelle's reflections are steeped in the pain and suffering of the world. In pain, death, poverty, marginalization, oppression—and this is what is meant by the Death of God—we experience living in the abyss, in darkness and despair. That is the truth of human existence. Truth-telling points to the abyss and agents of death. Westhelle continually quotes Luther saying a theologian of the Cross calls a thing what it is! A theology of the Cross calls us to recognize the suffering of the world and the pain of God. We are called to name suffering, death, chaos, and oppression what it is, and we are called to live in solidarity with the pain of God and the world.

Luther's understanding of dying and rising, death and resurrection was focused on an individual experience of dying to self and being raised in faith to justification and the life of the Spirit. Westhelle's perspective and vision focus upon a Cosmic Divine Death and Life of which one is a small but significant participant. A theology of the Cross rips away the façade that attempts to hide pain and death and invites one into the abyss where in the darkness there is the possibility of life and light. But there is no possibility of life unless we are first willing to participate in the death of God, the pain of the world.

Westhelle uses a Gospel image to express our journey in the aftermath of the darkness and death of the Friday crucifixion, the Abyss. He relates the story of the women walking to the tomb of Jesus on that Sunday morning. They walk in an atmosphere of deep sorrow, expressing their love for Jesus as they go to anoint his body for the last time. It was in performing this act of love to their dead master that they experienced the resurrection, or life and hope. Westhelle sees this as what gives meaning to life—performing acts of love in the shadow of the abyss—and makes light shining in the darkness possible. God died, and God lives. The abyss is reality, but love in the shadow of the abyss makes the return of God possible.

This is Westhelle's primary perspective for a theology of the Cross. A cosmic death of divinity and a cosmic resurrection are a reality portrayed in the Cross and resurrection, but, much more, they are a cosmic reality in which we participate.

Westhelle on Luther

Westhelle writes out of a Lutheran perspective and finds many of his themes and insights in Lutheran texts from the Reformation. He references Luther's profound words "The Cross is our theology." Although using the language and texts of Luther, Westhelle discovers new possibilities for meaning in Luther's texts. He uses these new insights for the purpose of developing his own theology of the Cross. This particularly reflects Westhelle's dialogue with postmodernism, which emphasizes that all language is molded by its cultural-historical context and that in one sense its truth, its relevance, is limited to its own cultural-historical context.

However, texts are also remembered and transcribed and therefore become detached from their original intent and context. They float beyond their time and place and are always open to new insights and meanings. This, it appears, is how Westhelle reads the texts of Luther. We have already seen how Luther's death and resurrection themes have been transformed from personal dying and rising with Christ

to a Cosmic death and resurrection within the totality of reality, the death and resurrection of God, or, in Hegelian terms, the death and life of *Der Geist*. In a similar way Westhelle reinterprets Luther's understanding of the wrath of God in the form of pain and suffering. Luther sees suffering, particularly spiritual/psychological suffering (inner despair or angst), as the abyss exploding from an encounter with a terrifying God. In the midst of this terrifying encounter one may experience the abandonment of God. God's wrath experienced in a terrified conscience is God's annihilating power crushing the personal ego, making possible life in the Spirit. This vision is rooted in Luther's vision of the bondage of the will and irresistible grace. For Luther, human beings are bound in sin eternally, bound in pride-filled self-centeredness, and are incapable of escaping from this ego-centered prison. God alone with irresistible power (grace) can break this bondage—and does so through God's wrath, which through suffering, pain, and a terrifying spiritual abyss destroys one's egocentricity. It is put to death, annihilated, in order that a resurrection might occur, a faith-life of the Spirit realized. Westhelle recognizes this original spiritual struggle of Luther and is aware of how Luther found answers to his quest for a gracious God in a radically new understanding of righteousness/justice. We receive what is not due to us (p. 40).

Steeped in Luther's world and writings, Westhelle deals with a floating text that is not necessarily bound to Luther's original form of angst but is still angst, despair, the abyss. He explains Luther's statement of God's "breaking down in order to restore" as the consequence of "speculative strategy about God's way of dispensing salvation" and indicates that Luther at this point was molded by (not free from) his medieval monastic tradition. Luther, or rather the contemporary Lutheran text, does not really intend to say that God annihilates the ego as a means of salvation: what is intended by the text is the prevention of any claims on our part to merit our salvation (p. 54).

By avoiding a direct conflict with Luther's intent Westhelle is able to continue his dialogue with Luther in the context of twenty-first–century reality. For Westhelle that is expressed in the theme God died and God lives. Suffering, pain, and the abyss are realities, and Life (the Resurrection of God) is experienced as love is shared in the shadow of the abyss. Within the new paradigm Luther's experience of angst is today shared in another form by those who experience the death of God, the abandonment of God, in oppression, marginalization, hunger, pain, and death. Furthermore, those who recognize the death of God or the reality of the abyss experience the transformation of life, for they are no longer resisting God's grace. In recognizing themselves as abandoned by God and dwelling in the bondage of death they are ready to count on God's grace to lift them up (p. 55). This is the twenty-first–century expression of justification by grace.

Westhelle reads another set of Luther texts that deal with the hiddenness of God in a similar way. He recognizes that Luther speaks of a hiddenness of God in the passion of Christ: God is met in the opposite, death or the Cross. However, in *The Bondage of the Will* Luther speaks of a second hiddenness that is behind the Cross. For Luther this second hiddenness of God arises for faith when confronted by the fact that some persons come to faith by the irresistible power of God and others do not. Why so? It is hidden in the terrifying otherness of God. I have argued in my book *Christ Crucified: A 21st Century Missiology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University

Press, 2004, 51–53) that Luther at this point sacrifices radical crucified truth for continuity with Hellenistic rationalism, which Luther claims to fully reject.

Westhelle, however, argues that the double sense of hiddenness found in Luther does not represent "alternative options for interpretation" (p. 56) because both are valid. Nevertheless, in claiming their validity he changes the perspective of Luther. Luther's convictions arise out of the experience of being saved by irresistible grace; Westhelle argues that it arises out of our experiences of being abandoned. Within the context of Westhelle's primary paradigm—God died, God lives—the second hiddenness of God arises out of the abyss when life and meaning are gone. He quotes David Tracy, who sees Luther's affirmation of a second hiddenness as rooted in our experience of God as "frightening, not tender, sometimes even as an impersonal reality—it—of sheer power . . . signified by metaphors . . . as abyss, chasm, chaos, horror" (p. 57).

Westhelle at this point plays the role of the confessional theologian claiming that floating textual interpretations are not only legitimate but enriching of the tradition. In this case he argues that Luther's own interpretation was based not on a rational argument involving irresistible grace but upon the authority of Scripture. He continues:

> But it is better to admit there is an inscrutable shadow-side to God than the other options available to us. It would be simply a descriptive statement of our finite experience, and of the very finitude of our reason. But if it is blasphemy, it is the one of Job. This is the one God is great enough to take. (p. 57)

Amazingly, one has to add to Westhelle's thought that God takes more than the blasphemy of Job. A theology of the Cross affirms that God takes the blasphemy of the death of Christ into God's own being, agonizes over the victimizers and blasphemers as well as the abandoned and even embraces them with love. Only such love has the audacity to say Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. Westhelle has much wisdom to share about the Cross shattering all rationality. Loving one's enemies is the heart of irrationality and the heart of the Cross. Westhelle does not reflect upon this absurdity. Interestingly, instead of love of enemy as the epitome of love he reflects on the love of the dead friend as the epitome of love since the friend can no longer return an exchange of the gift (referencing Kierkegaard).

Westhelle as theologian is free to express his theological witness and as most theologians free to deal with confessional texts floating apart from their original context and intent. But it is also legitimate to point out that this does not express what Luther writes in *The Bondage of the Will*. I prefer to deal with theological texts insofar as possible in their context and intent and state that I believe or think this to be true and this to be not true. In Westhelle's words, simply state what it is. Having read the original text in its own context one is free to say that the tradition must be stretched and reinterpreted for the contemporary context.

Westhelle's text is fascinating to read and contemplate. He writes out of his own experience of the abyss and the experiences of the millions who share participation in the contemporary death of God. His interpretations of Luther's texts that make possible a focus upon the reality of pain, suffering, the abyss, injustice, oppression and tyranny are a gift for which we owe him gratitude. His use of Luther texts to call for truth telling—to call a thing what it is—is profound. His imagery of sharing the fragrance of love with the smells of death is, truly, hope.

Hymn: A New Creation

Howard S. Olson
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As I reached the status of an octogenarian with an increasing awareness of my own mortality it has been encouraging to be reminded by the Apostle Paul that "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" So with each new day of grace I pondered on the rich variety of newness this undeserved grace provides.

When I was invited to the ELCA Advanced Writers' Workshop June 14–18, 2003, I was working on a first draft of a hymn text on the theme of a new creation. I chose a simple meter of 11 11 9 9 and composed a melodic line to which my developing text could be set. The participants in this clinic included experienced writers, journalists, editors, musicians and poets. The perceptive insights and critique offered by these poets led to several improved drafts.

After the workshop I sent my text and melody to Chris Nelson, who kindly created an SATB setting of my hymn and made some helpful suggestions for the improvement of the text. Two more musicians, A. Louise Olson and Richard G. Steinbreuck, suggested further adaptations of the harmonization, which I have incorporated.

In creating a text centered on the newness bestowed in Christ Jesus, my examples were circumscribed so that I could not include beautiful citations on newness from the Old Testament.

The first stanza sets the theme of our being made a new creation in Christ who sets us free from the terror and tyranny of sin's enslavement.

The second stanza is careful not to denigrate the Hebrew tradition of the Torah but to show that in Christ's new interpretation of the old law he fulfilled what the Torah intended.

Stanza three reminds us that Jesus taught us a new commandment to love one another as he first loved us. His new commandment leaves no room for pride in our own achievements but rejoices in how the Lord enables us to love him through loving our neighbor.
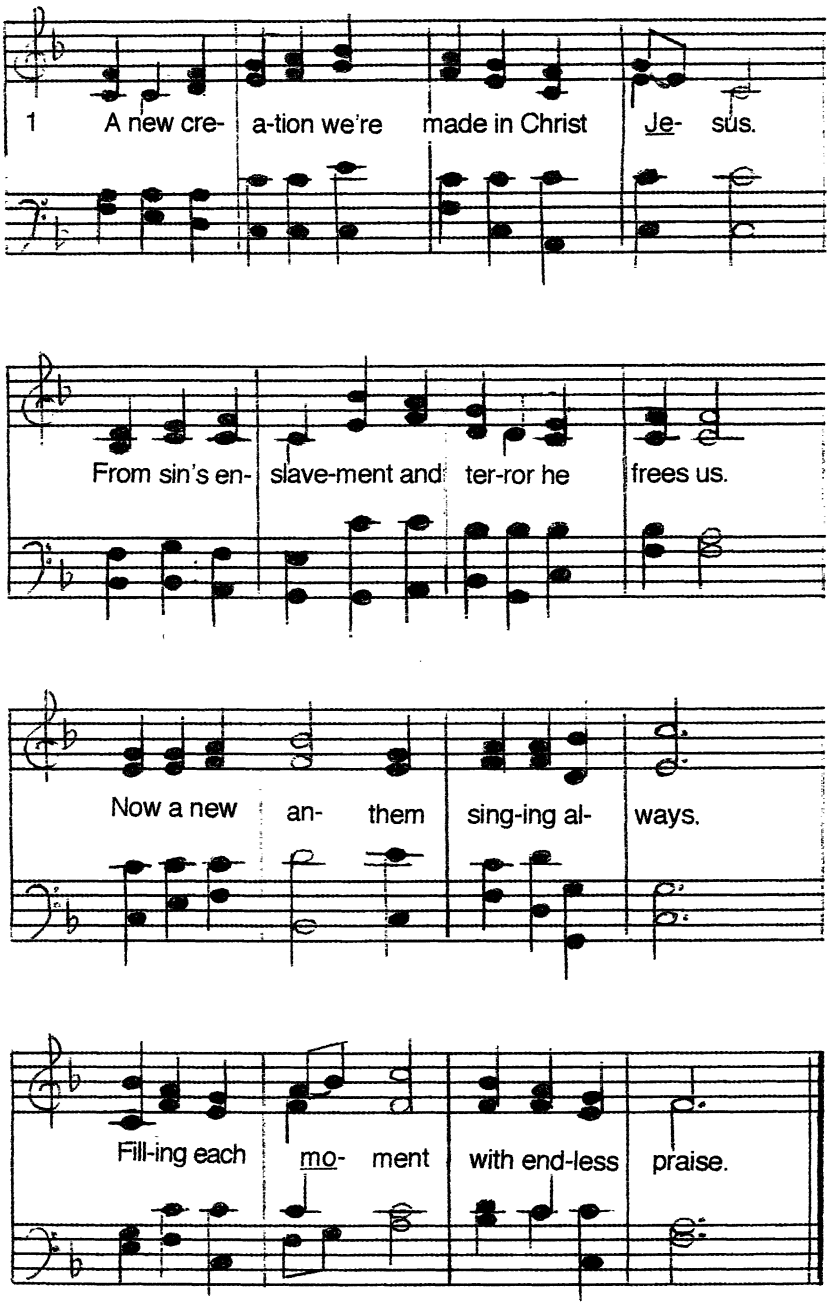
Stanza four deals with the sacrament of the Eucharist, the gift of bread and wine through which we are renewed, forgiven, and absolved. We come to the table, broken we kneel, rising united, with newness made whole.

The last stanza stresses the rebirth in baptism. Jesus commissioned the disciples to teach and baptize. Through this sacrament of word and water we are welcomed into the kingdom of God.

This hymn is appropriate for worship at the rites of confirmation, eucharist, and baptism. It is especially fitting for August 5, 2007, when the second reading is Col 3:1–10, dealing with the new life in Christ.

A New Creation

2 Cor 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!



A New Creation

2 Cor 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

1 A new cre-a-tion we're made in Christ Je-sus.
From sin's en-slave-ment and ter-ror he frees us.
Now a new an-them sing-ing al-ways,
Fill-ing each mo-ment with end-less praise.

2 Je-sus with new wine the To-rah tran-scend-ed.
His word ful-fills all the old law in-tend-ed.
When life seems aim-less, with-out a way,
He will di-rect us with grace each day.

3 His new com-mand-ment to love one an-o-ther,
Treat-ing each neigh-bor as sis-ter or bro-ther.
No long-er self and pride on the throne,
Service and sac-ri-fice our hearts will own.

4 Re-newed by bread and wine for ab-so-lu-tion.
This ho-ly sac-ra-ment brings res-o-lu-tion.
Brok-en we kneel, di-vid-ed in soul,
Ris-ing u-nit-ed with new-ness whole.

5 When our Lord left his dis-ci-ples he taught them
To bap-tize all who would trust and be-lieve him.
Through word and wa-ter re-born a-new,
Wel-comed to en-ter his kingdom true.

Text: Howard S. Olson
Tune: Howard S. Olson

Newness
11 11 9 9

Book Reviews

Christian Assembly: Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age. By Gordon W. Lathrop and Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. 180 pages. Paper. $18.00.

In this book Lutheran historian Wengert and liturgist Lathrop ask: How do you know the Christian church when you encounter it? What are its marks? They use the idea of "the marks of the church" (*notae ecclesiae*) to address this question. This is primarily a book about ecclesiology, alternating analysis of early Lutheran theology with contemporary social and congregational analysis.

The authors begin with a study of "assembly" (*ecclesia*) that allows them to raise the question of the origins of the marks of the church. Readers may be surprised to find that the terms in the Nicene Creed (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) were not designated as "marks" until well after the start of the Reformation. The authors appraise a range of other proposed marks, which are identified through liturgical, historical, and contemporary discussions. They warn against the dangers of a "bowling alone" ecclesiology common in many American churches and offer instead a range of models and typologies that avoid either a single "one size fits all" solution or a "choose your own" ecclesiology.

The authors seem to struggle to locate the reason for the popularity of the idea of "marks." My hunch is that because Calvinists added a mark (discipline) to two of Luther's most popular constituents of the church (proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments) they were important in the development of the idea of marks. Besides a wider ecumenical analysis, it might also have been interesting to hear more about contemporary understandings of the marks. For instance, Karl Barth has commended "apostolicity" as the sole mark of the church. However, the authors have understandably tended to emphasize Lutheran-Catholic conversations more, and this is an important contribution.

Ultimately, the chief value of this book is in raising the questions asked at the outset. By rooting their answers within the context of Lutheran tradition, the authors offer a pastoral reflection on how we might recognize the church when we see it. Lathrop and Wengert provide no simple formula but rather a range of classical and contemporary conceptions that might guide us as we think about what the church is.

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Coram Deo: Human Life in the Vision of God. By Caryn D. Riswold. Princeton Theological Monograph. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock/Pickwick Publications, 2006. 166 pages. Paper. $21.00.

In this published dissertation, Riswold compares and contrasts contemporary theologians' emphasis on "relationality" with more traditional approaches to theological anthropology. Luther's eucharistic theology takes prominent place in this analysis. Past and present tensions between relationality and individuality hold the book together.

Riswold succeeds in weaving contemporary critiques of classical atonement theories into thoughtful reflections on the "mission of Jesus." Likewise, process theology's concern for community and participation finds a ready dialogue partner in Luther's language of the real presence. This book is strongest when the best of contemporary theology and the Christian tradition speak honestly and directly to the other, *coram deo*.

The major divergence between past and present arises in how contemporary theologies frequently stress human responsibility for the well-being of creation. Riswold writes, "In order to preserve life, we must be able to do something" (p. 96). This desire to "do something" implies the long-standing critique that

Luther advocated ethical passivity. But instead of asking how Luther addressed this exact problem and then beginning a new conversation across the ages, Riswold looks past Luther in favor of contemporary insights. Taking Luther's theological anthropology more seriously, not less, would have strengthened the book's thesis.

That the book begins such conversations between past and present shows its usefulness. *Coram Deo* gives readers (presumably students, pastors, and teachers) a good sense of the goals and concerns of contemporary feminist and process theologies; it also shows how classic theological themes continue to speak to today. The fact that it may leave readers wanting more discussion may reinforce the community-centered theology and dialogical process that Riswold hopes to foster.

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Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul. By Tom Holland. Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2004. 382 pages. Cloth. $22.99.

Tom Holland teaches New Testament and Hermeneutics at the University of Wales. This book on Paul was written in the context of his work in that university. While not a simple study, Holland's theses are straightforward. First, the theology of Paul depends more on the Hebrew Scriptures than on Hellenistic thinking (pp. 109, 288). Second, Paul speaks of communal deliverance rather than individual salvation (p. 110). Third, the Exodus or Paschal motif formed the basis of Paul's Christology (pp. 167–72, 225, 290).

Though the Exodus motif depends on Pentateuchal narratives, especially Exodus, Holland finds in the prophet Isaiah the most immediate use of the motif for Paul, especially the *doulos* passages (pp. 31–34). The believer enters the Christian Paschal community through baptism in the death of Jesus (Rom 6:1–6; pp. 141–54). That death of Jesus, which opens up the New Israel, reflects one primary motif—the Passover (Rom 3:21–26 and the meaning of *hilasterion*; pp. 157–82). So in Paul divine justification references the whole process of redemptive history. It speaks of the "corporate salvation accomplished by Christ's death and resurrection" (p. 209). Holland appreciates the New Perspective on Paul that tries to erase the assumed antagonism between Paul and Judaism (e.g., Sanders, Dunn, and Wright), but he believes their view of the Jewish law as covenantal nomism doesn't quite allow covenant to be defined in terms of the Exodus rather than boundary markers, such as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and kosher food (pp. 183–205).

Finally, Holland wrestles with another major theme of the historical Exodus and the theology of Paul: the firstborn. As he is aware, the joining of Jesus as the suffering servant with the firstborn does not easily satisfy the reader or even Holland himself (pp. 237–86). He does derive some satisfaction from the secondary Pauline hymn found in Col 1:15–20 where Christ is the *prototokos* from the dead.

As indicated, this book is complicated. The language is clear, but the ideas, and the discussions with other scholars, reveal procedural difficulties. Holland assumes that his covenantal thesis goes back to the Reformation. He assumes that he is a conservative and that those who disagree with him are liberals (p. 53). To be sure, liberals do tend to be sociologically individualistic, but no more so than conservatives and fundamentalists who seek the personal salvation of unbelievers. In fact his covenant motif resembles the older Heilsgeschichte theology in which the redeeming act of God occurs in the context of God's people. A wide spectrum of scholars were associated with this position. Few people would call this reviewer conservative, yet I find myself in considerable agreement with the communal approach presented by Holland. That is, baptism joins the person to the body of Christ, eucharist celebrates the formation of the new Israel, and redemption references acceptance into the people of God. Holland does well to stress once more the communal nature of the Christian faith.

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I Have a Dream: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Future of Multicultural America. Edited by James Echols. Minneapolis: Fortress. 2004. xi and 102 pages. Cloth. $15.00.

This is an excellent and accessible resource for faithful reflection and analysis in congregation or classroom of justice issues confronting our multicultural society. James Echols gathers the 2003 Hein Fry addresses commemorating the 40th Anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Echols hopes that "this volume [would] remind you of the dream and [would] challenge you to work . . . for a multicultural America that honors and respects the full and equal humanity of God's diverse human family."

Peter Paris underscores the urgency of the message for us. He describes the context of the March on Washington, outlines the ethical imperatives of the speech, and reminds us of its critical hopes for African Americans today. Linda Thomas emphasizes King's work in the Poor People's Campaign and reflects theologically about our call to care for people living in poverty. Robert Franklin marvels at how King was able to address a very diverse audience counting on his conviction that "a dream inspired by particularistic, biblical sources could live in dialectical and fruitful tension with ideals embraced by nontheistic rationalists."

Emilie Townes takes on naive notions of solidarity and multiculturalism that unmask "a least-common-denominator of justice which is no justice at all." She posits a true solidarity that would "listen, hear, analyze, question, rethink, accept, reject" the systemic forces that kill those oppressed by them.

Dwight Hopkins calls the church to "proclaim and organize deliverance" from the inseparable local and world problems, and to take "race, gender, poverty, war, as an integrated whole." Justo Gonzalez points us to a dynamic vision of multiculturality, where each culture would be free to define itself, so "race and culture . . . will not be used to classify . . . but to establish connections, to do justice, to provide avenues for love and interaction."

The anthology concludes with an inspiring and prophetic message by James Forbes in which he reminds us of God's call to today's prophets to proclaim God's vision for the world with courage through the anguish and hate that entails.

Alicia Vargas
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Is the Bible Fact or Fiction? An Introduction to Biblical Historiography. By Barbara E. Organ. New York: Paulist, 2004. vi and 176 pages. Paper. $16.95.

According to its author, "The purpose of this book is to look at some aspects of the biblical historical books, not so much to identify what actually happened as to identify the kind of historiography the writers undertook" (p. 5). Currently, in biblical-historiographical studies, the burning question is precisely that. Is it "history" as the straightforward narration of events along a simple timeline, or is it narration intended to communicate a particular theology or ideology?

In a compact twelve chapters, Organ brilliantly lays out a case that calls for both a sensitive and an intelligent reading of the biblical text. Chapter 1 introduces the subject. Chapter 2 investigates the Apostolic Council as described in both Acts and Paul's letter to the Galatians. In chapter 3, Organ looks more closely at the purposes of Acts and Galatians and why it is that they tell the story a bit differently. In chapter 4 Organ explicates the story of Paul's conversion in Acts, and in the fifth chapter the same line of investigation is followed by examining the speeches of Paul in Acts concerning his conversion.

The sixth chapter leaves behind the New Testament's historical methodology and turns to the story of the Maccabees, asking about the context of the materials and laying the foundation for the discussion in chapter 7 concerning the causes of the Maccabean revolt. In the eighth chapter Organ answers the "why" of the varying accounts and sets out the theological rationale of those accounts. Chapter 9 turns to the Deuteronomistic history, and chapter 10 focuses on David.

Finally, in the last investigative segment, Organ writes about the ways that the books of Joshua and Judges "do history." The twelfth chapter draws together all of the research set forth in the preceding pages and offers the reader some very useful ideas to consider. The volume concludes with bibliography and indices.

Organ makes it clear that modern notions of history are superimpositions on the biblical text. "History" as done by the tradents of ancient Israel was not about the simple relaying of facts but had a moral and theological purpose. "History" in the Bible is the "story of a people."

At the conclusion of each chapter Organ offers questions upon which to reflect and further reading which may be of interest. Her organizational skills are intriguing, as she starts at the "back" and works her way to the "front" of the Bible. This is an engaging, important, and worthwhile read. I recommend it heartily and without reservation.

Jim West
Quartz Hill School of Theology
Quartz Hill, California

Mission in the Way of Paul: Biblical Mission in the Church of the Twenty-first Century. By Christopher R. Little. Studies in Biblical Literature 80. New York, et al.: Peter Lang, 2005. xiii and 345 pages. Cloth. $76.95.

Little has written two books in one—an inner book that summarizes Paul's biblical and theological contribution to mission, and an outer book that assesses Paul's probable view of a raging twenty-first–century missiological issue: the "international partnership movement" sponsored by Western evangelical mission agencies. Adapted from a prize-winning Fuller Seminary dissertation, this complex book helps to clarify some important missiological issues.

The inner book offers a useful and comprehensive but nonoriginal review of existing Pauline studies. Touching on Paul's socioeconomic status and attitudes toward wealth and vocation, we learn of the upper-middle–class status of Paul's parents in Tarsus, able to send their son to a rabbinic boarding school in Jerusalem. Paul's doxological (as opposed to humanistic) motivation for mission is strongly emphasized. The apostle's missionary *orthopraxy*—his own methodology in cross-cultural mission—is set forth as a norm for biblical mission, though not an exclusive one. Paul frequently reminds readers of his letters to be imitators of himself, even as he strives to deepen his own oneness with the Lord.

The outer book presents the author's argument for a Pauline approach to the practice of world mission in a post-colonial, globalized world characterized by enormous disparities of wealth and resources. Little offers a highly critical assessment of partnership relations between Western mission agencies and their emerging third world partners in a time when both senders and receivers are desperately searching for a new missionary identity. Beginning with the presupposition that biblical mission must be *missio Dei*, not simply a project of churches as mission agencies, and considering that churches everywhere, both rich and poor, are called to do mission in unity, what is God's will—as far as can be discerned from Pauline orthopraxy—for the multilateral sharing of resources and the redefinition of church-church relationships in the pursuit of *missio Dei*?

The answer, in short, is that the transfer of money in the form of financial subsidies from wealthy and well-wishing donors to impoverished aid recipients is a formula for spiritual stagnation, a departure from Pauline orthopraxy, and a hindrance to *missio Dei*.

Little marshals expert testimony and documentary evidence to show that continuous Western funding of third world mission projects (evangelism, church planting, diakonia), even when well intended, is at the very least questionable, probably counterproductive, and certainly in conflict with Pauline orthopraxy. Money leads to hidden control, promotes relationships of dominance and dependence, undermines trust, and encourages mercenary motives on the part of recipients. If the author is right, the dominant strategic pattern for international partnership relationships as currently employed by evangelicals in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union is tragically flawed and violates the integrity of *missio Dei*. The question then becomes how to reverse a habit of ingrained dependency created by Western affluence.

Evangelicals may have learned from the ecumenical missionary movement, which dealt with similar problems a generation earlier, of the explosive potential that money, power, and decision making introduce into partnership relationships. The "Moratorium" issue of the 1970s might have been highlighted as a predictive sign.

Mission agencies and armchair missiologists will find much to challenge their assumptions in this comprehensive study.

James A. Scherer
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Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History. Edited by Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 2006. xiii and 220 pages. Cloth. $48.00.

Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek provide a history of the ordination of women in documentary form, ranging from first-century New Testament texts to canons regarding female presbyters in the eighth century C.E. Once colleagues at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Madigan and Osiek bring considerable scholarly expertise and experience to this difficult task.

A major contribution is the breadth of its collection of literary and epigraphic evidence for the ordination of women to the offices of deacon and presbyter. Madigan and Osiek have, to their knowledge, collected all the relevant evidence in the East and West in both the Greek and Roman worlds, presenting the texts in their original languages and in English, including many sources not previously published. Like Ross Shepard Kraemer's *Women's Religions in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* (Oxford University Press, 2004) and Patricia Cox Miller's *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* (Catholic University of America Press, 2005), this volume allows the sources to speak for themselves. A typical source entry nevertheless includes all the necessary information to identify the source: the name of the author (in the case of a literary text), a brief description of the find spot (for inscriptions), the date, and concise comments about the source's significance.

The book is divided into three major areas: New Testament texts and their patristric commentators; women deacons in the East and West; and women presbyters. Madigan and Osiek maintain that the ordination of female deacons was more prevalent in the East. They could have speculated to a greater extent about the causes and significance of this regional difference.

The book is not a comprehensive study of women in authoritative roles in Christian assemblies. For example, prophets, virgins, and widows exercised authority and carried out various forms of ministry, but their roles did not develop into ordained offices. Therefore, texts and inscriptions that relate to their ministries do not appear in this volume. However, the editors describe the evolution of the offices of deacon and presbyter, including what duties belonged to each office and how those duties changed over time.

Given the abundant ancient evidence for the ordination of women, it is striking that the ordination of women has sparked intense modern controversy. Romans 16:1–2, for example, describes the deacon Phoebe as Paul's ambassador to Rome who read his letter aloud in the Roman assembly. However, as Madigan and Osiek note, controversy over the ordination of women did not begin in the modern age. Writing in the fourth century C.E., John Chrysostom described Phoebe as one "who is able to help [Paul] set the whole world straight," while Theodoret of Cyrrhus, writing in the same time period, characterized Phoebe's ministry as hospitality: "[Paul] opened the world to her and in every land and sea she is celebrated." Debate over the ordination of women thus began quite early and continues to the current day.

This volume calls for reexamination of theological assumptions and prescriptions regarding the ordination of women to modern pastoral ministry. It also calls for the celebration of the diaconal ministry of women and men, still practiced today. In the ELCA, deacons are consecrated rather than ordained, but this volume lifts up the diaconate as a ministry that belongs to the very beginnings of the Christian church.

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Preaching and Teaching the Psalms. By James L. Mays. Edited by Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006. 176 pages. Paper. $19.95.

As one reads this volume, it quickly becomes clear that James L. Mays not only has a deep respect for the book of Psalms but also has lived with and prayed with the book of Psalms. Mays's writings, gathered by Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker, are organized into three parts. The first serves as an overview of academic psalm study, an excellent introduction for any student. Along with information regarding genre, form, context, and current trends within the study of Psalms, Mays addresses three recurring images found in the book of Psalms: creation, the human, and the reigning God. Mays examines each image's use in several different psalms as well as how these images were cited and used in the New Testament. A reflection on John Calvin's treatment of the book of Psalms provides a segue into the second section of the book.

In this second section, titled "Interpreting the Psalms," Mays provides exegesis of some of the psalms most widely used in worship. As he discusses the Hebrew vocabulary of these psalms, the use of imagery in them, and the possible contexts in which they were written, Mays continually seeks to discover how these psalms might intersect with the lives of today's reader. In his chapter on Psalm 51, Mays considers that for many the concept of sin, and thus its reality in the lives of many Christians, is outmoded. However, sin itself, whether recognized or not, is alive and well. Mays challenges the reader to not only consider the psalm as descriptive of David's life or of a former worldview but to reclaim it for today. Psalm 51, he suggests, does not solely describe someone who is sorry for committing sins, though this is certainly the case. It also describes who humans are in relation to God, that is, creatures in need of God's grace. This careful attention to both the context of the psalmist and the context of the reader, found in each of the psalms treated in this section, provokes the reader to consider the psalms from a variety of viewpoints

The first two sections build toward the third, in which the careful study and exegesis found in the first two sections inform proclamation. This collection of sermons on the psalms is a shining example of how Psalms, itself a book of prayer and liturgy, can inform preaching and bear God's gracious word to a hurting world. In his sermon on Psalm 13, Mays notes that agony and adoration hang together in this psalm, bringing words to what humans experience in their lives. It is a psalm to be prayed, he counsels, as one's life meets the good news of the gospel.

This book with its solid scholarship and eye toward faith practice is well worth reading and a great gift to all who seek to enter more deeply into the book of Psalms.

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Das Weltbild des Epheserbriefes: Eine religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Studie. By Rainer Schwindt. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2002. xiii and 649 pages. Cloth.

A dazzling tour of ancient wonderlands featuring a multi-leveled universe populated by varieties of suprahuman entities awaits the reader of Rainer Schwindt's analysis of the kind of world that challenged the writer of Ephesians to find a meaningful way to express the gospel.

Much of the value of this work surfaces in Schwindt's determined effort to trace the evolution of thought relating to the basic problem of finding a way for humans to manage their search for identity and significance in a world of bewildering, transcendent entities. In the end, Ephesians emerges as a site for exhibition of the principal motifs and the main players in attempted frustration of God's plans and purposes.

In the first chapter Schwindt sketches the religious-historical inquiry relating to Ephesians, beginning with F. C. Baur and climaxing in accolades to E. Faust, *Pax Christi et Pax Caesaris* (Freiburg, Sw./Gottingen, 1993), for his discussion of religious-historical, tradition-historical, and social-historical aspects. Schwindt's aim is to advance the discussion with further attention paid to Philo as representative of Hellenistic Judaism. The chapter ends with the following

conclusions about author and provenance: The letter is deuteropauline and builds on Colossians; Ephesus is the seat of a Pauline school; the letter was not written prior to 80; and it was addressed first of all to Ephesus but with a view to all of the province of Asia. An indication of what awaits the reader in succeeding chapters is Schwindt's observation that the Hebrew Bible and the Classics have too frequently been dissociated.

True to Schwindt's goal of understanding Ephesians within a broad stream of Mediterranean culture as well as many of its tributaries, the next chapter provides a detailed tour of the cultural-religious length, width, and depth of Ephesus. Schwindt's description of the pantheon that finds defining expression at the city is but one of the many gems in his work. Not lost to the reader is the immensity of the formidable challenge posed to the writer of Ephesians.

One thing leads to another, and Schwindt's third chapter traces the various views held by ancient writers in various parts of the Mediterranean world, beginning with Mesopotamia, and on through cultures enriched by the pre-Socratics (especially Heraclitus of Ephesus), Plato, the Old Academy (especially Xenocrates), eminent Stoics, and the Middle Platonists Plutarch and Apuleius (with focus on their views of daemons). These expositions take a logical turn into discussion of beliefs in the Hellenistic and imperial period relating to the heavenly bodies and powers associated with them, with focus on astrological interest involving angels and daemons. Philo of Alexandria becomes a main source of information in this section.

With the help of these program notes readers are prepared for Schwindt's detailed study of phrases and terms in Ephesians in the light of themes and motifs developed in the course of centuries in the world in which Ephesus came to play a dominant role. The words *arche* (*archon*), *exousia*, *dunamis*, and *kuriotes* receive ample due. The distinctive aspect of "in the heavenlies" (*en tois epouraniois*) in contrast to "the heavens" (*ouranoi*) as area in which the drama of encounter with the daemonic powers is enacted, is certain to invite readers' attention. One may venture to predict that the chief point for questioning of an area of Schwindt's exposition will arise from what appears to be a tortuous understanding of the participle in 2:23.

Schwindt's centerpiece is his concluding discussion of Christology in its cosmic and ecclesiastical dimension. Of special interest in this connection is the careful manner in which he describes gnostic-type strains in Ephesians while cautioning against equation with later Gnosticism, which deviated from the core message of God's involvement in and with the world.

In the end, God emerges triumphant through the work of Christ whose redemption spells release for people buffeted about in a world of competing deities, spirits, and forces. God cuts through cosmic red tape, and God's peace spells hope for humanity, with the *polupoikilos sohia tou theou* (the multi-hued wisdom of God, with suggestion of Artemis's colorful investiture as backdrop) finding distinctive expression in the gospel. In a concluding sentence Schwindt suggests the special relevance of Ephesians for our contemporary world, with its multiplication of entities competing for mastery of bodies and souls.

No graduate program with interest in Pauline studies can responsibly pass up this book. For pastors able to read German, this book not only serves up an enriched course in the social-cultural-political-religious context within which Ephesians took shape but also offers a penetrating exegetical study of Ephesians as a whole and in part. Whatever the price, it is a bargain. To aid one's pilgrimage, Schwindt offers a lengthy bibliography, an index of biblical, apocryphal/pseudepigraphic writings, Qumran literature, Philo, Josephus, later ecclesiastical writers, rabbinic writings, ancient Greek and Roman polytheists, Gnostic writings, inscriptions from Ephesus, and magical papyri. Author and topical indexes ensure further entry for intellectual and spiritual profit taking.

Many studies offer a few and sometimes only one nugget beyond recycled information. This one provides a sackful.

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The New Testament in Cross-Cultural Perspective By Richard L. Rohrbaugh. Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books/Wipf & Stock, 2007. xv and 211 pages. Paper. $25.00.

One of the relatively recent exciting developments in biblical interpretation has been the use social criticism, that is, the interpretation of texts in light of the cultural context in which they originated. Richard Rohrbaugh has been one of the leaders in this field. He coauthored (with Bruce J. Malina) social-scientific commentaries on the Synoptic Gospels and John. The present volume reprints ten essays published earlier in scattered places and adds an eleventh, "Jesus: Village Artisan."

The first essay, "Hermeneutics as Cross-Cultural Encounter: Obstacles to Understanding," argues that failure to recognize cultural differences between biblical textes and our own world inevitably leads to difficulties in understanding and misinterpretation of biblical texts. Chapter 7, a reinterpretation of the prodigal son parable (Luke 15:11–32), illustrates this well. The father and both brothers break village norms and so have to take actions to fit into the community again. This makes the actions of each more comprehensible—even though their actions do not fit our cultural norms.

Each essay is worth careful reading. The volume concludes with a long bibliography but lacks an index.

Edgar Krentz

Briefly Noted

In ***Apostolic Letters of Faith, Hope and Love*** (Wipf & Stock, $15) Bruce M. Metzger writes brief essays on Galatians (stressing faith), 1 Peter (hope) and 1 John (love). Metzger writes clear English, which makes the volume useful for adult education and parish libraries. *EK*

In ***The Gospel of Mark*** (Epworth Commentaries, Epworth, £9.99) C. S. Rodd provides a narrative interpretation meant to read straight through, though most readers likely will not do that. He ends with a short summary of "Mark's Portrait of Jesus." He writes an easily understood text, without footnotes (he provides a mini-bibliography), based on the Revised English Bible. Add it to your parish library; many will find it helpful. *EK*

Anthony Thiselton's second commentary on this letter, ***1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*** (Eerdmans, $30) is more than a summary of his massive 1,479-page commentary in the New International Greek Testament Commentary. The strictly exegetical sections demonstrate his deep knowledge of the letter; the 52 sections titled "Suggestions for Possible Reflection" stimulate the reader to move into the twenty-first century. Pastors will find this clearly written commentary extremely helpful in didactic and homiletical preparation: lay people will find it understandable, since it avoids technical exegetical jargon. Add it to the parish library and to the pastor's resources. It will not disappoint any reader. *EK*

A special, 545-page issue of ***ARC, The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies*** (McGill University, $18), honors Prof. Frederik Wisse, who made major contributions to the academy and the church as a major interpreter of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts, New Testament studies, and philosophical theology. This rich volume will interest scholars in these areas more than parish pastors. A fitting tribute to a major scholar. *EK*

Michelle Slee provides a fascinating interpretation of the relation of Gentile and Jewish Christians in ***The Church in Antioch in the First Century C. E.: Communion and Conflict*** (T&T Clark, $55). She uses the Jerusalem conference (Gal 2:1–10 and Acts 15), and the subsequent debate in the city (the Antioch incident of Gal 2:11ff.), the Didache, and the Gospel of Matthew as the basic texts to describe the Antioch church in the first century. While it welcomed Gentiles, even as late as Matthew the Antioch

Christians expected Gentiles to convert to Judaism—and therefore Antioch was essentially a Jewish-Christian church longer than most scholars hold. An interesting rethinking, even though not, in my opinion, ultimately persuasive. *EK*

The Jesus Seminar continues its curious way. In ***The Historical Jesus Goes to Church*** (Polebridge, S18) eight writers describe how the use of the Jesus Seminar's results raise questions, provoke discussion, critique the tradition, call the reliability of the New Testament into question, and try to make the case that this benefits the church and its message greatly. Provocative, challenging, aggravating, and insightful, it will challenge clergy to rethink their understanding of Jesus as these essays claim that the modern world challenges the classical beliefs about Jesus. The challenge is both relevant and good: their solution to meeting this challenge satisfies less. Still, pastors need to be informed about their challenge, since they hope to export their theology to local parishes. *EK*

Evan Powell constructs a novel solution to the synoptic problem in ***The Myth of the Lost Gospel*** (Symposium, S16. He argues that Q is an unnecessary reconstruction, based on his conclusion that Matthew is the last Gospel written, essentially a rewriting of Luke. Interesting, if not entirely persuasive. *EK*

Qoheleth. A Continental Commentary. By Norbert Lohfink (Fortress, S23). This commentary was first published in German more than twenty years ago, but references have been brought up to date in this English translation. L. wrote his commentary to explain the choices he made for a modern German Bible translation; hence its relative brevity (158 pages) and freedom from academic details. L. advocates a clear (and controversial) stance: Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes), written in the third century, was an attempt to profit as much as possible from the Greek understanding of the world, without forcing Israel's wisdom to give up its status. Qoheleth made it into the canon because it was one of the textbooks used in the temple school in Jerusalem and in the comparable synagogue schools. When Qoheleth was introduced as a textbook, the first postscript was added in 12:9–11. The second postscript in 12:12–14 was an attempt to block the creation of new textbooks and to defend the book's orthodoxy by attributing to Qoheleth a slogan—"Fear God and keep his commandments"—that is more at home in Sirach. *Ralph W. Klein*

A Collection of Sermons from Zinzendorf's Pennsylvania Journey. Translated by Julie Tomberlin Weber and edited by Craig D. Atwood (Moravian Church in America, S16.95). These sermons might hold special meaning for readers of *Currents* since the ELCA has established full communion with the Moravian Church. Zinzendorf (1700–1760) visited America in 1741–1743 and was part of the movement known as the Great Awakening. Zinzendorf downplayed doctrinal and liturgical differences and even asserted in one sermon that baptism itself has become too much of a stumbling block. *RWK*

The Erotic Word. By David M. Carr (Oxford, $32). C. points out the opposition in much Christian thought between sexuality and spirituality, leading to phenomena like enforced celibacy and sexual repression. For nearly two millennia Christians (and Jews for that matter) understood the Song of Songs allegorically, but when a literal type of exegesis prevailed in the late nineteenth century, understanding the book as a series of erotic love poems, the spiritual understanding of the book was almost totally discarded. C. takes the reader on an insightful tour of the erotic dimensions of the Garden of Eden, Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard, and the Song of Songs. He concludes: "We are called to settle for nothing less than a passionate love affair with God and with life, embracing God and the creation through which God shimmers, living madly in the fantasy that this universe is not purposeless, but that we are called toward the drama and pain of life and love lived to the fullest." *RWK*

Preaching Helps

Proper 22—Christ the King, Series C

God's Place in Change

For the last few years, I have referred to the last Sunday after Pentecost as "The Reign of Christ," because I heard all the reasons that preachers in particular struggle with calling Christ our *King*. The ELCA was in a time of "renewing worship," when old things were passing away but new things had not yet fully revealed themselves. People experimented and were creative. Some things worked; others did not. Determining what things go into which category is an ongoing conversation. I am still pondering a celebration of the Eucharist in which the presider prayed the third-century Eucharistic prayer attributed to Hippolytus (*ELW* Eucharistic Prayer XI): "We give you thanks, Father/Mother, through Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. . . ." Including a punctuation mark in our address to God did not work for me.

This year, I opened the liturgical calendar in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and discovered that we call the last Sunday after Pentecost "Christ the King." We also continue to address God as Father in the Eucharistic prayer attributed to Hippolytus. The decision was made for me. For some these are good decisions; for others they are not. My point is not to debate any of the decisions that went into *ELW* but to highlight an aspect of the worship context in which we preach these days. A new worship book invites us to preach on God's role in change.

In his national bestseller *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (second ed., Cambridge: Perseus, 2003), executive development consultant William Bridges defines transition as a three-phase process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the new situation that the change brings about (p. 3). Every transition can be understood as consisting of three threads or strands—an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning. In every transition, things end. While some will celebrate the decommissioning of *LBW* and *With One Voice*, and others will grieve it, all will feel a sense of loss, say, when the words of a psalm, creed, or hymn are different from what they have known for years. The second strand of transition is a neutral zone, what I call a liminal strand—that in-between time when the old is gone but the new has not fully arrived. Some want to rush through this wandering in the wilderness to the land of promise; others enjoy the freedom and creativity that the liminal strand affords. And here comes the point I want to make: When a new beginning—such as a new worship book—comes, some will grieve what was for them the pleasant experience of the neutral zone. At least for now,

decisions have been made. The last Sunday after Pentecost will be known as Christ the King.

This season of Reformation Sunday, All Saints, and *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* strikes me as a fitting time to preach about God's place amid change—and not just because I wrote a book on the subject (*When God Speaks through Change: Preaching in Times of Congregational Transition* [Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005]). We can help our hearers sort out what is constant and unchanging—God's unconditional love for us and all creation in Jesus Christ—from those things that change to facilitate the proclamation of this good news. We can invite our hearers to lament and celebrate, to reminisce and anticipate. We can consider whether God brings change or protects us from change but know that God never abandons us in change. We can also help our people to realize that, like all living things, the church grows and changes as it lives more and more into the Reign of Christ, and to discover the ways that God calls us to live into God's reign.

Pastor David L. Miller, LSTC's Cornelsen Director of Spiritual Formation, who wrote this series of Preaching Helps, offers scriptural reflections that ground and nourish Christians' spirits amid the stress and excitement of change. Ordained in 1980, Miller served congregations in Nebraska and Kansas before joining *The Lutheran* magazine as a senior editor in 1987. From 1999 to 2005 he was *The Lutheran*'s editor. He has written hundreds of articles and has reported from more than thirty countries, winning numerous awards for feature writing, editing, and photography. In 1999 Wartburg Theological Seminary granted Miller a doctorate of divinity for his significant contributions to the ELCA and the international Lutheran community.

A spiritual director, David studied Christian spirituality at Catholic Theological Union, Loyola University, the Claret Center, Chicago; and the Academy of Spiritual Formation, Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of *Friendship with Jesus: A Way to Pray the Gospel of Mark* (Augsburg, 1999), a contemporary adaptation and exploration of Ignatian contemplation, a way of prayer central to the famous spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola. He is a frequent keynote speaker and retreat leader at events for laity and clergy across the country in Lutheran and ecumenical settings. He is committed to nurturing the life of prayer and spiritual discernment in Christ's church that all may know and be filled by the loving mystery revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Miller is deeply influenced by the spiritual tradition of Ignatius Loyola. He is also well versed in classical figures from the history of Christian spirituality and mystical theology such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis De Sales, Julian of Norwich, the Desert fathers and mothers, Gregory of Nyssa, and Thomas Merton.

I am delighted to welcome my colleague to these pages and pray that you find in his words sustenance for your spirit and for the souls commended to your care.

Craig A. Satterlee, Editor of Preaching Helps

Proper 22
October 7, 2007

Habakkuk 1:1–4; 2:1–4
Psalm 37:1–9
2 Timothy 1:1–14
Luke 17:5–10

First Reading

The disciples' derelict cry bemoaning their paltry faith invites exploration of the nature and blessing of faith. In today's lessons, the Spirit leads us into reassurance that Christ has given and continues to give all we need. Fear melts into faith as frightened, beleaguered disciples discover that they bear a strength and life that allows them to walk the way of the Lord.

The disciples' cry "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:1) comes at the end of the second section of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The journey starts at Luke 9:51 when Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem, where he will fulfill his ministry. On each step of the journey, Jesus reveals the reign of God and prepares the disciples for the crashing events to come and for the mission they will carry out in his name.

In the second section of the journey (13:22–17:10), Jesus prophesies the end times (13:22–35), announces a new code of behavior for the kingdom (14:1–35), and declares God's love for the lost (15:1–32). In chapter 16, Jesus harshly criticizes the Pharisees for their love of money, revealing the insignificance of wealth in light of the erupting reign of God.

Then Jesus turns again to the disciples, warning them not to cause the "little ones" to sin and fall away from him (17:1–4). The little ones are his sisters and brothers, his followers, the community of faith whom God loves dearly. Jesus does not direct his "woe" (17:1) to those who resist his leadership but to disciples who cause trouble and stumbling for those with whom he has come to share the reign of God.

Jesus' followers are to correct and forgive those who sin against them—and to be willing to do so an unlimited number of times (17:3–4). He charges them to maintain high standards for themselves while avoiding any arrogance or high-handedness in their treatment of erring sisters and brothers.

Against this backdrop, it is little wonder that the disciples cry out for greater faith. They feel their own souls in peril at the high calling of following Jesus. Their cry arises from awareness that Jesus' call is beyond them, that failure is inevitable—and spiritually dangerous.

Jesus' statement "If you have faith" (17:5) does not suggest that the disciples do not have faith but is a supposition for what follows. Having a lot of faith (by what yardstick can we possibly measure it?) is not required, Jesus says. Even the smallest faith is sufficient to live the discipleship to which he has called each of his followers. Why? Because the power of God is at work in faith.

The mulberry tree is large and possesses a widespread and elaborate root system. But even the tiniest faith can uproot it. A mustard-seed grain of faith is enough to meet the most overwhelming challenges the disciples face, Jesus says. So don't worry about having more faith. Live the faith you have.

A natural consequence of Luke's theology is evident here. Faith, however small, is a mark of the Spirit's presence in the disciple's life. It is a sign that God's reign is at work in the life of the believer and believing community. If you have the smallest faith, you already have the reign of God, the Spirit of the living God, at work within you (Acts 2; 6:5; 11:24). Jesus' followers have what they need for their life and king-

dom service, for their faith is the power of God's Spirit within them.

Little wonder that Jesus urges them not to expect special treatment for their faithful work (17:7–10). Their faithful service merely acts out the power within them. They do what God's Spirit moves and enables them to do. They deserve no more credit than do flowers for blooming. Like the flowers, Jesus' disciples bring forth the beauty that the creative wonder of God's Spirit fashions in them: "We have only done what we ought to have done!" (17:10) Of course!

The nature and power of faith appear also in the reading from the prophet Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah who saw the rise of the Babylonian power that would soon overrun Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. The population would be carried into exile. Doubts about God's justice and treatment of the wicked occupy the prophet's mind as he argues with God and bears the nation's fears, doubts, and accusations against God.

Can God remain faithful to the divine promise and deal graciously with the chosen people in the face of the overweening, arrogant power of great nations?

Chapter 1:1–4 contains the prophet's first complaint. Verses 1 through 5 of the second chapter are the Lord's response to Habakkuk's second complaint. Verses 3 and 4 are most to the point today: Wait. Don't lose hope. The vision of redemption and fulfillment awaits its intended time. *It will come.* Thus, "the righteous will live by their faith" (2:4). The prophet's message: Do not give up hope. The Holy One made covenant with us and will fulfill it. Exile is coming. Only those with faith will live. Only they will avoid surrender to despair, living in hope that they will enter the fullness of God's promise.

The reading from 2 Timothy is one in a series of continuous readings, not chosen for its thematic connections with the other lections. But related themes echo here, too. Timothy may have possessed a timid spirit (1 Cor 16:10–11). To this, Paul (the purported author) assures Timothy (and us) that God gives not "a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim 1:7). The saying is structured much like Rom 8:15: "you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. . . ."

God's Spirit gives power for bold witness beyond any shame (1:8,12; compare Rom 1:16). Again, we see the wonder and power the disciples of Christ bear in their mortal flesh, allowing them to live and serve beyond cowering, despair, or shame.

Pastoral Reflection

Is God enough for us? Does the Spirit give what we need to live a discipleship of grace, purpose, love, and power? To put it personally, "Jesus, are you enough for me?"

The answer in today's readings is immediate and powerful: Yes, I am enough for you, Jesus says. You bear the Spirit of God in your mortal flesh, even if your small faith troubles you. The reign of God is at work in you. The presence of faith, itself, testifies to the mysterious and undeniable life of God that you bear.

It may be human nature to fear the limits of our resources. This fear produces (often lame and pathetic) excuses for why we can't live or serve, witness or move beyond the static state of our spiritual and communal lives. Jesus is uninterested in our excuses and unhindered by our immobility and fear. He turns our eyes from fixation upon our deficiencies to the mystery of the One whose Spirit and inbreaking rule is present in such faith as we have.

Jesus issues a strong word of assurance to disciples and to the church in our doubt about whether we have enough faith to live the life of discipleship to which Jesus calls

us. This life is one of helping all of Jesus' little ones, correcting those who err and granting fulsome forgiveness to those who offend and sin against us. It is a life of keeping faith when there seems little likelihood that we will receive anything from God. And it is a life of sharing the love of God in Jesus Christ without shame or apology.

All of this is possible because our faith is not our own but the presence of God's reign within us.

Recent Finnish research into the theology of Martin Luther has revealed a prevalent though often misunderstood theme in the reformer's thought: "Christ is present (really, truly, ontologically) in faith" (Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* [Fortress, 2005]). Christ is present in faith, even the faith of those who fret that they have so little. Christ invites us again and again to turn from the insignificance of our resources to the wonder and power, beauty and joy that we bear.

Luther can have the last word:

> Thus a Christian is greater than the entire world. For in [one's] heart [one] has this seemingly small gift: yet the smallness of this gift and treasure, which [one] holds in faith, is greater than heaven and earth because Christ, who is this gift, is greater. (*Luther's Works* 26: *Lectures on Galatians 1535* [Concordia, 1963], 134). DLM

Proper 23
October 14, 2007

2 Kings 5:1–3, 7–15c
Psalm 111
2 Timothy 2:8–15
Luke 17:11–19

First Reading

Faith sees, grasps, and gladly enters God's reign when it appears. Jesus invites us to see God's rule coming in all he does that we may enter an ever-new way of living marked by joy, praise, and service.

The healing of the ten lepers, a story unique to Luke, occurs at the start of the third and final leg of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The opening segment of this section of the travel narrative (17:11–18:8) has Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God while predicting dramatic resistance and judgment that will fall upon him. This segment ends with a devastating question: "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on Earth?"

The answer is "Yes," but in characteristic fashion Luke finds greater faith among the small, the poor and outsiders—those who do not belong to the chosen people—than among those who should recognize who Jesus is and what he is doing (see 7:9). Here, a Samaritan, "this foreigner," is the only one of the ten healed lepers who recognizes that more than physical healing is at work in Jesus. This leper alone has faith that saves (17:18–19). He enters the reign of God while the others merely return to their old way of life. They are healed but do not enter the true miracle of God's salvation.

The ten cry out to Jesus, "have mercy on us" (17:13). Showing mercy was a central expectation of God's visitation (1:50, 54, 58, 72, 78; 18:38). Ritually impure, they maintain a proper distance from Jesus (Num 5:2–3; Lev 13:45–46). Jesus directs them to the priest, a command bearing the implicit promise of healing, since a priest must verify that the unclean has been healed. Only then can a former leper rejoin the community.

While on their way, all ten are healed. But only the outsider, a Samaritan—a fact Luke emphasizes—returns to glorify God, a standard response to a wonder in Luke-Acts (5:25–26; 7:16; 13:13; 18:43; 23:47; Acts 4:21; 11:18; 13:48; 21:20). The others, presumably members of God's covenant community, do not return to Jesus or praise God. This leads to Jesus' sad question:

"Were none of them found to return and give thanks to God except this foreigner?"

Jesus' final word signifies what has really occurred: "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well" (17:19). The actual language could be translated "Your faith has *saved you*" (see 7:50; 8:48; 18:42).

And indeed, it has saved him. All ten lepers were healed, but only one recognizes that this blessing signals the appearance of God's reign in Jesus. Seeing the inbreaking rule of God, he has a change of heart and returns to give thanks. He does not merely reenter society as a ritually pure human being; he enters the kingdom of God. He is among the blessed who see the arrival of the kingdom (10:23). Unlike the Pharisees or the other nine lepers, he knows the kingdom of God has come among us (17:20–21), and he goes his way, living in praise and thanksgiving (17:15–16)

The healing of Naaman's leprosy in the reading from 2 Kings 5 echoes themes appearing in the Gospel. Like the Samaritan, Naaman is an outsider. Worse, he is an enemy, although one whom God, the Lord of history, has blessed (5:1–3). The prophet Elisha also doesn't touch Naaman but refuses to even go out and see him, directing him instead to go wash in the river.

Naaman resists Elisha's command and resents the prophet's lack of hospitality and respect for his high position (5:9–11). He almost walks away from a healing. It is the powerless ones, Naaman's servants (5:3,13), who save the day by persuading their master to do what the prophet suggests. He does and is healed, and like the Samaritan leper he returns to give thanks (5:15)

The major connection with Luke's story is the movement of Naaman's soul. He comes to Elisha filled with pride of power and position (5:9–13). His healing moves him not merely to humility but to recognize the true God in the wonder of his cleansing (5:15). Naaman returns home healed. But a more profound change has come over him. He now knows who God is and to whom his ultimate loyalty and praise belongs.

The reading from 2 Timothy does not include themes closely connected with the others. Luke Timothy Johnson points out that memory and models are important motifs in 2 Timothy (*The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* [Fortress, 1999], 434). The author of this pastoral letter reminds Timothy of the qualities and nature of the discipleship to which he is called in Christ (1:1–14).

Timothy also receives models upon whom he is to shape his witness. He is to strive and suffer as a good solider for Christ (2:2), compete like an athlete and care for the faithful like a farmer tends his crops (2:1–7), and always remember Jesus Christ for whom the Apostle Paul suffers hardship. Paul suffers so others might have salvation. Jesus likewise suffered and died (2:8–10).

This suffering and struggle occurs within the promise of God's faithfulness: "If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him" (2:11–12). This above all is sure and worthy of belief. The call is to remain faithful and bold (2:14–15) even as Christ is faithful that we might be saved (2:13).

Pastoral Reflection

If all you get out of being sick . . . is well, you got cheated. This saying circulated among the chaplaincy staff where I received clinical training. The grammar was awkward but effective. We knew that sickness—with its anxieties, pain, and weakness—is a time ripe for personal and spiritual growth. It is pregnant with possibilities for developing deeper intimacy with oneself, one's loved ones, and God.

Ten lepers get better in today's Gospel.

but only one gets the best. All ten experience the loving, healing touch of Jesus. He makes their bodies whole again. Nine return to their old way of life, not realizing that they have experienced the rule of God. They seek the approval of their society's leaders, are certified for public commerce, and return to a way of life they thought they'd lost.

They get back to life the way it was. But they don't get a whole new life in which they recognize the rule of God in all healing, in all that's good, in all that redeems and uplifts. They go their way, but, unlike the leper who returned to Jesus, they do not go glorifying God and giving praise for the wonder of God's blessed rule, which they have experienced in their mortal flesh. They don't recognize that something decisive has happened; they fail to understand that the love of God is loose in the world, seeking to make all things new and alive, not just once but again and again.

There are various parallels between this and our communal and individual lives. I will mention one: The human hunger for approval by authorities and those to whom we accord power is epidemic. It controls, limits, and disfigures countless human souls. We seek approval again and again, not realizing that seeing and belonging to the reign of God means we can go our own way, faithfully and well, without needing the blessing of the powers that be or waiting for them to tell us we are all right. Our faith makes us well. It joins us to Christ, saving us from the world's coarse judgments so that we may enter the freedom of the children of God, graced and gracious.

Like the leper, our faith rests in the rule of God's relentless love, which invites us to live in joyous freedom, giving glory to God and thanks to Jesus who brings us the kingdom. DLM

Proper 24
October 21, 2007

Genesis 32:22–31
Psalm 121
2 Timothy 3:14–4:5
Luke 18:1–8

We are invited into intimate relationship with the One who is patient and loving beyond all others. God desires our nearness in prayer, urging us to bring all we are—our joys, fears, and struggles—into a relationship where nothing is held back. In this divine relationship we share the depth of ourselves and wrestle with mysteries that are beyond us. The greatest mystery is the love of that One who is more full of mercy and blessing than we can know, except as we engage in the struggle.

In Genesis 32, Jacob arrives at Jabbok brook filled with fear. The story is very ancient. Middle Eastern folklore holds numerous stories of river demons or numens that prevent crossings. Typically, they are some kind of divine beings who are effective at night and flee at daylight.

At Jabbok Jacob seems to confront one such being as he struggles anxiously with his past, especially his lying and cheating ways in relation to his father, Isaac, and brother, Esau, a powerful fellow he will meet the next day. The last time Jacob encountered Esau was after he cheated his elder brother of his blessing and birthright and had to flee for his life (Gen 27:1–45). Now Esau, armed and dangerous, is coming to greet Jacob's party (32:6–8). Jacob sends rich gifts from his herds and flocks ahead of him to appease Esau before they meet (32:9–21). He has become a wealthy man during his exile, acquiring wives, children, and vast flocks through various (sometimes deceitful) means.

Jacob stays behind to pour out his heart in fearful prayer for God's steadfast love and faithfulness, begging God to deliver him from his brother and keep the divine promise to bless and prosper him (32:9–12). Then comes his night struggle, but it is not with Esau or his checkered history. The text makes it clear that his struggle is with God (32:28–30).

Jacob wrestles all night, seeking the blessing he needs to face his future. This struggle with God is the first of two dominant motifs in the story. The second is the change of name, from Jacob to Israel, which signals a change of identity and mission. Cunning Jacob becomes the father of God's chosen people, who fall under God's protection and have a special purpose in history. Their destiny is to carry on the identity of their ancestor, Israel, who strove with human beings and with God and prevailed (32:28).

Jacob is less triumphant about the outcome of his struggle. While his night opponent says Jacob prevailed against God (v. 28), Jacob says he has seen God face to face and survived: "my life is preserved" (v. 30). He limps into his future, wounded, yet knowing God as the source of his identity and mission. No longer the deceitful schemer who lives by his razor-sharp wits, he now is one who struggles with God and finds there the divine blessing and purpose that will carry him—and those who follow him—into the future. He has met God in his struggle, a meeting that leaves no one unchanged.

Luke 18 is no less emphatic about entering the blessing of God in the midst of human struggle. The story is not about the need to keep knock, knock, knocking on heaven's door to awaken a sleepy God to our needs. Conventional religiosity reduces the story to the need for persistent prayer. Prayer and the need to pray without giving up is a characteristic in Luke (6:28; 11:1–2; 22:40, 46; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4, 6; 10:4, 9, 30–31; 12:5, 12; 16:13, 16, 25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8). But the widow in Jesus' parable (literally, "one who has no voice") reveals the strength and justice God continually gives in the intimate relationship of prayer.

The parable sounds as if it is intended to draw laughter. The widow keeps at the judge who "respects neither God nor human beings." His disregard for the widow marks him as one who disdains God, since God is on the side of the alien, the fatherless, and the widow (Exod 22:22–24; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 27:19; Ps 68:5; etc.). She is so persistent that the judge, overcome with self-pity, knows she will wear him down (18:5). The dishonest judge's words literally translate: "she will keep coming and end up giving me a black eye." The language conjures the image of a bag lady banging the judge over the head with her packages. He cares nothing for the widow or for justice, but he is concerned with his comfort and reputation, so he relents and gives her justice.

Jesus uses similar unsavory characters to reveal the nature of God's kingdom (11:5–13; 16:1–9). The import is clear: God's reign is the exact opposite of the unjust judge. God's beloved will not be disregarded. The Holy One is patient with them, will hear their cries and answer with justice (18:7). The much-debated *makrothymeo* typically carries the sense of patience, long-suffering and tolerance, though the NRSV reads it as a separate question, "will he delay in helping them?" (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* [The Liturgical Press, 1991], 270).

God will not be slow in answering the prayers of those who call upon divine grace for deliverance and justice. Jesus' words may ring hollow to a church or individuals suffering hardship, wondering if their present time of struggle will ever end. It is easy to

cite examples of those who cry for justice and deliverance from external or internal oppressions but to no avail. God does not move immediately to remove their struggle. Jesus' words in 18:8 reveal the perennial temptation in such situations: If there is delay in deliverance, will "the Son of Man . . . find faith on earth" when he comes?

In the face of such delay, we, like Jacob, struggle with God in prayer and find there the blessing and identity as beloved of God that strengthens us to face our future in hope. The call to pray like the widow is a gracious invitation to bring all that we are into relationship with God. Leave nothing —*nothing!*—out. Bring it all. Struggle with God in intimate loving relationship. Don't be nice. Be honest. Our relationship with God is ruined when we "make nice," pretending to be someone we are not, denying our real thoughts, doubts, and emotions about who God is and what God is or is not doing. Only so are we grounded in God. It is okay to tell God you think he is being a real underachiever. By bringing our whole selves, as did Jacob, we meet and can enter intimacy with a mercy and a mystery that staggers us.

God suffuses those who pray with divine mercy and justice enabling us, like the widow, to continue serving and seeking God's reign in all things. When we pray like this, the channel between us and God remains open and is not the avenue of merely sporadic discharges of divine energy. Living in constant communion, we receive the energy to persevere in the mission God gives us.

The reading from 2 Timothy continues the emphasis on memory and models for empowering ministry noted in the discussion of Proper 23. Timothy is to remember how and from whom he first heard the message of the gospel (3:14–15). This memory and the Scriptures he has known since childhood equip him to persistently proclaim the message, not waiting for when the time is right (4:2), which is a contrast from the ancients' typical concern for timeliness.

The final verse of today's reading reflects an interesting shift in the life of the church as it moves deeper into a post-Pauline period. Paul has urged Timothy to join him in suffering for the gospel (1:8) and to work with Paul in the gospel he preaches (2:9). But here Timothy is urged to "carry out *your ministry* fully" (4:5; emphasis added). The church and Timothy are growing up. Responsibility for the mission of the gospel is moving to the next generation. DLM

Reformation Day
October 28, 2007

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

In Christ we receive a new relationship with God and a new being. Christ is both *for us* and *in us*, making us new. In historical language, justification is not merely imputed and forensic, a declaratory fiction in which God pronounces the guilty righteous. Justification is *effective*, altering the life and heart of believers, because Christ is more than God's favor toward us: he is also God's gift to and in us, making us righteous as we receive and participate in God's life.

Today's readings reveal three central aspects of our participation in God's triune life. We receive a faith in which Christ is present. We enter the freedom intended for all the children of God. And we receive a new heart, one given to God's holy purpose.

The Romans reading, with its tortured grammar and conflicted history, has been

fought over by reformers and counterreformers from the Lutheran reformation on. Justification, Paul teaches, comes by "grace as a gift" (Rom 3:23), through faith (3:25). For Paul faith is understood as a gift, as is the entire process of salvation (3:24–25).

In Rom 1:18–3:20, Paul buries us in proofs for the universality of human unrighteousness. There is no justification through works of the law because all human beings have failed to keep God's law, a state of affairs Paul confirms with Scripture (3:10–18). This failure dooms any attempt to gain righteous acceptability before God. All we know from the law is that we are sinners (3:20). Any attempt to escape this situation and seek righteousness through the law resists God's verdict and the way God chooses to justify the unrighteous.

At this point, Paul could consign the world to the righteous contempt and condemnation of God. But it is exactly here, Paul says, that God steps in to convert a situation of wrath to one of righteousness and hope. The righteousness required for salvation is universally made available apart from the law through God's action in Christ (3:22–24).

Faith is the door to enter this new reality. Faith acknowledges one's sin and need for God's gift of righteousness and is prepared to grasp and be grasped by the goodness of the God whose righteousness makes this gracious offer to the undeserving.

But this act of God is not merely a statement of acquittal for the guilty. Believers are *made righteous*, not only declared to be so (3:24). Faith is a gift in Paul's thought. If so, the faith that makes righteous already reflects the presence of Christ, who is God's gift given in justification. Faith is not mere intellectual assent to a series of propositions about God and Christ. It is a vital personal commitment involving the whole person. It is union with Christ, such that "it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in [one could read *of*] the Son of God" (Gal 2:20). (The phrase "faith in Christ" at Rom 3:32 could likewise be read "faith *of* Christ.")

This union with God in Christ makes the believer a new ontological reality in which human consciousness is transformed by the Christ who is present in faith. Faith that accepts God's judgment and trusts in God's mercy reveals the operation of justification in the depth of a human life. It makes righteous by establishing such trust in our hearts (3:26; 4:1–24). Consequently, there can be no boasting, since all is gift (3:27). God not only declares us righteous but makes us righteous through the presence of Christ in faith.

In recent decades, Finnish scholarship has revealed this dynamic in Martin Luther's understanding of justification. The Finns roundly reject the suggestion that Luther's view of justification is purely forensic. They say Luther affirms that Christ is both God's favor (*gratia*) and God's gift (*donum*) in justification, basing this on Luther's own usage (Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification* [Fortress, 2005], 16–22). As *gratia*, Christ is God's favor and forgiveness for the unrighteous. As *donum*, Christ is gift, the presence of divine life present in faith itself, creating a new being. Luther writes:

> Christ is namely the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, is namely the One who is present in the faith itself. . . . Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ. (*Luther's Works* 26: *Lectures on Galatians, 1535* [Concordia, 1963], 129–30)

Or again:

> Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew. (*LW* 35: *Word and Sacrament I* [Fortress, 1960], 70)

Or finally,

> . . . we are not only to become loved by God through Christ, and have his favor and grace (*gratia*) as the highest and most precious shrine, but also to have Him, the Lord Himself, dwelling in us in His fullness. (From a sermon by Luther on 2 Peter 1:4, quoted in Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith*, 2–21)

The Gospel speaks of the freedom belonging to all the children of God (John 8:31–36). "Continue in my word," Jesus urges, which in John means to "abide" or "remain" (15:1–11; 1 John 4:13–21). We are to abide in the word of God Jesus reveals and is. Just so, we know the truth, which is to say *we know God.*

The wonder of this unfathomable statement should not be passed over lightly. We come to know the One who is beyond all human naming. This knowledge is not an intellectual concept acquired by cognitive grasping. It is a personal and existential awareness that arises only in a living, loving relationship. We come into a knowing of God such as exists only among closest friends and lovers. This alone sets us free to live in liberation from the fears, sin, and oppressive powers that hold our hearts in bondage.

Jesus' listeners take his words in a nationalistic sense. This reaction is impossible to understand, since their Abrahamic heritage did not prevent them from repeated episodes of political bondage. But their real bondage lies in the assumption that anything other than the truth of God in Christ can set one free from sin's oppression and give abundant life (8:34; 10:10). Those who commit sin demonstrate by their sinning that they are not free, tightening their bondage to sin in the process (8:34). Life lived in alienation from God perpetuates bondage. But truth and freedom—indeed, God—is known as we abide in the revelation Jesus brings and is. We are freed to live as children of God (8:35–36), receiving grace upon grace (1:16), while living beyond the bondages that enslave.

The Jeremiah passage describes the new covenant Yahweh will establish with Israel. Jeremiah prophesied during the rise of the Babylonian empire, which soon overran Jerusalem and carried the nation into exile. The people placed foolish confidence in the temple, thinking God would never allow alien feet to tread or destroy there (7:4–7). They burned offerings to alien gods (18:15) and paid little attention to Yahweh or the covenant demand to do justice (22:11–30).

The prophet looks beyond exile—indeed, beyond the Sinai covenant—to a new day when God would establish a new covenant with the people. They had irreparably broken the old covenant (31:32). Sin had become second nature (13:23).

But the new covenant would be different. The difference is reflected not in a new code of law laid down by God but by the instrument by which the covenant would be kept. Yahweh promised to create a new people on whose heart the law of God is written. They will all know God, deeply and intuitively, because God is changing their hearts. God does not merely forgive and give everyone a fresh start; God makes them fresh and new. They know the heart of God even as they know they are God's beloved people. Thus, they will live the desire of God from their hearts (31:33–34).

This promise inspired Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah, who also spoke of an eternal covenant that could not be broken because God would create a new people with new hearts (Ezek 16:60; 34:25; 37:26; Isa 55:3; 61:8). This promise finds fulfillment in Jesus, the Christ, abiding in the hearts of the faithful, granting them new hearts and freedom to live as children of God. DLM

All Saints Day
November 4, 2007

Daniel 7:1–3, 15–18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11–23
Luke 6:20–31

Rejoice in God's saints—and watch them closely! They know what the darkened minds of a calculating age cannot know. They see what is truly real in a time when human eyes fixate on appearances. They abide in hope when the world mocks them as naive. They hear the music of a world of mercy and grace and move to its rhythms before that new age fully appears. They are the face of Christ's holy future, and we give thanks for their witness that saves us, too.

Ephesians 1:11–23 holds no distrust for a spirituality in which visionary moments and ecstatic experiences sweep us into existential awareness of God's holy mystery and love active in the world. Listen: May "the eyes of your heart [be] enlightened . . . [that] you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints" (1:18). May God grant us "a spirit of wisdom and revelation" (1:19).

Verses 3–14 lay out central themes that echo through the letter. Most notably, God has a plan, a "mystery" (vv. 8b–10), that has been active since the dawn of creation but is now revealed in Christ. The mystery is a plan to gather up all things into one thing, really into one person, Christ. God is gathering us and all creation into one harmonious unity in which all share in the divine life of Christ (v. 10).

This oneness with all things in Christ is our inheritance (v. 11) to be accomplished according to God's good pleasure (vv. 5, 9). Knowing this, seeing it appear already in Christ's holy church (vv. 21–23), it is little wonder that we should praise God for this mystery, so hidden from human eyes except those who "hope on Christ" (v. 12) and are marked with the Holy Spirit (vv. 12–13). They know what will be fulfilled in God's good time "according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will" (v. 11).

The thanksgiving and intercession (vv. 15–19) connects with the nearly unspeakable prayer that comes at 3:14–19. There, the author prays that the church may know what cannot be known: the height and depth, length and breadth of the love of God in Christ, and to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19)—surely among the most mystic statements of Christian Scripture.

For Ephesians, knowing and being filled by the unspeakable love of God is the very definition of what it means to have the "eyes of your heart enlightened [that] you may know the hope to which he has called you" (1:18). This enlightenment enables us to recognize God's power, working out the divine mystery, so decisively moved forward by Christ's resurrection (vv. 19–20). Christ has been granted authority over the oppressive forces that obscure and resist the fulfillment of God's mystery (vv. 21–22). His authority is evident in the church, which shares in the fullness of his future already, even as that fullness labors to fill all things (v. 23). God's saints sense and smell this future, experiencing it even now as they live in concert with the dawning of Christ's day of fulfillment.

The outlines of God's future find definition in Luke 6:20–31. Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" (6:20–49) is a major statement of the shape of God's reign, which comes as good news for the poor (4:16–21). Jesus has been demonstrating that good news in word and deed throughout Galilee starting at Luke 4:14. The list of those blessed—the poor, hungry, hated, reviled, excluded, and de-

famed—startles normal human sensibilities. That's the point. Reality is not what we think. The present order of things with its normal values is profoundly out of sync with the enduring truth of God. What now appears real, relevant, and true will crumble, for it is not built on the foundation of God's ultimate purpose.

Jesus does not glorify poverty, suffering, or dishonor but points to the blessing, present and future, of those who have cast their lot with him and the reign of God he reveals. They have seen the future breaking into the present in his embrace of the outcast and forsaken. Jesus proclaims and enacts a kingdom where the least and the last are not lost to God's mercy (15:1–32), where arrogance and wealth are dangers to one's soul (12:13–34; 14:1–24; 16:19–31; 18:18–30).

The disciples of Jesus are blessed because they see, however dimly, the life that is life, the reality that is real because it is eternal; it is of God. Those who possess nothing and appear to have no future are blessed (6:20–23). They have already entered God's future, and their future is assured. They will dwell in deepening communion with the merciful God who loves and seeks the lowly, being filled with that which is eternal (1:48–53). But woe to those who, having all they need, assume that this reflects God's special blessing upon them (6:24–26). Their riches blind them to the new reality of the reign of God. They reject and persecute the harbingers of that holy future because it threatens their comfort and way of life (6:22–23, 26).

The rich choose a counterfeit way of living that is not life but merely reflects the convenient conscience of a shallow age that does not know how to seek what is just or eternal or what makes for peace. They overlook injustice and refuse to repent in light of the inbreaking age. The saints see this new age, while others are lost in the darkness. This, of course, makes saints difficult to live with, which is why they so often are hated.

The remainder of Jesus' sermon (6:27–31) lays out marks of those grasped by God's future. They strive to love in the face of hatred and to bless in the face of curses. They eschew the violence that the world declares is wisdom and seek to live generously. All of this marks them as "children of Most High," seeking to be "merciful, just as your Father is merciful (6:37–38).

The reading from Daniel reveals God as the ruler of history who will bring a universal reign of justice over all nations and peoples. Daniel was written during the intense persecution of Israel during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (165–164 B.C.E.). The author encourages the Jews to remain faithful even as a bloody purge sought to force them to abandon the law of Moses in favor of Greek paganism. The last half of the prophecy consists of a series of apocalyptic visions, all of which present past events as if they still lie in the future (7:1–12:13). This stirs confidence in the prophet's assurances that the kingdoms hostile to Israel will be overthrown and the reign of God and God's holy people realized.

In today's reading, the four beasts represent four successive empires that oppress Israel: the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Greeks (7:1–14). They are stirred by the "four winds of heaven," reflecting God's control of great historical events (7:20). The winds, from the four compass points, reflect the universality of God's authority over the cosmic events that disturb the whole earth. Each of the four empires will rise (actually each had already done so) to trouble the people, but in the end "the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever—forever and ever" (7:18). The fourth kingdom, that of Antiochus IV Epi-

phanes, will speak against God and "wear out the holy ones of the Most High" (v. 25). But it, too, shall be consumed (v. 26), and "dominion . . . shall be given to the people of the holy ones of the Most High" (v. 28).

God's mercy and justice will endure to the end against the assaults of the arrogant, Daniel says. The Most High will establish a universal and everlasting reign that reflects the holiness of God. The saints know this even when suffering cripples and hope appears foolish. DLM

Proper 27
November 11, 2007

Job 19:23–27a
Psalm 17:1–9
2 Thessalonians 2:1–5, 13–17
Luke 20:27–38

The living God liberates our desire and excites our imagination for an unsearchable More that we cannot define or grasp. The God of the living releases our minds from every crass materialism that tames our vision and ties our hopes to this age. We are freed to expect a boundary-breaking resurrection and redemption beyond anything we now know or can understand. Such hope-filled living comes as a gift from the One who is Life.

Job stands utterly alone, rejected and abandoned by family, friends, and apparently God. He has suffered through Bildad's second speech, which coldly remarks that Job is the cause of his own torment since he refuses to act to remove it (18:1–21). The apparent hostility of God moves the hostility of human beings toward Job (19:13–22).

Why must his "friends" be so intolerant toward him? Job threatens their religious convictions, the truths by which they order their existence. The fault for Job's suffering rests in him, they say (19:1–12). He must be wrong, a sinner. They rigidly adhere to traditional doctrines of divine retribution. But Job maintains that the root of the matter lies not in him but in God. Job's suffering has come not as the automatic result of his wrongdoing but because God, for some inscrutable reason, is acting against him.

In today's text (19:23–27a) Job pushes through the dark veil of desperation and suffering to make a profound profession of faith for which there is no visible support. He finds a partial solution to his predicament that allows him to rise above the worst temptation—final despair—that presses on him. His pitiable state is temporary, he maintains. God eventually will heed his cry and vindicate him as an innocent man. He will again know God as friend.

Job asks for an inscription that his words may endure and be seen beyond his death, which he believes is near (vv. 23–24). His words echo through the church's history. They have been read at countless funerals and immortalized in G. F. Handel's oratorio *The Messiah*: "For I know that my Redeemer (Vindicator) lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth" (v. 25).

But is Job's vindication a hope for before or after his death? The context makes *after* the most natural reading. Job anticipates a vision of God even in the underworld that will announce his vindication (vv. 26–27), suggesting some kind of survival of consciousness beyond death: "and after my skin has been destroyed I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side." This is consistent with Israel's knowledge of Yahweh as the living God who is present even to the dead.

Three times Job makes references to seeing God in 19:26–27. He craves the vision of God, believing this will redeem him and reverse his torment. His desire is fulfilled at 42:5. We are not told what he sees as he stands before the whirlwind from

which God speaks (38:1ff.). We see only that he is lifted beyond torment in the knowledge that the mysteries of his life rest hidden and secure in the wondrous reality of God (42:1–5). He does not have answers to his questions. Standing in awe before the Holy One whom he cannot understand, he knows only that he can trust and hope in God's inscrutable mercy. Modern souls could use a hefty dose of Job's awareness.

In Luke 20, Jesus has ended his journey to Jerusalem amid growing conflicts with the scribes and leaders of the temple. The Sadducees, an aristocratic and religiously conservative party, who largely managed the temple, suggest a ridiculous example intended to prove there is no resurrection. This group, mentioned only here in Luke, also rejected belief in angels and the oral traditions of the Pharisees.

Jesus swats away their materialistic argument as if it were a pesky fly, using scriptural material the Sadducees unquestioningly accepted as authoritative. First, he notes that their literal-minded idea of the resurrection is false (20:34–36). Life in the age of the resurrection is not a mere extension of present bodily existence, the revivification of a corpse. Family life and marriage are not ultimate; they pass away, relativized by the reign of God (18:24–30). The context of levirate marriage, where a brother-in-law married a brother's widow, was the threat of Israel's extinction. Since the "children of the resurrection" do not die, there is no more need for procreation.

Jesus' use of God's revelation at the burning bush (Exod 3:6) deals a death blow to the Sadducees' argument. Using interpretive techniques well known to them, he points to Moses who "speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (20:37). Since God is "not [God] of the dead, but of the living," these patriarchs, though having left the earth, are somehow alive in God (20:38). God remains their God. So they must be alive. God always is, so those who are in God also are alive. Luke then adds to his Markan source: "for to him all of them are alive" (Luke 20:38; compare Mark 12:18–27).

There is no speculation here about the nature of the resurrected life. Jesus simply affirms its discontinuity with physical existence in our current age (20:34–36; compare 1 Cor 15:35–56). We cannot know what it will be. But faith in the living God, the God of the living, does invite our imaginations and joyful hope for the unimaginable redemption God is plotting for the beloved.

A great gulf separates Jesus' proclamation of God's kingdom and the messianic expectations and concerns of the Jewish leaders. This becomes evident in Jesus' controversies with the leaders following his entry into Jerusalem (Luke 20:1–21:4). Luke Timothy Johnson points out that Jesus' opponents see the kingdom as a political reality, tied to allegiance to a Jewish king or at least to rebellion against the emperor (20:20–26). It consists in this present existence without a resurrection. God's blessing (for the Sadducees) consists in prosperity of progeny, wealth, children, long life, power, and prestige (20:27–38; 20:45–21:4). God's revelation is closed in a book, and the Messiah is defined in terms of the nation's past glories (Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* [The Liturgical Press, 1991], 318).

Jesus offers a kingdom where all things belong to God. God's reign transcends all political expressions or national interests. There is no closed horizon of imagination. God is rich in life, resurrected life, and the divine heart hungers to give fullness of life beyond our ability to imagine. Our hope is not for the perpetuation of this existence but for life new, eternal, and beyond human expectation. This is the holy intention of the One who is God of the living, not the dead.

In the reading from 2 Thessalonians Paul seeks to still a mania that may have been stirred, in part, by the apocalyptic message of his first letter to this church. The church is in a panic. Some have stopped working, devoting themselves to waiting for the return of their Lord (3:6–13).

In apocalyptic thought, evil must reach a boiling pitch before the time is right for the visitation of God's judgment. This expectation may have stirred the community to see every episode of growing affliction or persecution as a decisive movement toward the climactic intervention of God in history and the return of Christ on the clouds (1 Thess 1:10; 2 Thess 1:6–10; 2:3–4). Paul's earlier guidance would not necessarily have forestalled such apocalyptic enthusiasm (1 Thess 4:13–5:11).

Paul urges the church to be of sober mind. They must not interpret every local event or word as having cosmic significance (2:2). The day of the Lord is not yet at hand, and they are not to be preoccupied with the end time, for its arrival will be unmistakable (2:4–12). They are freed to live in the current time, knowing that this is not an insignificant period of merely waiting for the end and Christ's appearance. The present is a time for thanksgiving, sanctification, and good work (2:13–17). DLM

Proper 28
November 18, 2007

Malachi 4:1–2a
Psalm 98
2 Thessalonians 3:6–13
Luke 21:5–19

I remember Eric, a tired old man whose dying days I closely attended in the early weeks of my pastoral ministry. "Too late, too late," he would repeat without explanation. I never fathomed the depth or significance of his despair, because he would not or could not name the regret he grieved on his death bed. I could only gather that he had waited too long. Opportunities to do and be what the depth of his soul required of him had been missed. It was a sad scene, despite my attempts to console this baptized child of God. He felt he had squandered his soul somewhere amid the living of his days.

"By your endurance you will gain your souls," Jesus counsels in Luke 21:19. And so it is. Jesus turns us to ways we live and shape our lives in relation to God's faithfulness, ways that tear us from or move us deeper into the loving mercy of God who alone can preserve us.

At least three ways of squandering (and, conversely, gaining) your soul are evident in the readings: surrender to cynicism, sloth in doing the good, and silence in the face of resistance or persecution.

In the first reading, the prophet Malachi (literally, "my messenger") is troubled by the people's doubt of God's love (1:2–5), their refusal to honor God (1:6–14), and their despair and cynicism about God's justice (2:17–3:5; 3:13–15). Malachi carries out his ministry in a postexilic age. But the enthusiasm about rebuilding the temple, evident in the other prophets of the period, Haggai and Zechariah 1–8, has given way to routine disinterest. The people have slipped into a morally depleting disillusionment. Vitality has ebbed away. Temple worship is as sick as the animals offered in sacrifice (1:6–14). The priests are indulgent, ignorant, and venal (2:1–9). The population murmurs against God because the evil prosper and the arrogant are happy and always escape God's justice (2:17–3:5; 3:13–15).

The social situation dissipates souls. They waste away in apathy, convinced at heart that faithfulness is foolishness. Nothing matters, so why bother with faithful

worship, loving sacrifice, or doing justice? What's the danger in dishonoring God with empty offerings and faithless marriages (2:10–16)? Faithfulness does not matter, say the cynical voices of the age.

But the Holy One comes with justice to those who honor God. They and their children will be spared, making them God's "special possession" (Mal 3:16–18). The prophet does not say that the nation of Israel shall be special to God. Only those who revere the Lord and think on God's name "shall be mine," the Lord says through the prophet (3:17).

The difference between those who serve the Lord and those who do not will be clear on the day when the sun of righteousness rises to shine on the people. The arrogant and evil will be swept away, burned like stubble, leaving neither root nor branch. But those who remain faithful amid the current malaise will rise to experience healing and joy (4:1–2). Their souls, not dissipated by the murmuring and cynicism of the age, will spring with life and vitality knowing the visitation of God's mercy and justice.

2 Thessalonians is typically considered post-Pauline by much contemporary scholarship. (See also the discussion of the second reading in Proper 27.) Eschatological expectations are a major concern in both 1 and 2 Thessalonians, but the two letters handle them differently.

In the first letter, the congregation does not seem preoccupied with the last things (5:1–3). Paul encourages them to be ready (5:4–11) and assures them that those who have died are not lost but have priority on the day of the Lord (4:13–18).

But 2 Thessalonians soundly disapproves of the apocalyptic enthusiasm that grips the church. Unlike the first letter, it does not encourage sound prophecy (1 Thess 5:19–20) but confronts false prophecy and its danger to community stability. In today's reading, the writer appeals to Christ's authority and to Paul's example of hard work during his days among them (3:6–9, 12). Those who are idle, refusing to work in light of the return of the Lord, are not living in accord with the tradition ("deposit," *paradosis*) of the faith Paul taught them (3:6).

The present is not a time for idleness. We, too, must not be consumed by one kind of enthusiasm or another (whether religious or secular). These upset community peace and distract us from work most useful for building up the faith and service of the Christian community. The reading speaks to a wide range of distractions present in church and society. These distractions include everything from the feverish apocalyptic speculations evident in the *Left Behind* series to the highly secularized enthusiasms of a society so sated by its affluence that it cannot hear the Spirit's call to do mercy and justice next door or around the globe. I also should not fail to mention the feverish busyness of congregational life that keeps bodies moving but does not engage human hearts with the transforming truth of the gospel.

Faithful lives and witness to God's reign of mercy and justice will produce enemies, even among friends and family. This is clear in Luke 21:5–19, especially vv. 12–16. Luke has heavily reworked his Markan source material (compare Mark 13:5ff.). A side-by-side comparison of the changes is beyond the scope of this discussion, but such a review in a volume of Gospel parallels is useful. Luke may or may not be using another source for this pericope, but it is clear that he seeks to bring this text within the scope of his theological vision.

"Do not follow them," Jesus says of those pretending to speak in his name and lead the people to premature expectation of the end times (21:8). This replaces Mark's

assertion (13:6) that such voices will appear and "deceive many." Luke's revision of Mark continues in subsequent verses. "Do not panic," Jesus urges the faithful (Luke 21:9). Then Luke has Jesus describe a series of events that leads not to the end of all things (as in Mark 13:5ff.) but to the fall of the city of Jerusalem (Luke 21:5–7, 20–24), an event that would have already occurred by the time Luke wrote his Gospel.

This editing serves to heighten Jesus' reputation as a prophet. Luke is clear: Jesus' word can be trusted. Jerusalem has fallen as Jesus said it would, and you have seen it. This heightens Jesus' credibility about the return of the Son of Man in the verses that follow (21:25–38).

But Jesus' call for faithful testimony must not be lost amid apocalyptic images and speculation. As Jesus was led away (22:16) and handed over to Herod (23:6–12) and Pilate (23:1–5, 13–25) to make faithful testimony, so the disciples are to face "kings and governors" to do the same (Luke 21:12–13). They will bear witness before the seats of power (Acts 23:24, 26; 26:30) and to many all through Luke's second volume (Acts 3:13; 4:33; 5:32; 20:26; 26:22). Each time, Jesus keeps his promise to give words and wisdom so they can faithfully testify to the dawn of God's reign (Luke 21:15). The promise to provide such timely speech also occurs at Luke 12:11–12, where Jesus assures us that the Holy Spirit will teach disciples what to say at the time they need it. Hence, we need not worry but trust Jesus' promise (Luke 21:14–15)

Jesus' call is to endure in faithful testimony to the reign of God. Our words and deeds are not to flag in the face of resistance, betrayal, or the discouragement that settles over us amid difficult challenges. Our witness is Spirit-inspired and empowered, enabling us to endure that we may gain our souls (21:19). DLM

Day of Thanksgiving November 22, 2007

Deuteronomy 26:1–11
Psalm 100
Philippians 4:4–9
John 6:25–35

Thanksgiving too often degenerates into a self-congratulatory celebration of national prosperity. It is easy and natural to recognize the freedom from want and the material abundance most Americans enjoy. We look at the rest of the globe and correctly recognize that we do not share the suffering that dooms hundreds of millions to malnutrition and early death.

Awareness of global suffering can quickly move us to gratitude for having escaped this fate. But if thanksgiving celebrations penetrate no deeper than this, they remain sub-Christian, ignoring the true source of lasting gratitude and our own deepest needs.

John 6:26 moves us in a more fruitful direction: "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate your fill of the loaves." Exactly. This is what moves much Thanksgiving Day gratitude. We have eaten many loaves from God's good garden. Jesus' words reject a shallow faith based on material benefits that we have received from God's goodness. Jesus wants us to see and understand the *sign* he just worked in the miracle of the loaves (6:1–15).

In the synoptic Gospels, seeking a sign carries a pejorative connotation. Skeptics and nonbelievers seek a sign, a miracle or wondrous act, as proof that Jesus' authority comes from God (Matt 12:38–39; 16:1–4; Luke 23:8). Typically, Jesus refuses to perform such proofs, rejecting the request as the mark of an evil and faithless people.

Faith based on such signs is shallow and fails to penetrate to the truth of Jesus' identity (John 2:23–25; 4:48; 6:26, 30).

But John's Gospel also includes a unique and positive understanding of *signs*. Signs are works or acts of wonder Jesus does not as apologetic proofs but as revelations of his identity as the Word made flesh. They reveal his oneness with the Father. Signs disclose the salvation that he brings. They are filled with spiritual symbolism that brings to light that nature of the salvation God offers in the Son. If Jesus restores Lazarus to life, his teaching quickly shows that this restoration of physical life is a sign of the gift of eternal life (11:24–26). The sign is not an external proof intended to overwhelm doubt but an expression of Jesus' identity that can be seen only by faith.

Today's reading comes at the front door of the bread of life discourse (6:25–71), following Jesus' multiplication of the loaves (6:1–15). Jesus contrasts the physical bread with which he fed the crowds—and even the bread from heaven God gave to Israel in the wilderness—with the "true bread . . . the bread of God" (vv. 31–33), which "endures for eternal life" (v. 27). The bread that Jesus gives—indeed, the bread he is—satisfies a need deeper than the bread that sent the crowd running to find him.

The crowds fail to understand Jesus' words and ask for a sign as proof of his credentials as one sent by God (vv. 29–31). Their questions reveal that they continue to grasp only the surface and material meanings of Jesus' words (vv. 25, 28, 30, 34). They cannot see that Jesus' revelation is true bread that lasts, *abides* (*menein*) in John's characteristic vocabulary (6:27, 33; 15:1–7). True bread gives the abundant life God intends for the human beings (10:10).

In the first of seven "I am" declarations in John, Jesus identifies himself as "the bread of life" (6:35). Each of the "I am" sayings expresses what Jesus does for humanity (I am the light of the world, 8:12; 9:15; the door of the sheep, 10:7, 9; the good shepherd, 10:11, 14; the resurrection and the life, 11:15; the way, truth and life, 14:6; the true vine, 15:6).

As bread of life, Jesus satisfies the deep hunger of the human heart for divine revelation. We are hungry to see and know the One who is eternal. We want to taste and savor eternal life, enjoying an intimacy with God that satisfies a longing no Thanksgiving turkey can touch. This bread moves lasting gratitude far beyond the material and nationalistic pieties so common on this day. Jesus invites us beyond the celebration of a prosperity that perishes to an enduring joy and gratitude for the eternal life we experience as we eat and drink all that Jesus is and brings. This joy is not dimmed by the presence of hardship or struggle, for it is rooted in the presence of Christ who is near (Phil 4:4–5). The second reading reflects the pervasive joy evident from the beginning of Paul's letter to the Philippian church (1:3–11, 18, 25, 2:2, 17, 18, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10).

Joy is a mark of the eschatological age of salvation which God has initiated in the death and resurrection of Christ. Christ reigns, exalted above (2:9–11). Nothing truly matters except knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection (3:7–11). The Lord is near (4:5), and the power at work in the resurrection and glorification of Christ is at work in believers, enabling us to will and work the fruits of salvation, which are pleasing to God (2:12–13).

The joy of this letter is not appreciated unless one realizes that the Philippian church was experiencing antagonism and suffering for their faith in Christ (1:28–30). Paul is concerned that internal divisions had weakened their ability to withstand external pressures. There was also internal conflict. Today's reading comes on the heels of Paul's

guidance to two faithful community members who are at odds with each other (4:2–3).

From this we see that God's joy and surpassing peace (4:7) do not arrive when conflict or struggle cease but as we live in the intimacy of prayer (4:6), aware of the Lord's nearness among and in us. The joy of Christ's nearness endures and strengthens amid human struggle. This is a testimony Christians in many troubled lands can offer their North American sisters and brothers.

The first-fruits offering (Deut 26:1–11) is an ancient practice not confined to Israel (Gen 14:20; 28:22; Amos 4:4). In Israel, one-tenth of the grain and fruit was to be given to support the sanctuary (Deut 14:22–29; Num 15:17–21). The offering signified Yahweh's ownership of the land. God has a right to the sacrifice, which expressed both human dependence upon God and the desire for union with God's presence and will.

In today's reading, the offering of the first fruits is connected with an identity story. The worshiper brings an offering in remembrance of God's deliverance of the people from Egyptian bondage. Participation in this act of gratitude bound one to a people, a history, and the God who in power and mercy brings deliverance to the oppressed, keeping the ancient promise to the patriarchs (26:3).

Deliverance was not celebrated as ancient remembrance but as current reality, an historical deliverance operating in the present. "*I* have come into the land," the worshiper says bearing the offering (26:3). The Egyptians "treated *us* harshly" (v. 6). "*We* cried to the Lord" (v. 7). "The Lord brought *us* out of Egypt" (v. 8); "he brought *us* into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (v. 9).

Each worshiper is to think of himself as the oppressed who would have no land, no bounty, no peace had God not delivered him personally. God's mighty act of deliverance happened not just for the ancestors but for the present generation. Without it there would be no freedom, no good land, no first-fruits offering in gratitude to God who gives this bounty. The celebration deepened worshipers' identity as those known, delivered, and blessed by God. And their joy was to be celebrated not as personal privilege but as a gift also for the alien among them (v. 11). DLM

Christ the King
November 25, 2007

Jeremiah 23:1–6
Psalm 46
Colossians 1:11–20
Luke 23:33–43

What is the dream you believe in, the future for which you hope? What is the fulfillment of your life, your relationships, the world and its nations? What hope makes your heart ache and holds the power to draw tears? The hopes we hold mold our behavior, shaping our emotions and expectations. But our hopes are too often too small. They are seldom captured by the fulfillment of all life that God faithfully and unfailingly works in Jesus, the Christ.

The readings for Christ the King offer a cosmic vision that extends from before the birth of time into all eternity. It is a vision of divine promises kept and of a world fulfilled by a faithful God. This vision frees our hopes and ignites our imagination in anticipation of God's future, which has already begun to appear. There is no greater hope—or joy—to which we may give ourselves.

In Colossians 1:11–20, an ancient Christian hymn with an exalted Christology celebrates Christ as the face of the eternal wonder of God (v. 15). Christ is the one in whom the fullness of God's fullness dwells

(v. 19). The divine energy revealed in the person of Jesus of Nazareth has existed since before the creation of the world (vv. 15, 17). The power and wisdom at work in Christ is the gracious gravity that holds all that is from centrifugally flying off in every direction (v. 17). All creation bears the mark of having been made in Christ and through Christ. All that is has been made for him, finding in him its fulfillment and purpose (v. 16). God makes peace among all the whirling, disparate, conflicting elements of the universe in and through Christ and the blood of the cross (v. 20).

The Christ hymn echoes with wisdom motifs from Hebrew Scripture. Proverbs describes Wisdom as an agent in the creation of the world (3:19). Wisdom was created first as a partner in the divine work (8:22–31). The author of the Colossians hymn drew from these ideas, applying them to Christ.

The idea of the fullness (*pleroma*) of God in Col 1:19 is also in Hebrew Scripture (Isa 6:3). Indeed, wisdom is to fill the earth (Wis 1:7). A gnostic heresy, which may have been troubling the Colossian church (2:8, 16–23), held that the *pleroma* was the whole body of heavenly powers and emanations that flow from God. These thrones, dominions, rulers, and powers (1:16) were considered spiritual beings, supernatural powers, who held control over various parts of creation, including human beings. One needed to gain knowledge of these powers and their spheres of influence to satisfy them, avoid taboos, and align oneself with their workings.

Colossians contradicts such slavishness to forces that would control us. The *pleroma* is not shared among many beings and divine intermediaries. The fullness of God dwells in Christ alone (1:19). The entire universe, created in, through, and for him, is directed and brought to completion in and by him. His resurrection places him above all the powers that diminish our vision, deflate our hopes, and resist the final reconciliation and peace to which God will bring all things (1:20). Christ is our hope in a world where dozens of powers and forces pretend it is they, not our Lord, who hold the future.

The church, Christ's body, is the locus of God's reconciling work. There, already, we see and know Christ as the Lord and firstborn of the dead (1:18). The church is and reveals the beginning of the completion that God will bring. Christ who is firstborn of creation, firstborn of the dead, is "head of . . . the church" and will "have first place in everything" (1:18). There is no larger hope.

In Luke 23:33–43, Jesus is revealed as the true Son of God, Messiah and King, through his faithful suffering in obedience to the divine will. Titles fly around in this pericope. Jesus is mocked by those who sarcastically call him "the Messiah of God, his chosen one" (23:35). The soldiers mock him as he hangs on the cross, derisively calling him "the King of the Jews" (23:37–38). The thief crucified alongside Jesus gets in on the action, calling him "Messiah," perhaps hoping against hope that Jesus is exactly that and will save him (23:39).

Those who ridicule Jesus believe in a theology of the test: If Jesus is Messiah and King, he can save himself from this dire fate. The logic is well attested in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon: "for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for according to what he says, he will be protected" (Wis 2:18–20).

The irony is thick. Jesus' enemies do not know what they are doing and saying. In

their efforts to scoff at him, they establish the truth of his identity as the faithful Son of God who brings the salvation of God's reign to earth.

Jesus preached that his followers are to forgive their enemies as a sign that they are daughters and sons of the merciful Father. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . . Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (6:27–28, 36). By forgiving his enemies even as they deride him and gamble over his clothes (23:34) Jesus demonstrates that he is the son of the all-merciful God.

The rulers who berate him do not see that Jesus is the Messiah not because he comes down from the cross but precisely because he does not. He was not sent to save himself. He cannot save himself and remain faithful to God's will and plan that made it necessary "that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory" (24:26). The "chosen one" is sent to serve and suffer (Isa 42:1; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30; 8:30–35), fulfilling God's intention to open the kingdom to all who see the faithful God revealed in Jesus' faithful suffering and consequent glorification.

Those who sarcastically throw around messianic titles can neither see nor receive the reign of God in the faithful, innocent, suffering Jesus. The only one who does, the other thief on the cross, does not use a christological title. He simply calls Jesus by name and asks to be remembered in the kingdom (23:40–41). At this, Jesus reveals the Father's holy purpose of granting the kingdom and all its benefits to those who will receive it (23:42–43). God is ever waiting and eager to give us the kingdom that we may dwell with Jesus in time and eternity. Such is God's good pleasure (12:32).

The first lesson, too, speaks of God's divine determined intention to gather God's beloved people under a righteous leader, one unlike the faithless shepherds who scatter and destroy the flock (Jer 23:1–6). The shepherds are Israel's unworthy rulers.

Two central aspects of biblical prophecy are on display in this reading. The Hebrew prophets criticized and energized. They called the covenant people back to faithfulness to God and the justice and mercy God requires. But they also fanned the nation's hopes in times of despair, speaking gently to the heart with words of comfort rooted in God's steadfast love and mercy. They assure the oppressed that God will keep the divine promise of restoration.

Jeremiah looks ahead to the destruction of the nation. The people will be scattered because the shepherds have been careless and faithless (23:1–2). But the vision does not end there. He looks beyond the suffering of exile to a day when God will gather the people and bring them home, setting up a ruler, a righteous branch, who will save the people and enable them to live in peace and safety (23:3–6).

This is God's intention and the nature of God's rule. And God will bring it about. This is the holy and gracious promise we celebrate on Christ the King. Our bodies and souls hunger for the reign of Christ, and our eyes and ears strain to capture the signs of its appearance, even here, even now. DLM

Who Bears Responsibility?

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Twenty years ago, the American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America met in Columbus, Ohio, to form a new Lutheran church. As a result, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America began its life January 1, 1988. While there has been much to celebrate in the ELCA's common witness to Jesus Christ, lament has also characterized its life together. The church has lamented the decline in total membership and can no longer claim to be a communion of 5 million plus. And although congregational giving continues to increase, benevolence commitments to synods, the ELCA, and its various institutions and agencies have been stagnant at best.

Who bears responsibility in the church for membership decline, a lack of growth in benevolence, or any number of other matters that could be cited?

My experience has been that responsibility for given challenges or problems is always assigned somewhere else. The tradition of blaming takes over. Seminary professors and administrators locate responsibility in congregational, synodical, and/or churchwide leadership. Congregational pastors and other rostered leaders point to the seminaries, the synods, and the denomination. Synodical bishops and churchwide leadership follow suit. In many instances, the result is that valuable time, energy, and creativity are wasted in addressing missional challenges or problems.

In my judgment, the church would be much better served in addressing contemporary issues in the church's ministry if we changed the question. Instead of asking "Who bears responsibility?" the question should be "What is the responsibility that we bear?" as public leaders in the church serving in a variety of places? Changing the question would invite the church's leaders to "first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of the other's eye" (Matthew 7:5). In addition, it would contribute to an environment in which all share responsibility, all reflect self-critically, and all seek faithful and more effective collaborative approaches to theology and mission in the twenty-first century.

Thanks be to God for the gospel of Jesus Christ and for our shared life in and through the church!

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