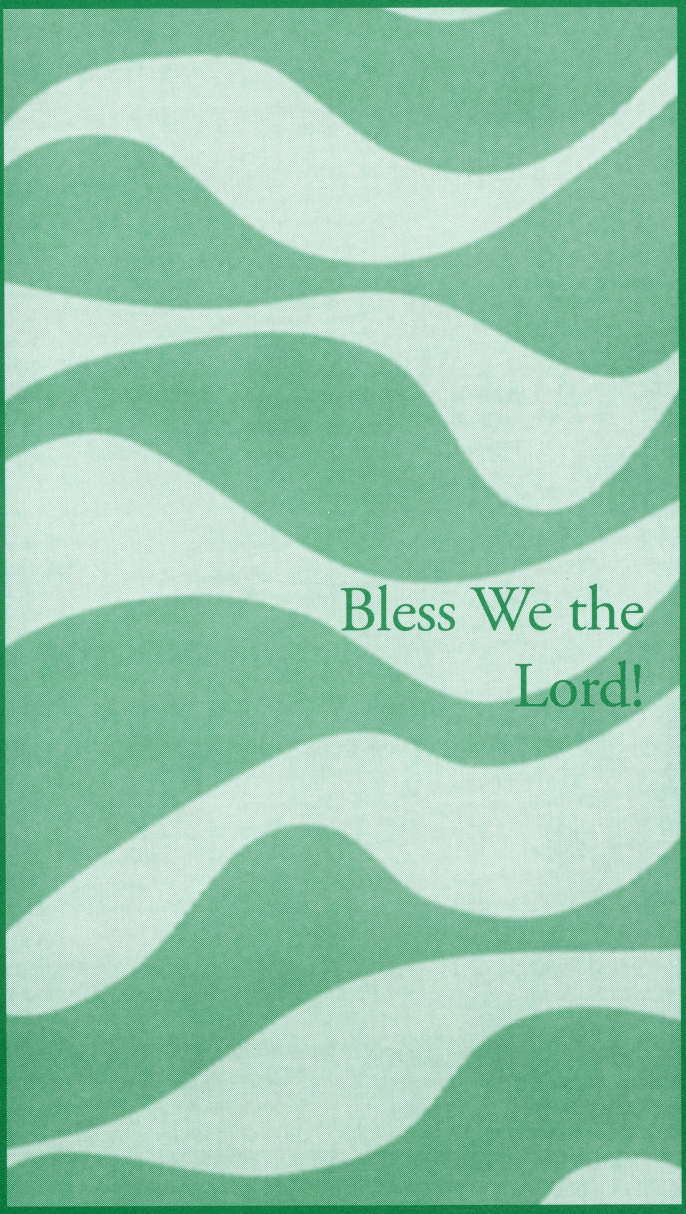
June 2007 Volume 34 Number 3




# CURRENTS

## in Theology and Mission

# Currents

## in Theology and Mission

Published by
**Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago**

in cooperation with
**Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary**
**Wartburg Theological Seminary**

Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*
*rklein@lstc.edu*
Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
*Wartburg Theological Seminary*
*ncookeverist@wartburgseminary.edu*
Assistant Editor: **Peggy Blomenberg**
*pbe@lstc.edu*
Editor of Preaching Helps: **Craig A. Satterlee**
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*
*csatterl@lstc.edu*
Editors of Book Reviews:
**Edgar Krentz**
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0752)*
*ekrentz@lstc.edu*
**Connie Kleingartner**
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0747)*
*ckleinga@lstc.edu*
**Craig L. Nessan**
*Wartburg Theological Seminary (563/589-0207)*
*cnessan@wartburgseminary.edu*
Circulation office: 773/256-0751
*currents@lstc.edu*



CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (ISSN: 0098-2113) is published bimonthly (every other month), February, April, June, August, October, December. Annual subscription rate: $18.00 in the U.S.A., $23.00 elsewhere. Two-year rate: $35.00 in the U.S.A., $45.00 elsewhere. Three-year rate: $51.00 in the U.S.A., $65.00 elsewhere. Published by Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a non-profit organization, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60615, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. Printed in U.S.A.

*CURRENTS* is indexed in *ATLA Religion Database, Elenchus, IZBW, NTA, OTA, Religion Index I* (formerly *IRPL*), *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, and *Theologische Literaturzeitung*.

MICROFORM AVAILABILITY: 16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm, 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Inc., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

# Contents



Drawings by Mark Kloess

# Bless We the Lord!

It is a strange concept, come to think of it. We often speak of God blessing us in manifold ways, but how can we mortals offer any blessings to God? Folks did it quite regularly in the Old Testament (Gen 24:48; Deut 8:10; Josh 22:33; 1 Chr 29:10, 20; 2 Chr 20:26; 31:8—and many times in the Psalter). Blessing of God is a little easier to understand when it appears in "the blessing formula": "Blessed are you, God." This blessing formula occurs twice in the Bible (1 Chr 29:10 and Ps 119:12), begins at least one of the standard Eucharistic prayers, and is very common in synogogal worship today. This blessing formula does not say who does the blessing, but it recognizes God as one who is to be honored, praised, thanked, and exalted—that is, blessed.

The solution to this mini-dilemma of how we can bless God comes in 1 Chr 29:10: "David blessed Yahweh before the whole assembly, and David said, 'Blessed are you Yahweh, God of Israel our ancestor, forever and ever.'" David blessed God *by* pronouncing the blessing formula, and I suspect that what is explicit here is implicit on all the other occasions when humans blessed God. When we hear that people in the Old Testament blessed God, they were implicitly pronouncing the blessing formula in regard to God. The next verse in Chronicles explains what such blessing means: "To you Yahweh belong greatness, and power, and honor, and splendor, and majesty, indeed all things in heaven and earth." The doxology appended to Matt 6:13 in many late manuscripts of Matt 6:13—and in every one of our recitals of the Lord's Prayer—is based on this verse, 1 Chr 29:11.

Whether or not the following articles bless the Lord, they do offer manifold blessings to us!

**Martha Ellen Stortz** explores the way Christ dwells in us through the Eucharist and the way we dwell in Christ through our baptism. Through the Eucharist we take Christ's body into our own and become what we eat. Through baptism we are taken up into the body of Christ. Through both of these sacraments we are enabled and empowered to reach out of ourselves and toward the neighbor and into the world. When Thomas insists on touching the wounds of Jesus in John's Gospel, he understands the wounds as central and essential in any estimate of Jesus. Similarly, Juliana of Norwich desired to share Christ's sufferings and to receive three wounds: true contrition, natural compassion, and unshakable longing. The meal of the Eucharist nourishes us with Christ's body and blood, it is food that is not simply eaten but shared, and

it is not finished until we have reached the hungriest mouth in the world. In baptism we move forward only by returning to its promises. Baptism adopts us into a cross-cultural and cross-pollinated family of the children of God. Through baptism we are the body of Christ in the world, his hands and feet.

**Joel N. Lohr** examines how Paul's tentmaking affected his relationship with and ministry to the Corinthians, the meaning of 1 Corinthians 9 in its context, and Paul's decision to remain financially free from the Corinthians. Paul's tentmaking trade enabled him to identify with the lowly and exhort the socially elite to do the same thing. Tentmaking was long, hard, noisy, and dirty work—with low pay. This work choice was at a great cost to Paul, but he thereby provided an example for the Corinthians to follow. Paul had discovered freedom but was willing to forfeit his rights for the sake of the gospel. Paul was proud that he had made the gospel free. He was pleading with those in the upper strata of society to give up their freedoms, as he had, in order to remove division within the church. In imitating Paul's example the strong identify with the weak and, in turn, imitate Christ.

**Pamela Cooper-White** reviews a collection of essays by Lutheran college professors dealing with religion, the arts, and imagination. The reviewer identifies herself as an Episcopal priest, interested in postmodern, psychoanalytical, and feminist theory, but with many ties to the Lutheran tradition. The review is as broad as are the insights in the various essays. She gives particular attention to the views of Carol Gilbertson on the relationship of literature and religion in the classroom. (Gilbertson was once the chair of LSTC's Board of Directors.) The author notes that dramatic readings of the Gospel of Mark allow audience members to reenact their own struggles in those of the disciples. She also affirms that from a psychological point of view we cannot exclude our own psychological needs or our "countertransference" in relation to the experience of music as we perform it or experience it. Of course, music does not always move us in ways that feel good or are uplifting. Paul Beidler notes that the reiteration of any moment in time necessarily disconnects it from the immediacy of that experience. The author laments the lack of sustained attention to the visual arts, architecture, film, dance, and other forms of art in this collection. While the authors are homogeneous, they evoke a host of questions, indicating the importance of this publication.

**David J. Lull** addresses once again the biblical passages dealing in one way or another with homosexuality. The passages from Romans 1 condemn passions and desires that are excessive, exploitative, and violent and that lead to decadence, but these warnings apply to people of every sexual orientation. Homosexuals are no more prone to such behavior than heterosexuals are. Four traps attend discussion of this issue. The first trap is the assumption that

homosexual love and committed relationships are only about engaging in genital sex. The second trap is that one side or the other can win the battle over the Bible if they just craft the right exegetical and hermeneutical arguments. Both the United Methodist Church and the ELCA have reaffirmed their commitment to a unity in Christ that transcends and encompasses differences of opinion on sexual issues. The third trap is to talk about the *issue* of homosexuality, because this strategy keeps many gifted and loving persons in our midst out of sight and mind. The fourth trap is legalism. Organizing one's life around law has not produced, and cannot produce, the righteousness that is the goal of life. Paul offers instead a life immersed in and infused by Christ's faithfulness. Even advocates for the ordination of homosexuals in committed relationships can fall into the trap of legalism. A focus on local discernment and on Christ alone offers genuine promise beyond our churches' debilitating impasse.

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name" is the way the psalmist begins Psalm 103. Verse 20 ups the ante by offering a command to the angels, "You bless the LORD also." The psalmist closes Psalm 103 with an apostrophe to all created things that they should bless the LORD and then signs off by exhorting himself to bless the LORD one more time. Our usual liturgical response to all this blessing of God sounds a little tame to me: "Thanks be to God!" Inwardly, from now on, we might be tempted to swing into the blessing formula and say: "Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who. . . ."

*Ralph W. Klein, Editor*

P. S. With this issue we are renewing a former popular feature of *Currents*, a back page editorial by one of the presidents of the three seminaries that support and promote our journal. In this issue, President Phyllis Anderson of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

# Indwelling Christ, Indwelling Christians: Living as Marked

Martha Ellen Stortz
*Professor of Historical Theology and Ethics*
*Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary/Graduate Theological Union*
*mstortz@plts.edu*

I want to explore both sides of indwelling: *the way Christ dwells in us*, and also the less-explored side of indwelling, *the way we dwell in Christ.* We Christians are marked women and men because of that mutual exchange.

I want to probe two marks on our body. In the Eucharist, we take Christ's body into our own and literally become what we eat. It transforms us. Much of the literature on the indwelling Christ, from both the Finns and the Americans, explores Luther's eucharistic theology to unpack this side of indwelling. Christ dwells in us.[1] But there is another side of indwelling, the way we dwell in Christ. In baptism we are taken up into the body of Christ, making us dwell in that marked body. We transform the world. This "other side of indwelling" is less discussed, and I argue that it has equal, perhaps even primary, importance as we think about that mutual exchange between the body of Christ and the body of believers.

Luther's great 1520 treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian,* features a cosmic courtroom drama, but it also plays as an intimate bedroom drama.[2] Luther uses boldly erotic imagery from Paul's letter to the Ephesians to express a "one flesh" union between Christ and the church: Christ is the Bridegroom; the church is the bride. Through baptism we dwell in Christ.

Taken together, these two practices, the Lord's Supper and baptism, have personal and corporate dimensions. Through the work of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, they work on each of us individually, enabling and empowering us to reach out of ourselves toward the neighbor and into a world. The Lord's Supper works primarily on the individual: Heavenly food transforms the self of each believer *coram hominibus* to increasingly love the neighbor.[3] We become what we eat; Christ transforms us.

---

1. See *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998). This interpretation informs the work of others, such as Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, *Public Church: For the Life of the World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

2. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian (1520)," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 585–629.

3. Mark Totten calls this gradual transformation "a person's proper righteousness [that] goes on to complete alien righteousness," dubbing it a "broader" sense of justification. See his fine exploration of the indwelling Christ and its implications for ethics, "Luther on *Unio cum Christo:* Toward a Model for Integrating Faith and Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31:3 (2003), 443–62, esp. 456.

Baptism has a more corporate dimension, gathering scattered believers into an organic whole, where we are marked as the body of Christ in the world. We transform the world.

I want to talk about bodies, real bodies—the marked ones we see pierced and tattooed around us (maybe even our own), your body and my body, Christ's body and the church as the marked body of Christ. Then I discuss the Lord's Supper as one of the marks on Christ's resurrected body. Through this practice we take Christ's body into our own, becoming what we eat. Christ dwells in us. Through the Spirit of the risen Christ we are transformed. This is one side, perhaps the more popular side, of indwelling, and this first form of indwelling has powerful implications for how we live in the world.

Then I talk about baptism as another mark on Christ's resurrected body. Through this practice Christ takes our bodies into his own. We dwell in Christ. Through the Spirit of the risen Christ, we transform the world. This is the other side of indwelling, less discussed, and this second form of indwelling has equally powerful implications for how we live in the world.

I speak primarily as an ethicist, only secondarily as a historian. Both titles make me squirm, and not just a little. I consider myself basically a voyeur: I love watching how people conduct their lives. The discipline of history allows me to watch how people used to conduct their lives. The discipline of ethics permits me to examine how they conduct their lives in the present. What we believe in—or don't believe in—has the power to form and inform, transform and deform who we are and how we are in the world.

OK—on to bodies.

## Bodies: reading the marks

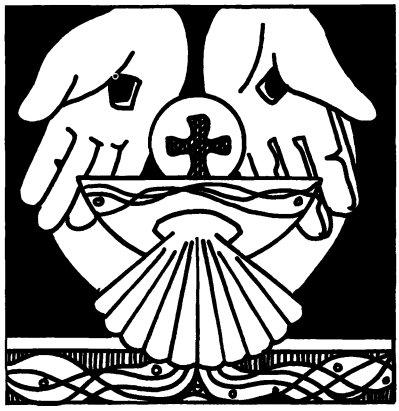
Mine first, then you can show me yours. Not the present body, but the one almost thirty years ago pedaling furiously to a lecture Professor Jürgen Moltmann was giving in Tübingen, a small university town on the Neckar River in south Germany. It was cold, I was late, and when a car passed a little too close on my left I overcompensated and bumped into an extruding door handle on a parked car, smashing my right knee. I got off my bike to assess the damage. My thick winter tights had not been broken, and I assumed nothing else had either. A few hours later when I returned home, I peeled the tights off and found myself peering into a very clean, very deep cut that revealed an anatomy textbook's view of the inner musculature of the knee. Off to the local emergency room, from which I emerged with a walking cast up to my hip. Now, it is true that German emergency medicine dictates that everything that *can* be done *will* be done. At the time, I thought the treatment a bit extreme. But the injury was more serious than I first acknowledged. I am lucky that the wound was not deeper and was grateful to gradually resume, a mere eight weeks later, my usual manically active life, and I am reminded of the whole incident by a crooked four-inch scar wandering up my knee. You wonder how people get into this business? I'm a marked woman.

But then, aren't we all? And couldn't we all tell similar stories as we contemplate the history that is quite literally written on our bodies? So it is with God, who through the incarnation took on a body and became one of us. There are stories etched on our bodies, and there are stories etched onto God's. It is worth thinking about God's body as marked.

Let's think about the body of Christ. And for once let's not think about it ab-

stractly, as some mystical body that Christians, present and past, call Church, capital *C*. No, I want to think about Christ's physical body, the one that trod the dusty streets of the Ancient Near East, whose feet got cracked and dirty just like everyone else's. I want to think about Christ's physical body, the one that endured the blows of the Romans, the sting of a crown of thorns, the spit of centurions, the flailing and floggings graphically depicted in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. I want to think about Christ's body crucified, tortured to the point of asphyxiation.

I want to think about Christ's body the way Florentine artist Fra Angelico did as he painted frescoes for each of the cells at the Benedictine convent of San Marco in Florence. He painted his way into that body—so much so that it's hallucinogenic. In one of the frescoes, Christ is blindfolded and tied to a column. Around him, hanging in air, without any human person attached to them, are the instruments of his torture: a leather strap coiled to strike, a mace swung back for direct hit, a stick braced beating, two pursed lips—they are attached to no face—pursed, with spit flying from them. Because he cannot see, Christ knows neither the origin nor the agency behind the weapons of suffering. The whole scene is hauntingly like the hooded prisoners of Abu Ghraib. Though he cannot see, Christ, like them, registers each instrument of torture deeply in his body. And so do we, for the artist has communicated to us how it feels to be so defenseless, not knowing where the next blow will come from, who will deliver it, where it will connect with raw flesh. Fra Angelico paints it all with an extraordinary combination of both compassion and nerve. He had no doubt that the body of Christ bore all kinds of scars. That body was marked.



This is not fun to contemplate, and I suspect that the controversy surrounding Gibson's movie and the fascination with the Fall 2005 exhibit of Fra Angelico's work at New York's Metropolitan Museum are at least partly about our reluctance to believe that God actually has and had a body. We are closet Gnostics—alas! I might like to have cosmetic surgery on my knee and erase that ugly scar, but it's very dangerous to do cosmetic surgery on the crucifixion and erase Jesus' scars, the marks that were on his body. Erase those scars, and we can no longer remember the story of the resurrection. We cannot remember that crucified body. All we are left with is a Gnostic Jesus who does nothing but offer up enigmatic sayings ad nauseam. (Ever wonder why the Gnostic gospels never made it into the canon? They are simply too boring. All Jesus ever does is talk, talk, talk, then take people aside for secret conversation and talk some more.)

The story of Thomas in John's Gospel will not allow us to forget either the crucifixion or the resurrection. I am indebted here to the work of my late friend and colleague Dr. Robert Smith, who read the Gospel of John backward through the eyes of a Thomas who will not believe it's Jesus

unless he can finger those wounds.[4] The gnostic Gospel of Thomas is embarrassed that God would even get wounded, much less have a body. The Thomas of John's Gospel is defiantly convinced that the resurrected Lord is a marked man. He demands proof of that for himself—and for us. Reading John's Gospel through the eyes of Thomas, Smith concluded that Thomas's story is not about his doubt but about Jesus' resurrected body. Thomas insists that he will not believe "unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hands in his side" (Jn 20:25). According to Smith's reading, the real shock is not Thomas's deep need to know, not even his demand for "visible proof"; the real shock is that visible proofs are available. This is not a tale of Thomas's doubt, as later generations of Christians dubbed it. It is about Thomas's conviction that God has a body. It is about resurrected bodies, that they are marked. Thomas needs to know that Jesus was a marked man, and his testimony stands against our temptation to forget that God has a body, erase the crucifixion, and fast-forward to the good parts. As Smith put it, "I try to take my stand with Thomas . . . he understands the wounds as central and essential in any estimate of Jesus, in any talk about God, and in any teaching about discipleship." Unless we take the gnostic escape, we have to think about the marks on the body of Christ.

Let's take all of this a step further. Anyone dwelling in that body will be similarly marked. Anyone in whom Christ dwells will be similarly marked. And this kind of indwelling, both as Christ dwells in us and as we dwell in Christ, offers deepest consolation—if we can stand the experience.

How are we to put all of this together? I think we get some help from the folks around us, maybe the folks among us, maybe from our own bodies. How many of you are pierced or tattooed? In my more cynical moments, I can write off these markings as "tramp stamps," small efforts at exhibitionism. Two things shake my cynicism. One is the realization that these markings represent an effort by some to stake out some turf in a world that looks like it's crumbling under their feet. They regard the erosion of foundations of institutions such as family, church, and government with a cynicism born of despair. Perhaps the tattoos and piercings stake claim to the only "still point of the turning world"—their own bodies.[5] We who judge them, often severely, ought ourselves to be judged by their need. Have we given them nothing more stable to hang on to?

The other thing that shakes me out of my middle-aged cynicism is the winsome voice of Dame Juliana of Norwich, a fourteenth-century mystic and visionary. She sought similar markings, and perhaps if there had been a tattoo parlor in downtown Norwich she would have been satisfied and gone no further. But Norwich was a busy market town, with mother houses to various religious orders—and a pit to burn heretics in the town square. Julian had to find that "still point" elsewhere. The account of her search, *Revelations of Divine Love*,[6] registers her heartfelt request to be marked. She desires to share in Christ's

4. Robert H. Smith, "Wounded Lord: Reading John through the Eyes of Thomas, A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel from a Fresh Angle." Unpublished ms., 2006.

5. The line is an internal rhyme from T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton," in his *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1971), 15, 18.

6. Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999), 3ff.

sufferings, to literally receive three wounds (and she calls them wounds!): true contrition, natural compassion, and unshakable longing. She wants to experience Christ's passion and death, and for her it is not at all a spectator sport. Juliana wants to be in Christ's body, to suffer as he suffered, weep as he wept, drop into the abyss of a death he conquered. Juliana reaches out for the ultimate in compassion (which literally means to "suffer with" someone or something). Her request is granted, and not just abstractly. Taken up into Christ's passion, she suffers a long and wasting illness that brings her to the brink of death; then she miraculously recovers and lives to tell the tale. She tells of her suffering inside the body of Christ not just once but twice, as she wrote and then, over the course of the next twenty years, rewrote her story. Besides ranking alongside Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as one of the classics in the emerging vernacular, *Revelations of Divine Love* charts the course of her journey into the body of the dying Christ. What she finds at the center, drawing her forward like a magnet, is love: "Love was his meaning." Talk about dwelling in Christ!

Is this so foreign to us? If you have ever been with a loved one in pain, you know what Juliana is talking about. You want to enter their pain, get inside their head, suffer with them, take the pain away. Think of how much more difficult and yet more necessary this is when dealing with children or animals, who can't speak for themselves, at least not in a language we can understand.

A good friend whose husband was desperately ill told me one day that she wanted to try each of his pills one by one, in order to get inside his body and better experience what he was going through. 'If I can't make it go away," she said in that wonderful spirit of "what-the-hellness" that

The real shock is not Thomas's deep need to know, not even his demand for "visible proof"; the real shock is that visible proofs are available.

marks that the territory beyond grief, "at least I can be there with him." Again, love was the magnet, drawing her into a place she never would have gone, never wished to be, never could have been alone.

The desire to suffer with Christ crowds late medieval piety. Juliana of Norwich gives us written record of this longing; St. Francis of Assisi gives us a visual icon. Like Juliana, Francis prayed to receive the wounds of Christ in his own body, and after much prayer and fasting on Mount La Verna he did. These wounds or marks, called the stigmata, were a sign of how profoundly Francis had entered into the body of Christ. So deeply did he dwell in that mystery that he bore on his body the marks Christ bore on his body at the time of his death.

The image of Francis receiving the stigmata was replete throughout medieval piety; it could not have failed to escape Martin Luther's attention. Yet Luther would not have countenanced anything so singular, so virtuoso, or so exotic. He excoriated a spirituality that you had to work toward, and he vilified—and splendidly did he vilify them!—spiritualities of ascent, where the devotee had to work toward a spiritual perfection that imitated the life of Christ.

His was a spirituality of descent, portrayed so lyrically in his Christmas hymns:

*All praise to you, eternal Lord*
*Clothed in a garb of flesh and blood,*
*A manger choosing for a throne*
*While worlds on worlds are yours alone.*
*Hallelujah!*[7]

Hallelujah, indeed! But Luther shared that late medieval longing to be marked with Christ's suffering and resurrection. He was sure that the Christian holy people would be marked by dwelling in the body of Christ, and he brings that physical dimension into his ecclesiology. In his rich treatise on holiness (now there's a word we don't hear much in Lutheran circles!) *On the Councils and the Church*,[8] he presents seven "marks" of the church: the preaching and hearing of the word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, forgiveness or the office of the keys, ordination, prayer/praise/catechesis, and the way of the cross of Christian discipleship. Too often we think of these as Christian practices or spiritual disciplines. Or they become characteristics of the church, the way we characterize a certain style of house or kind of tree. For example, Frank Lloyd Wright buildings display distinctive architectural traits: low, horizontal lines, rectangular arrangement, attention to space as well as structure to create a whole environment. There are unique characteristics to his "prairie style."

Should we apply this analogically to the marks of the church? No. When thinking of Luther's "marks of the church" we should not think "traits" or "characteristics" but wounds and scars, tattoos and piercing. After all, if the resurrected body of Christ was still scarred, so will the people be who dwell in it.

I want to look at two of these wounds, marks on the body: the Lord's Supper, through which we take Christ's marked body into our own, allowing him to dwell in each of us, transforming us; and baptism, which incorporates us into that marked body of Christ, inviting us to dwell in it, transforming the world. Christ dwells in us, and we dwell in Christ, and we are marked by taking that body into ours; we are marked by becoming part of that body. Let's look now at each side of indwelling.

## Christ dwells in us: The Lord's Supper—you are what you eat!

The Lord's Supper is one of the biggest marks on the body of Christ. Then, as now, disciples are what they eat.[9] Feeding on Christ, we take Christ's wounded body into our own, so that he literally dwells in us. So nourished, we become his marked body in a world that hungers for his presence.

I want to look at the Lord's Supper as a three-course meal within an elaborate ritual of blessing. The Lord's Supper is first and foremost holy food, nourishing us with Christ's body and blood. Second, it is food that is not simply eaten but shared. Third, it defines eucharistic living, a practice of blessing in the midst of a banquet of beggars.

*First course: Holy food, holy people.* In my part of the world, you are what you eat. Particularly in Berkeley, the "Foodies" rule. Standing in line for coffee, patrons place their orders in paragraphs: "No foam, no

---

7. "All praise to you, Eternal Lord," *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979), #48.

8. Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church, 1539," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 539–75.

9. In the following material on the Lord's Supper and baptism, I draw from my book, *A World According to God* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

fat-soy, double-decaf latte," etc. I am impressed daily with the religious fervor with which people discuss restaurants or recipes. People are justified by diet, not by faith.

So it was in the ancient world. Diet was as determinative to them as genetic code is to us. Food hard-wired people, and classical literature prescribed in mind-numbing detail what you should eat and what you should drink, given particular body types, gender, general physical condition, and activities that occupied one's time. We need only review the dietary codes in Leviticus and Deuteronomy and realize that the Hebrew people were not alone in the ancient world. Diet segregated tribes and classes of people; it separated rich and poor. Different groups of people had access to different kinds of food, and so they participated in very different dietary regimens, some from necessity, some from choice. In a culture obsessed with eating and drinking the right kinds of food, Jesus' approach to food caused a great deal of controversy.

Jesus' dining practices and his table mates alike received censure. Again and again people commented: "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Matt 11:19) The words refer not to any intemperance on Jesus' part but to his choice of company: He ate and drank with the wrong kinds of people. It's the standard description of friendship in the ancient world. According to the Miss Manners of the Ancient Near East, your friends were the people you ate with, and the people you ate with were your friends. Table fellowship signaled life-friendship. Friends not only dined together; they shared their lives. So the familiar snipe made at Jesus adds up like an equation: He eats with them, he drinks with them; therefore, he is their friend. In eating and drinking with outcasts and sinners, all the "wrong" kinds of folk, Jesus signaled his willingness to share his life with them. Jesus' table etiquette gained him notoriety.

Eventually Jesus took his dining practices to the extreme, offering himself as food. This gesture absolutely upset the social order. In John's Gospel he proclaims himself to be "living water," "bread from heaven," "the true vine." These are all titles a local Foodie would understand—but be utterly horrified to find applied to a person. The Last Supper drew all kinds and classes of people together around a common meal with a single menu. Tax collectors and sinners ate alongside rabbis and zealots—and everywhere dirty, stinky fishermen. Yet this common meal hard-wired everyone in ways that today would be like surgically reconfiguring their individual genetic codes. All of these folks, whatever their gender, tribe, or genetic code, would be made one through this supernatural nourishment. Through eating and drinking the body and flood of Christ, the disciples would be essentially altered.

This is still the disturbing truth today. Gradually, as we become what we eat, we turn into the body of Christ in the world. We reach out to the people he reached out to; we teach the people he taught; we dine with the people he dined with. We bring God's blessing into the world. If Christ dwells in us, we find ourselves altered, marked for blessing.

*Second course: food is shared, not simply eaten.* If this meal were all about eating food, we would swarm the altar, grabbing for chunks of bread for ourselves and fighting for every drop of wine. That is not what happens. The words of institution state this clearly: "The body of Christ, given for you"—not "taken by you." The gap between giving and taking is enormous.

Gradually, as we become what we eat, we turn into the body of Christ in the world.

I grew up in Baltimore, Maryland, in one of those tiny brick row houses, picturesque but crowded. A neighborhood mom used to summon her hungry family to dinner by calling up and down the alley: "Come and get it!" Appearing out of nowhere, children scrambled in to take what they could. Dining was apparently about "getting it," not "giving it," about taking and not sharing food. For this family, the Lord's Supper would have required remarkable restraint. The words "given for you" sum up the countercultural character of this meal. They free us from the "Mine!" fields of daily life. They liberate me from enslavement to everything I consider rightly mine by dint of hard work, earned compensation, or entitlement. The Lord's Supper shares food that is given for me out of a generosity I cannot begin to fathom, not taken by me as my just due.

The distance between giving and taking is the difference between an open hand and a clenched fist. That distance creates a space where miracles happen, whether they occur in a soup kitchen or a church sanctuary. Miracles happen wherever food is shared, as the feeding of the five thousand demonstrates. The whole miracle of feeding happens because a small boy broke out of the "Mine!" fields. He shared his minor provisions, then Jesus blessed it and shared it further. Finally, the disciples shared the blessed food with the crowd. Five thousand people ate their fill; twelve baskets of food were left over—all because a young boy did not declare his simple meal "Mine!"

I have always thought that this miracle should be dubbed not "the miraculous feeding" but "the miraculous sharing." It stands as the first recorded soup kitchen in the ancient world. It foreshadows the Last Supper, where Jesus shared himself as bread and wine, presenting his own body as food and his own blood as drink. It also plays up to that wonderful story of the First Breakfast, where the resurrected Christ joins disciples who have returned to their old haunts, the Sea of Galilee, to cook them breakfast. This time he's grilling fish—not to eat, but to share. And at that meal, he directs the disciples to a ministry of sharing food: "Feed my lambs; feed my sheep" (John 21: 15–17). In a very real sense, the Lord's Supper sets in motion a miraculous chain of events that continues to this day, as we share food we have received with others. The meal is not finished until we have reached the hungriest mouth in the world. Shared food nourishes us; sharing food defines our mission. Like the loaves and fishes at the miraculous feeding, the food we share will have no end, for we share in the endless goodness of Christ.

Christ's endless goodness is often depicted as an endless feast, and many descriptions of eternal life depict an eschatological banquet. As a modern parable depicts this feast, it will be open to everyone, regardless of whether they are seated in heaven or hell. In hell the inmates gather around a stupendous banquet with fabulous food and drink. There is only one thing wrong: the utensils the guests use to feed themselves are two feet long. There is no way they can reach their mouths with such elongated forks, and the scene at the

table is one of pandemonium, as the guests first complain, then physically fall to blows in their frustration. In heaven the residents gather around the same stupendous banquet at a table groaning with every good thing. The table is set with the same large utensils, but the guests dine with pleasure. The forks and spoons reach easily across the table, and guests feed each other. They can eat the meal because they share it. They don't even think about what they are supposed to do. Eucharistic practice shapes a spirit of eucharistic generosity. Disciples share food because that is simply who they are. These table mates learned generosity from the Lord's Supper. Like a mother duck imprinting her baby ducklings, Jesus' patterned them. Now sharing is what they do; more precisely, sharing is who they are. They practice eucharistic generosity.

*Third course: eucharistic living.* A good friend of mine lost her husband quite suddenly. In the weeks after his death, she began to lose weight as well. Her concerned friends descended upon her, and we bore casseroles—and questions. Was she sick? Was she depressed? Had she lost the will to live? She shrugged off our questions and made us take our casseroles home. "It's not a big problem: I just hate eating alone," she said. "I mean, what's the point? So if you're going to bring me food, be prepared to stay and share it with me."

The widow taught us all an important lesson, that eating is fundamentally a social act. Someday scientists and dieticians will prove that she is right. Food tastes better in the company of others. Something in the chemistry of eating together enhances a meal. The flavors blend better; the spices are more vivid.

We forget the social dimension of eating in a fast-food, fly-by-dining culture. We drive-through and eat-on-the-run so that we don't have to "waste time" preparing a meal. Many families rarely sit down at a table together to share a meal, given the balance of soccer games and piano lessons and PTA meetings and business trips. The Lord's Supper calls a halt to fast-food dining by inviting us to slow down and to sit down. We flourish in the company of others, for God blesses us in and through our neighbors, the blessings they bring and the food they share.

The message of eucharistic living goes deeper. Fast-food dining fuels fast-food spirituality, as shelf upon shelf of self-help books witness. There is a limit on how much we can help ourselves, however well-read we are. Like the widow, we depend upon our friends for food and companionship. Their presence blesses us in immeasurably, for they are both kindred spirits and the presence of God's Spirit. God blesses us in and through others, using their presence to bear the divine.

A friend who had visited Calcutta spoke of his experience navigating down a busy street in the downtown area amid a sea of outstretched hands. Beggars lined the sidewalk, and he could not move without someone shoving a hand in his face, asking for a coin, a scrap of food, or a blessing. He was shocked by the level of suffering and need, by the way other pedestrians moved through the crowd without seeing the sea of waving hands in front of them. But he also was jolted by the revelation that we all have hands out for hand-outs. The people in front of him were under no illusion that they could make it on their own. They needed the kindness of strangers in order to survive. But don't we all?

I suspect this was one of Luther's last insights. The friends who had crowded around his bedside awaited nothing less than confirmation that the Reformation had been God's plan. If Luther died in agony,

everything would have been a mistake. If he had a good death, they were golden, good for another couple of centuries. Luther surprised them all with a very enigmatic observation: "We are all beggars." We depend on each other more than we know for food, for blessing, for friendship.

This final mark on of the indwelling Christ points to a final banquet when all the children of the world will sit at table to break bread and drink wine together. Eucharistic living nurtures disciples in the meantime, teaching them to move through the world with open hands. As we become what we eat, we give and receive both blessings and bread.

## We dwell in Christ: Baptism—journey into the body of Christ

The Lord's Supper marks us as the meal that nourishes individual believers, creating the possibility for Christ to dwell within. Baptism moves in the opposite direction, an ecstatic direction, moving us literally "outside" of ourselves and inviting us more and more deeply into the body of Christ. Luther identifies the final mark on the body of Christ as the way of the cross *(via crucis)*, the journey of discipleship. Baptism begins the journey and offers a compass for the road ahead. Dwelling in Christ, we gain the direction baptism affords, find the community baptism creates, and join the mission baptism embraces.

I have called this "the other side" of indwelling, which takes us on a journey outside our own bodies and into the body of Christ. Baptism invites us to dwell more and more deeply in Christ. This other side of indwelling is a little scarier, a lot more consoling—and also most certainly true. Christ dwells in us, to be sure, but we also dwell in Christ. We live in Christ's body.

This is a truth that holds both beauty and terror. The beauty lies in the fact that we are taken out of ourselves, embraced by something—more accurately Someone—and "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Dwelling in Christ, we enter his body, we encounter other members of that body to form an organic unity, and we are drawn up into Christ's ongoing ministry to the neighbor and the world.

The terror lies in the fact that because it is Christ's body it bears the wounds that were on Christ's body at the time of his death—*and remained there* on his resurrected body. The resurrected body did not erase signs of Christ's suffering; it bore the wounds of crucifixion, marks on Jesus' hands and feet, a pierced side, the grisly tattoo around his forehead where the crown of thorns had dug in. If we enter into Christ's resurrected body, we too will be marked women and men, and that is a truth that terrifies.

It is a truth that also offers deepest consolation, as I argue in what follows. In the course of that argument, I look at the direction baptism affords, the community it creates, and the mission it embraces.

*The direction baptism affords.* I remember trying to do a difficult dive off a three-meter board. My coach had been clear about what to do and when to do it, but there was just a lot to keep track of. I would get to the end of the board and freeze, having forgotten a key piece of what I needed to go forward. By then, of course, I had lost the momentum I needed for the dive. I had to start all over again, circling back to the other end of the board and more instruction from my coach. Each time I had a little more information, a little more encouragement, and a clearer picture of what would happen next. But the only way I was going to get off the board was to start over.

The journey of discipleship is a lot like learning to dive. It feels like it runs in circles, and we move forward only by starting over. We return again and again to the call we received in baptism; we move forward only through returning to its promises. Luther spoke of a daily return to baptism, and this is precisely what he had in mind. Returning to the call orients us to the journey ahead just like a run down a three-meter board orients a diver to the jackknife ahead. The call baptism issues is a simple invitation: "Follow me."

"Follow me." Jesus beckoned his first disciples with the same words, and the invitation was so compelling it did not need elaboration. Along the way, however, the disciples faltered and fell out of step. They longed for the lives they had left behind, even the monotony of fishing and the invariant rhythm of the tides. They missed their friends and family; they murmured against their leader. But again and again, Jesus issued the invitation: "Follow me."

These are the words most frequently attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, a kind of bookend encouragement on the journey of discipleship. Looking at the life of Peter, we find that the words "Follow me" inaugurate his journey of discipleship as he looks up from his nets on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 1:16–20). And a resurrected Jesus speaks these same words to Peter after the First Breakfast: "Follow me" (Jn 21:22). It is worth noting that the only other words Jesus repeats with such frequency are the words "Be not anxious." I suspect that's no coincidence.

Clearly we latter-day disciples move forward only by moving back. If we dwell in Christ's body, we will need to hear these words again and again. Like hikers consulting their compass in unfamiliar territory, disciples return to baptism to take their bearings. We circle back to baptism, certain we will find there the direction we need.

The journey of discipleship is perilous. Like medieval pilgrimages, the journey may entail suffering, persecution, and death. Pilgrims' garb marked these travelers as easy prey. In similar ways, baptism turns Christians into marked women and men, making us targets for everything and everyone whom evil holds in its thrall.

Yet, while baptism makes us more visible, baptism also gives us the power to stand up to evil. Baptized into the death of Jesus, we rest assured that we are also baptized into his resurrection. The confrontation with powers and principalities will end not at the cross but at the empty tomb. Thus, marked by the sign of the cross, we enter into a deepening relationship with a new community and a mission.

*The community baptism creates.* Dwelling in Christ's body, we become part of a new community: the community of the children of God. Adoption is the only way to enter this community, and we should understand the baptismal ceremony as a rite marking us for adoption into this new body.

I have two nieces who were adopted from Guatemala into my husband's Irish German Catholic family. They joined us as young girls and are keenly aware that they are adopted. Given Guatemala's more formal standards of social interaction, we talk too much, we wear too little, we gesture too wildly. Given the girls' Mayan ethnicity, we're all the wrong color. Given the girls' dirt poor upbringing, we are very wealthy in comparison. We are terribly informal in contrast to the girls' Guatemalan formality. My husband and I must have been the most egregious examples of all these differences, because we became known simply as "The Locos," as in "When are the Locos coming over for dinner?" And it was a term of deep

affection, one we cherish. But it was also true. In their book, we all looked a little crazy. Adoption makes for some wild and crazy cross-cultural and cross-pollinated families. And none of us would trade it.

Baptism adopts us into a crazy, cross-cultural, and cross-pollinated family called the family of the children of God. The Lutheran theology of baptism focuses heavily on forgiveness of sins, because that's the only way large families can get along without killing each other off. But while the theology focuses on forgiveness, the gestures point to adoption. The newly baptized child or infant is lifted up in front of the assembly, and we may think this is an accommodation to back-benchers and balcony dwellers, but in fact the gesture has ancient origins and decisive significance. In the ancient world, lifting up a newborn was a way of claiming paternity. Immediately after its birth an infant was presented to the presumed father of the child, and he could choose to lift up the child or not. With this gesture he claimed paternity of the child, and a child so claimed would rest secure in the family's embrace and inheritance. Unfortunately, not all newborns were claimed. Unclaimed children were routinely set down to die of exposure or to be picked up by others. The public squares of ancient cities had a customary spot, the *lactarium*, where children were abandoned. They could be picked up by strangers and raised as slaves, servants, or prostitutes. Occasionally they were adopted by childless families as sons and daughters, heirs to the family wealth.[10]

The social reality of children in the ancient world stands as a backdrop for the apostle Paul's letters to the earliest Christian communities. New Christians found themselves adopted by a new family in baptism. They were claimed as "children of God," freed from slavery and abandonment for all eternity. Paul has these ancient practices in mind in his discussion of baptism in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans:

> So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. (Gal 4:7)

> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom 8:15–17)

An ancient reader would have supplied the gestures behind these texts. They remain in our present-day ceremony, which adopts us into a new family with God as our Father and Mother, Christ as our Brother.

But baptism claims us in two ways. Through baptism God claims us as "children," and God also claims us for the world of the kingdom. We receive an inheritance as joint heirs with Christ, and our work as members of this new family is to carry on in the family business. To put it crassly, baptism entrusts us with the franchise for the God business. We don't just pick up where Jesus left off; we become Christ's body in the world, the ongoing presence of the incarnation. Baptism allows us to dwell in that body, so that we become the crucified and resurrected body at work in the world today. It will mark us, even as it marked Christ's body.

Again, Paul rings the changes on how we are marked by baptism:

---

10. Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1983), esp. pp. 47–62; Martha Ellen Stortz, "'Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent?': Augustine on Childhood," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 78–102.

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3–4)

Paul reminds the community at Rome that as "children of God" they are part of Christ's body. As the body of Christ, they had to suffer as Christ did. But, as the body of Christ was raised up, so they also would be raised up.

A small chapel at the Jesuit University in San Salvador, El Salvador, captures Paul's spirit. Around the sanctuary hang fourteen Stations of the Cross, but instead of featuring scenes from the passion of Christ, the Stations display drawings of the Salvadoran people, who were brutalized, tortured, and raped during the civil war. The pictures commemorate Christians who carry on Christ's witness in the world, suffering as he suffered, lifted up in resurrection as he was lifted up. So anointed, we embrace Christ's mission—and it is a mission for the world.

*The mission baptism embraces.* Baptism incorporates all of us into the body of Christ. We dwell in Christ. This is the other side of indwelling; we are not simply representatives of Christ in the world. We *are* his body, his hands and feet. As members of that body, we literally re-member that body in the world: bone on bone, sinew on sinew. Isn't this what Jesus commanded at his Last Supper when he said: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19); "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:25)? Indeed, we may be the body of Christ that people first encounter, the body they long to touch.

Think of the body of Christ for a moment as a human body. Think of the marks that were on it at the time of his death: marks in his feet and hands where nails were pounded, a mark in his side where a spear pierced him, marks of the scourging he had received, bruises and cuts where he had been beaten. Thomas would not believe he was in the presence of the resurrected Christ until he touched that body. He wanted hands-on proof.

> To put it crassly, baptism entrusts us with the franchise for the God business.

In our own generation of seekers there are thousands like Thomas. They will not believe until they too can touch that body. Because we dwell in Christ, we can offer the hands-on proof of the resurrection these seekers demand. Through baptism, we remember that body, becoming that body in the world: We are Christ's hands.

I am the only pianist in the family. This is not because of my singular talent but because of a rather poignant misunderstanding. Piano lessons were offered to my younger sister, who declined protesting, "My fingers don't know the right keys." She feared her hands lacked the special intelligence that would send them scurrying gracefully across the keyboard. The truth is that none of us knows the right keys. That's why we circle back to baptism to listen again to the phrasing, learn the fingering, catch the tone of a difficult passage. Baptism is where we receive instruction from our older brother Jesus, who assures us that, despite all mistakes, we too are

children of God. God will not abandon nor dismiss us because God did not abandon his Son Jesus. So we continue as Christ's hands in the world and pray as the psalmist prayed: "O prosper the work of our hands" (Ps 90:17). As Christ's hands in the world we join the family business, extending those family values into the world.

The resurrected body was a marked body, marked by Christ's passion and resurrection. Through the Lord's Supper Christ dwells in us—we bear Christ's wounded body in our own. Through Baptism we dwell in Christ—we are borne in Christ's wounded body. Through the work of the Spirit of Christ Jesus, each of these marks on the body of Christ works on us, enabling and empowering us to reach out of ourselves toward the neighbor and into a world.

The Lord's Supper works primarily on the individual, as heavenly food transforms each believer *coram hominibus* to increasingly love the neighbor. We become what we eat. Baptism has a more corporate dimension, gathering scattered believers into an organic whole, where we are marked as the body of Christ in the world. We are that body people long to touch.

Let us scatter to serve.

*A version of this article was presented at the Leadership Conference "Christ in Us": Wellsprings of Lutheran Spirituality," Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, February 20–22, 2006.*

# He Identified with the Lowly and Became a Slave to All: Paul's Tentmaking as a Strategy for Mission

Joel N. Lohr
*Durham University*
*Durham, England*

The social background of first-century Christianity has received much attention recently, with many of these studies focusing on the letters from Paul to the Corinthians. Paul's refusal to accept Corinthian financial support is a central concern of these letters. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is adamant concerning this issue, claiming that he would rather die than to accept the Corinthians' pay (9:15). Why does Paul devote an entire section of the letter (chap. 9) to defending his refusal? How should we understand this section within the larger context of the letter?

I am principally concerned here with the social reality of Paul's ministry and exploring questions of why Paul refuses the financial support of the Corinthians. To remain focused, I use 1 Corinthians 9 as a foundation and pay special attention to vv. 15–18 as they relate to Paul's boast of making the gospel "free of charge" (v. 18). My aims are (1) to understand how Paul's tentmaking and subsequent income affected his relationship with and ministry to the Corinthians; (2) to investigate the purpose and meaning of 1 Corinthians 9 in context; and (3) to examine 9:15–18 in order to shed light on Paul's decision to remain financially free from the Corinthian body. I argue that Paul's tentmaking trade was an avenue for him to identify with the lowly and to exhort the socially elite to do the same. As I suggest, this identification with the lowly was something Paul did in imitation of Christ. Further, Paul's refusal of financial support proves to be his solution to possible obligatory relationships in Corinth and aids his overall objective, to remove divisions and unify the body there (1:10).

## The nature of Paul's trade

In a brief but penetrating study, Ronald F. Hock shows that Paul's trade as tentmaker has been too long ignored and overlooked as an important aspect for understanding Paul and his social setting.[1] Contrary to perceptions of Paul as a vocational theologian, Hock shows how tentmaking is central to understanding Paul's life as an apostle. Through a detailed exploration into the daily life of first-century artisans, Hock paints a vivid picture of the life Paul chose to pursue and, we might add, endure.

1. Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980). See also his "Paul's Tentmaking and the Problem of His Social Class," *JBL* 97 (1978): 555–64; and "The Workshop as a Social Setting for Paul's Missionary Preaching," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 38–50.

We can highlight Hock's findings as follows. Artisans typically worked many hours, often from sunrise to sunset. In this regard, Hock believes that Paul was no exception; in fact, it is likely that he was extraordinarily industrious, working "from before sunrise until sunset—save, of course, on the Sabbath."[2] The artisan's workshop was typically dirty, noisy, and dangerous. Paul, being a worker of leather,[3] might have benefited from slightly more favorable conditions. Workshops in the first century were typically located together according to type, near the town's market.[4] Duties in the workshop were often not strictly limited to crafting but included selling product to customers, training apprentices, and conversing with those who stopped by to "sit down and talk."[5] Hock also makes clear that artisans in the first century were typically very poor. Even after working such extended hours, the pay was often only daily bread and not much more. Judging by the examples known to us, artisans were "usually hungry, poorly clothed, and cold."[6]

How was the artisan, and thus Paul himself, perceived by his contemporaries?

## First-century conceptions of the artisan

The fundamental status distinction in Paul's day was likely that between being a slave or being free.[7] Although this distinction was immensely important to those in the lower classes, the elite tended to view all manual laborers as slavish. Slaves were often viewed as subhuman, in a place of shame and dishonor, and others who performed manual labor could be stigmatized in this light. The position of being hunched over one's work in a dirty setting with other slaves (or slavish freedman) promoted this view.[8] Often, even the free person could not escape the stigma attached to his work; these workers were viewed as poor, uneducated, and un-free. According to Hock, they were "frequently reviled or abused, often victimized, seldom if ever invited to dinner, never accorded status, and even excluded from one stoic utopia."[9]

If Paul chose to be part of this class, how did this affect his relationship with

---

2. Hock, *Social Context*, 32. He bases this primarily upon 1 Thess 2:9.

3. Hock argues against suggestions that Paul was a weaver of *cilicium* (goats' hair), treating σκηνοποιός as "leatherworker." This included, according to Hock, making tents and crafting various leather goods (*Social Context*, 21).

4. Hock cites the "cabinet making district" in Athens (*Social Context*, 32), and Wayne A. Meeks discusses other examples of kindred trades gathering in common areas in *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 29). The location close to the market would enable not only regular flow of business but also opportunity to converse with people and, for Paul, provide a means to communicate the gospel. See note 5 below.

5. Hock, *Social Context*, 33. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor shows how the nature of the workshop would have been suitable for such activities and agrees with Hock that Paul likely used the workshop for missionary endeavors. See his *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, *GNS* 6 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 167–70, and support from Meeks, *First Urban*, 29. Hock's discussion in "Paul's Missionary Use of the Workshop" (*Social Context*, 37–42) helpfully shows how Paul could work "night and day" at his trade and at the same time be the missionary we find in the New Testament.

6. Hock, *Social Context*, 34.

7. Meeks, *First Urban*, 20–22.

8. Hock, *Social Context*, 35–36.

9. Hock, *Social Context*, 36. I have allowed Hock's picture to stand relatively unchallenged, as support from others shows his picture to be reasonable. See Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 209; Peter

various churches, particularly in Corinth? Was Paul not entitled to leave this life of manual toil and hardship and receive support as a missionary? Why did he remain a tentmaker?

## The Corinthian church: social considerations

The social makeup at Corinth has been the subject of many recent studies.[10] Too broad to detail here, I accept the emerging consensus that Corinth was a socially stratified and diverse church.[11] Using 1 Cor 1:26 as a guide, we see that most in Corinth were of the lower classes,[12] though the "not many" mentioned does not exclude that some *were* in fact "wise by human standards," "powerful," and "of noble birth."[13] These social divisions would likely have lead to disunity within the church at Corinth. Gordon Fee has argued, however, that the real issue in 1 Corinthians was not division within the church but rather tension between Paul and the church there as a whole.[14]

Although the situation in 2 Corinthians may prove supportive of this, the case for 1 Corinthians is weak. The argument that divisions existed *within* the church, on the other hand, is quite strong. For example, Paul almost immediately informs his recipients that he is concerned about the divisions among them (1:10–17). Later, we see that issues between the "strong" and the "weak" are a concern to Paul (8:1–13). Moreover, Paul's exhortations regarding the Lord's supper (11:17–34) could be understood as directly related to class differentiation.[15] Clearly the letter reveals a deep concern for divisions among those in the church at Corinth.

Paul's choice to remain a tentmaker was likely an embarrassment to some.

---

Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul's Relations with the Corinthians*, WUNT 2.23 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), 211, 306; and Meeks, *First Urban*, 20–21. Note, however, Meeks's understanding of the free person's status as low but not at the bottom (p. 59). Gerd Theissen portrays Paul and Barnabas as "respectable working men," this being, however, in contrast to beggars (*The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. John H. Schutz [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 37).

10. See, for example, Marshall, *Enmity*; David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996); John Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth*, JSNTSup 75 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992); Witherington, *Conflict*, esp. 5–32; and Theissen, *Essays on Corinth*.

11. Justin J. Meggitt challenges this "New Consensus," arguing that the affluent should be excluded from our understanding of Pauline churches (*Paul, Poverty and Survival* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998]). Theissen, although noting strengths in the book, is not completely convinced. See his "The Social Structure of Pauline Communities: Some Critical Remarks on J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*," *JSNT* 84 (2001): 65–84. Although Meggitt holds firm to his thesis ("Response to Martin and Theissen," *JSNT* 84 [2001]: 85–94), our study follows Theissen's assessment.

12. The term "class" is employed in this study without anachronistically implying divisions common today. Though "status" is often a preferred term, "class" may best render the sense of the situation at Corinth for contemporary audiences.

13. See Meeks, *First Urban*, 51–53, 73; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 1–4; and the concise summary by James D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians*, NTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 46–50.

14. Fee states: "The letter is basically the apostle Paul vis à vis the whole Corinthian congregation"; *First Epistle*, 10.

15. See Meeks's helpful insights in *First Urban*, 67–69.

Would the rich, and those of noble birth, naturally feel proud that the founder and leader of their church worked as a slavish artisan?[16] It is not inconceivable that a rich patron would rather pay Paul a wage than be subject to such shame.[17] Besides, as Hock shows, it was not uncommon for a rich household to employ an "in house" philosopher.[18] Was Paul's role as apostle that different? Paul, however, was convinced that he should and would remain a humble artisan.

The above background is crucial to understanding the forcefulness and import of Paul's refusal to accept support in 1 Corinthians 9. By noting key points in vv. 1–14 that build up to the climax of vv. 15–18, we shall see that Paul's refusal of financial support from the Corinthians was both an effort to remain free from the tangle of social webs and obligations and, more important, to identify with the lowly. Paul's choice was at a great cost to himself, yet he did so with the hope of providing an example for the Corinthians to follow. He hoped they would give up their "rightful" freedom for the sake of others and dissolve any division and barriers between them.

## 1 Corinthians 9 and Paul's "digression"

The difficulty in connecting chapter 9 with the surrounding discussion on eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:1–11:1) has not gone unnoticed.[19] This chapter, when read in isolation, seems anything but a discussion on the subject of idol meat. Has Paul digressed? Has he put down the metaphorical pen, only to pick it up later to discuss an issue burning on his heart, quite aside from the topic at hand? Prima facie, chapter 9 appears to be a misplaced insertion separate from Paul's main concern that the strong abstain from idol meat for the sake of the weak.

A close reading of the passage, however, reveals Paul's skill to persuade through a well-constructed argument. This digression in fact functions as a comparison to amplify and undergird his basic argument in 8:1–11:1. Margaret M. Mitchell, noting that the term "digression" can be read negatively—connoting a lack of connection to the rest of the text—opts to replace the term with "exemplary argument."[20]

Though agreeing that 1 Corinthians 9 is an exemplary argument, we also retain the term "digression." The chapter should be regarded as a discrete unit, yet in unity with the larger concern at hand.[21] Never-

16. Admittedly, we can only postulate how the upper classes perceived the lower based upon evidence available to us concerning class distinctions. There must have been a basis for Paul's concern to remove divisions among them, and status inconsistency fits well. For a discussion on status inconsistency as it might relate to early Christian groups, see Meeks, *First Urban*, 191–92.

17. For example, how would the wealthy in the church respond when business associates raised questions about their leader, whom they saw grunting away in a dirty shop near the market?

18. Hock, *Social Context*, 53–55.

19. For a short summary see Alex T. Cheung, *Idol Food in Corinth: Jewish Background and Pauline Legacy*, JSNTSup 176 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 137–39.

20. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians*, HUT 28 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 250. She elaborates on the function of digressions in rhetorical speech through the words of W. H. Wuellner: "digressions in Paul's letters are illustrative of his rhetorical sophistication and . . . they serve to support his argumentation. This view runs counter to the current scholarly opinion that Paul's digressions are interruptions in his arguments and often carry him off into irrelevant material" (249, note 350).

theless, the question remains: How does the digression fit with Paul's concern of idol meat?

Paul's concern is that the strong Corinthians would exercise wisdom to give up their freedom (to eat idol meat) in order that their fellow Christians with weaker consciences might not stumble (8:9–13). Paul recognizes that the idols to whom the meat has been sacrificed are nothing, and thus the food itself is not defiled; however, he calls the "strong" to put aside their like knowledge and exercise love (8:1) for the sake of the weak. Paul uses the digression to illustrate that he too has freedom yet is willing to forfeit his rights for the sake of the gospel.

## 1 Corinthians 9:1–14

The freedom that Paul chooses to surrender is his right to receive a living from the gospel. His opening words are telling: "Am I not free?" Perhaps we could read Paul's words as "Am I not free *as well*?" The expected positive response alerts his readers that his following argument is connected to the issue of freedom just discussed.

With this reading, the entire chapter takes the shape of an exemplary argument. Through a series of rhetorical questions, Paul demonstrates that he too, like the Corinthians, has freedom. Using a mock defense speech (ἀπολογία, 9:3),[22] Paul systematically constructs the argument for his right[23] to make a living from his missionary endeavors. He builds a strong case for the apostle's right to receive support, and, when the argument seems complete (9:12), he adds yet another premise (9:13–14). His argument is obvious by the end of v. 14. Just as the soldier doesn't finance his own military expenses, just as the vineyard owner eats of the fruit he produces, just as one who tends livestock drinks of its milk, just as an ox eats of the grain it treads, just as the priest is entitled to the food of the temple, *so too* are those who proclaim the gospel entitled to make their living from it. Paul has built his case. He has defended the right to receive income for his toil and labor in the gospel.

The climax of Paul's argument naturally follows. However, it has been flipped on its head. Paul does not lead the argument to its expected climax (to demand pay for his work); rather, he states the very opposite. He will have none of it. He will not accept the very thing he has just argued he is entitled to. Rereading vv. 4–14 with this in mind, each of Paul's rhetorical questions actually receives a response opposite to what is expected, thus making the climax more powerful (see chart on next page).

The theme of Paul's digression is seen in v. 12b and is repeated through recurring threads in 15a and 18b: We/I have not made use of this/these right(s). Paul, although having the right to partake of these things, refuses. Why, we ask, after building such

---

21. A thorough argument to this effect here would deter the focus of the study. For discussion and support for the unity of 8:1–11:1, see Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 23–24; Cheung, *Idol Food*, 138–39; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 663; and Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 83.

22. Mitchell, *Rhetoric*, 244–46; Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 52. This "apology" is in defense of his right to refuse support, not his apostleship. There is no internal evidence in 1 Corinthians suggesting that Paul needed to defend his apostleship. See Witherington, *Conflict*, 203; contra Fee, *First Epistle*, 363.

23. Although ἐξουσίαν (v. 4) is often translated as "power" or "authority," "right" seems to best capture Paul's sense here.

| Verse | Question: | Expected Answer: | Paul's actual (hypothesized) answer: |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Do we not have the right to food and drink? | Yes | I refuse food and drink in order to keep the weak from stumbling |
| 5 | Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife? | Yes | I will deny myself a spouse for the sake of the gospel |
| 7 | Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? | No one | I will pay my own expense |
| 7 | Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? | No one | I will not eat the fruit of my vineyard |
| 7 | Who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? | No one | I will not drink milk from the flock I tend |
| 9 | Do we muzzle the ox while treading out the grain? | No | I will muzzle myself while treading out the grain |
| 10–11 | As a farmer reaps a crop from his field, should not a material crop be reaped from spiritual seeds planted among you? | Yes | I will not take from the crop I have planted |
| 13 | Do not those employed in the temple eat of what is offered on the altar? | Yes | I refuse temple food while working there; my food shall come from outside |

a strong case, does Paul renounce this right to support?[24] To this question we now turn.

## 1 Corinthians 9:15–18

As already mentioned, the thrust of Paul's message in chapter 9 is that, despite having the right to receive a living from the gospel, he has not made use of it. Would it not have been easier to receive an income from the work in which he invested so much of his time? Does not the tone of his defense suggest that there was tension between Paul and the Corinthians over this issue[25] and that accepting their money would have relieved the situation?

Before discussing the ramifications and social considerations relating to Paul's refusal of his right, we look at the nature of and reasons for Paul's refusal in 9:15–18.

Paul is adamant. He has not made use of these prerogatives, and he assures the Corinthians that in writing them he is not proposing to do so (9:15). He has already interjected the reason for his refusal in v. 12: He will "endure anything rather than put an obstacle [ἐγκοπὴν] in the way of the gospel of Christ." Although this noun

24. Questions arise here whether Paul is actually disobeying a command to receive his keep from the gospel (Matt 10:9–10). Both Theissen (*Essays on Corinth*, 42–43) and Witherington (*Conflict*, 209–10) effectively handle this charge by arguing that Paul shows how sustenance from the gospel is a *privilege*, not a command. In other words, a worker is *worthy* of his wages, not necessarily commanded to receive them.

25. Here we return to the question of whether Paul's defense is a true apology or a contrived one. Although there is no internal evidence to suggest that Paul was responding

is not attested elsewhere in the New Testament, its cognate verb ἐγκόπτω is.[26] This word often carries the sense of causing a military hindrance or preventing an enemy advance. In other words, Paul is concerned that he not place anything in the way of the Corinthians that would prevent them from receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What might that hindrance be? Paul is not explicit, but I believe the overall theme of 1 Corinthians sheds light on the issue. His central concern in the letter is summarized in 1:10, "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose." The very issue Paul is addressing in idol meat (8:1–11:1) is unity and love between the body. Although we cannot be certain that well-defined factions existed among the Corinthians, we can be sure that Paul is concerned that the actions of the strong may destroy the weak and thus the unity of the church.[27] It is probable that Paul's acceptance of financial support would have given some perhaps key contributors reason to claim rights over Paul. Could this have caused a hindrance to the gospel to those in the lower strata?

For the time being we put these questions aside in order to probe more deeply into vv. 15–18. In v. 15, Paul, arguably using hyperbolic language, insists that he "would rather die" than to have his boast taken from him. What exactly is his boast? It is not that he proclaims the gospel but that he proclaims the gospel without payment from the Corinthians—that he makes the good news "free of charge." Proclaiming the gospel is not an option for Paul; as a commissioned apostle he is under obligation to do so ("woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel," v. 16). Paul is *not* under obligation, however, to preach the gospel free of charge. His reward, then, because he does so voluntarily, is presenting the good news at his own cost. Because he does so, he has found a ground for boasting.[28]

To boast implies that there is something worthy to boast in. Paul's long hours of difficult labor, "working night and day" (1 Thess 2:8–9) in order to have daily bread, are the grounds for his boasting. This is his reward (v. 18). His reward is to know that he did not make use of his right to receive payment for his missionary work. Paul is proud that he has made the gospel free. And should we somehow believe that Paul is proud because of human achievement, remember *why* he decided to withhold his right and endure the hardship—to avoid any hindrance to the gospel of Jesus Christ at Corinth (v. 12).

---

to a specific complaint (i.e., refusal of support), his further discussion of the theme in 2 Corinthians (11:7–12; 12:13) seems to point to, at the very least, Paul's ability to foresee a complaint. See C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 2d ed., 1971), 200, and Fee, *First Epistle*, 9, 398–99. Others argue that no specific attack is in view here: Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 52, 83–84; Dunn, *1 Corinthians*, 61–62; Witherington, *Conflict*, 203. For an illuminating discussion on the relation between the "defenses" (concerning the privilege of support) in 1 and 2 Corinthians, see Theissen, *Essays on Corinth*, 44–46.

26. Acts 24:4; Rom 15:22; Gal 5:7; 1 Thess 2:18; 1 Pet 3:7. Ἐγκοπὴν is also not attested in the LXX though is elsewhere in antiquity. See *BAGD*.

27. Cheung, *Idol Food*, 88.

28. Richard A. Horsley cleverly brings out the paradoxical nature of Paul's statement: "Paul poses the rhetorical question: What then is my 'reward/pay'? (v. 18). He provides an utterly paradoxical answer: His 'pay' is to make the gospel 'free of charge'" (*1 Corinthians*, ANTC [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998], 130).

## The hindrance: patronage, status, or both?

This returns us to our earlier questions on the social reality at Corinth. We have noted that the social status of those in Corinth was stratified and that most were not rich. Some, however, were. It would appear that Paul is addressing these rich Corinthians in the letter.[29] What was Paul trying to convey to them in his refusal of their support?

Peter Marshall has suggested that the payment that Paul refused was "not disinterested but represented the vested interests of a group of people from the higher ranks in Corinth who wished to put Paul under obligation to them."[30] John Chow, in his work revealing the nature and structure of patron relationships, echoes this concern, showing that Paul's acceptance of the gift would signal his willingness to be subject to the powerful patrons in the church.[31] Hock, exploring the nature of the philosopher's charging of fees and entering a household, agrees that accepting the gift would have placed an obligation upon Paul that he was not prepared to accept.[32]

These positions, essentially arguing the same point—that Paul refused support to remain free of obligatory relations in Corinth—are persuasive in that they provide an explanation as to why Paul accepted the support of some churches (Phil 4:10–18) and yet would refuse the payment at Corinth.[33] It is also suggestive when looking at the issue in 2 Corinthians regarding the "super apostles" (chaps. 10–13). Was Paul enraged because these apostles had chosen to accept money, or was he perhaps upset that in their acceptance of payment they entered into relationships with certain groups within the church, stirring further division? Though difficult to conclude, we can at least infer that Paul was concerned to remain neutral with regard to social divisions, seeking to foster unity.[34]

The argument that Paul refused support simply to avoid obligatory relationships does not answer every concern in 1 Corinthians 9. It sheds some light on Paul's refusal of the gift but does not fully explain the nature of the hindrance of the gospel. Is Paul implying that his acceptance of the gift would place him in a relationship with the Corinthians that would keep him from his greater missionary strategy of evangelizing the world? The hindrance, according to this reasoning, is that an obligation to the Corinthians would restrict Paul's plans to travel the world to spread the gospel.[35]

But is that the sense we get from 1 Corinthians 9? How do vv. 19–23 then fit with Paul's refusal and the larger question of 8:1–11:1? Paul makes clear there that freedom is of central concern. Though he is free, he has become a slave to all (v. 19). He has done so in order that he might win more to Christ. How has Paul made him-

---

29. Theissen, *Essays on Corinth*, 70–99, esp. 95–96; Dunn, *1 Corinthians*, 48; Witherington, *Conflict*, 22–23.

30. Marshall, *Enmity*, 233.

31. Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 172.

32. *Social Context*, 52–59, 65.

33. Compare Witherington (*Conflict*, 208–09), who agrees, yet stresses that the Philippian gift was not necessarily a regular salary. The thrust of Marshall's study is that the source of enmity at Corinth was due in part to Paul's acceptance of the gift from the Philippians while refusing the Corinthians'. See his *Enmity*, esp. 234, 257–58. His thesis, though interesting, is difficult to demonstrate from 1 Corinthians itself.

34. Admittedly, this is not entirely satisfactory, because Paul was not completely neutral. His plying of a trade instead of receiving payment would have connected him with those lower in status. Apparently this was a lesser risk than connecting with the upper strata. See further Horrell, *Social Ethos*, 213.

35. Compare Theissen, *Essays on Corinth*, 27–40.

self a slave? By giving the gospel free of charge. Why has he done this? To win more, or, stated differently, to remove any hindrance to the gospel (v. 12).

How does becoming a slave remove the hindrance? Although we have noted that Paul was able to stay free of obligatory relationships in doing so, this is not the primary concern of the text as it stands. It would seem that Paul, in becoming a slave, has decided to *identify with the lowly*, to be a hardworking, poor artisan in order to win more to Christ. Paul gave up his freedom to be supported by the gospel and decided to toil with his hands, working long hours in a lowly environment, for the sake of the gospel. And, because Paul writes primarily with the rich in mind, he is urging them to do the same. He is pleading with those in the upper strata to give up their freedoms, as he has, in order to remove division within the church and be "united in mind and purpose" (1:10). It is not insignificant that Paul ends the section with which his exemplary argument is primarily concerned (8:1–11:1) with the words "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (11:1).

In Paul's decision to be a lowly artisan we see, I suggest, that Paul *was* imitating Christ. Although his plea in 11:1 for the Corinthians to imitate *himself* seems appropriate in light of our discussion, we may be uncertain how to connect his introduction of *imitating Christ* to his argument. This is central to the overall argument of 8–11:1 and cannot be overlooked.[36] Paul is pleading with those who are strong to give up freedom for the sake of the weak. This Paul has done. So has Christ. Paul urges the Corinthians to deny their rights for the sake of others. This Paul has done. So has Christ. Paul urges the Corinthians to imitate him. Paul has become as a slave to all in order to bring salvation through the gospel (9:19, 22). So too has Christ.[37]

## Conclusion

The "digression" of 1 Corinthians 9 is intricately connected to Paul's main theme in 8:1–11:1; indeed, we see the theme of Christian unity here as in the whole of the letter. Paul has argued that the Corinthians are to consider the weak among them, overlooking their own knowledge of idol meat being nothing, and show love by not partaking. Wanting to make clear that he exercises the same principle in his own life, Paul makes use of an exemplary argument. Although he has the freedom and right to make a living as a missionary worker, he has refused to do so for the sake of the gospel and unity of the body. Paul is free to accept the gift, but he chose not to exercise this right and became a slave, plying his trade and remaining financially free in order to win some to Christ. Paul urges the strong to forfeit idol meat—their right and freedom—for the sake of the weak. In imitating Paul's example they identify with the weak and thereby imitate Christ. This is the hope, theme, and purpose of Paul's letter—that there would be no division within the church, and that they would be "unified in the same mind and purpose." Paul's hope is that all division would be toppled and the church would truly become one body—that is, finding identity not in earthly categories but in Christ.

---

36. Though it may seem disjointed for Paul to introduce the idea of imitating Christ in 11:1, it reveals not incoherence, but rather that Paul's entire argument of 8–11:1 was rooted in a deeper theological principle, namely, that the church should imitate Christ's becoming low and giving up freedom for the sake of salvation.

37. Showing how Christ did this would take us beyond the scope of this article. A good starting place, however, would be the Philippian hymn (Phil 2:5–11; esp. v. 7).

# Review Essay—*Translucence: Religion, the Arts, and Imagination*

Pamela Cooper-White
*Professor of Pastoral Theology*
*Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia*
*pcooper@ltsp.edu*

***Translucence: Religion, the Arts, and Imagination***. Edited by Carol Gilbertson and Gregg Muilenburg. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. 220 pages. Paper. $18.00.

This is a collection of essays that grew out of a Lutheran Academy of Scholars seminar in the summer of 2001, "The Public Intellectual and the Arts." Invited by Ronald Thiemann and facilitated by L. DeAne Lagerquist, the seminar included faculty (both Lutheran and non-Lutheran) from a variety of Lutheran-affiliated colleges, many of whom are also directly involved in the creative arts—musicians, poets, an actor, and an art historian—and continued online through the events of September 11. The resulting anthology is one in which religion (primarily in the form of Lutheran Christianity), philosophy, and the arts are brought into a dialogue that is not only fruitful but also highly literate and theologically sophisticated.

The book's guiding metaphor, *translucence*, reflects the shared conviction that arose among seminar participants "that there is indeed a deeply relevant phenomenon that imbues the many realms of human experience. Our focus is this profound sense that *God's light shines through human art in multiple ways*" (p. vi; emphasis added). Lagerquist cites characteristic Lutheran themes that were seen as central to the conversation distilled into this volume:

> "an understanding of the labyrinthine depths of human evil and the majestic power of God's grace in Christ," an appreciation of the objective character of divine salvation, the notion that the church is more than a collection of like-minded people, and "the Lutheran gift for ambiguity." (pp. xiii–xiv)

Given the reader-response sensibility that runs as one thread through this anthology, I need to identify my own location as reader/reviewer. As an Episcopal priest teaching in a Lutheran seminary and married to a Lutheran pastor and seminary president, I approached this project as an outsider (non-Lutheran), but one with at least a nose, one eye, and part of several limbs poked long-term under the Lutheran theological tent. The title of the book had not forewarned me of the book's thoroughgoing Lutheran perspective. I was drawn to it because of my training in both visual art and music (both as a performer and a musicologist) and also because of a research project in which I am currently engaged on the subject of sacred space and its impact on the psyche for growth, healing, and empowerment. My own constructive theological work has led me more and more toward a paradigm that is informed both by

contemporary psychoanalysis and by postmodern, global, and feminist theory and theology. I do not pretend to be the best judge of how successfully this book has represented the various streams of Lutheran theological thought in its dialogue with the arts, but the questions the book raised for me as a postmodern, psychoanalytic, Anglican feminist involved intimately with both Lutherans and with artists were fruitful ones. It is in this spirit of extending the dialogue that I offer this review.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, Curtis L. Thompson and Gregg Muilenburg explore philosophical assumptions, particularly lifting up the value of imagination (Thompson) and "subtle thinking" (Muilenburg). Thompson advocates a "two-eyed form of interpreting" a work of art in which the temporal reality being expressed by the artist and the "eternal freedom shining through" are held in creative tension. In Thompson's subtle readings, incorporating premodern (especially Luther) and late modern (Kierkegaard, Hegel, Heidegger, Moltmann, Pasewark) sources, the act of interpretation, like the act of making art, is an act of freedom (following Kierkegaard), acknowledging multiple meanings, and even co-creating with the artist—including those meanings yet to be revealed by future interpretations. Both freedom's ground ("creation and redemption") and freedom's goal ("making free as emancipating the human from being sinfully turned in on itself, opening it again to the world of future possibilities, and empowering or potentiating it to full and healthy life in the world" (p. 23) according to Thompson, constitute the "divine reality" that shines through both creation and art as "translucent medium" (p. 3).

Thompson's discussions of the relationship between art and power are particularly interesting in light of a postmodern feminist image of power, including spiritual power, as a "mechanics of fluids."[1] While Thompson mentions postmodernity at the end of his essay, in connection with an emphasis on "the irrational and piecemeal qualities of the artist's novel productions" as problematizing the "modern vision of artistic freedom" (p. 31), I would, out of my own more postmodern sensibility toward contingency and multiplicity of truth(s), inquire of and with Thompson: Freedom as what? Which freedom(s)? For whom? In what context(s)? How does perception, as it is embedded in each local, particular context (race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, class) meet, connect with, or even distort whatever is shining through? Is there a singular divine transcendence, a singular "highest work of Absolute Spirit or God," even a singular "ultimate reality" (citing Thompson's reading of Hegel) that shines through the translucence of a work of art, even as it is perceived "as in a mirror dimly?" Answers to such questions would inevitably flush out statements of faith and their underlying contexts and assumptions, which then could be brought into dialogue with very different perspectives, including faiths and contexts that are distinctly Other.

Muilenburg lifts up the power of art as metaphor, or, drawing on Nikos Kazantzakis, "*metousiosis*"—transubstantiation—to "put flesh on the bones of theory and motivate us to spiritualize that flesh" (p. 45). Because "metaphors do not *mean*, they *show*" (p. 51), Muilenburg advocates the kind of subtle thinking involved in metaphorical creation and interpretation as a catalyst to action. While a more elabo-

1. Luce Irigaray, "The Mechanics of Fluids," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 23–33.

rated discussion of what would constitute ethical action would have been welcome in this essay, Muilenburg's reading of Kazantzakis does point toward a particular ethic, in which to "live well" (the goal of philosophy, Aristotle's *eudaimonia,* p. 40) is defined as an emulation of Christ's sacrifice. However, the goal of this "bloody ascent,"

namely, to "cast off the flesh through transubstantiation" (p. 55), begs for a more critical discussion of how such a goal reiterates Christianity's traditional denigration of the body—even as Muilenburg advocates for metaphorical thinking as that which "puts flesh on the bones of abstraction" (p. 54). Dialogue with feminist/Womanist/mujerista sources in particular would provide a welcome counterpoint in this discourse about "subtle thinking."

In Part II, "Art as Translucence," the authors explore particular aspects of artistic expression including musical composition in historical context (Kathryn Pohlmann Duffy), poetry (Bruce Allen Heggen), literature and pedagogy—the invitation to bring explicit religious discourse into the literature classroom as a catalyst for students' imagination about God, spirituality, self, and others (Carol Gilbertson)—and the potential impact of oral performance of scripture (James S. Hanson).

Duffy makes an argument for a historical-critical approach to listening to music of earlier historical periods, in which translucence is invoked as a metaphor not so much for the divine as the composer's own intentions to shine through the music. With well-chosen, familiar examples, she traces the evolution of Western musical treatment of sacred texts in a manner that is accessible to readers not previously trained in music history. She affirms the standard musicological view that a deliberate intention of expressing or evoking emotion in music did not fully evolve until nineteenth-century romanticism. Her point is well taken that listeners should "guard against the tendency to view music teleologically . . . the temptation to think that music improves over time" (p. 61). By refraining from listening ahistorically to earlier music, she argues, particularly expecting to be "emotionally charged by music" (p. 59), we can avoid imposing judgments on it from our own (post-romantic) time and context. It would be interesting to extend this discussion even farther by engaging it with a consideration of non-Western musical forms. At an interdisciplinary level, Duffy's argument might also be put in dialogue with other, different approaches to interpretation, for example, New Criticism (which rejects context as a norm for reading), reception/reader-response theory, and queries that might arise from a more poststructuralist perspective.

Heggen's essay, "To Tell the Truth but Tell It Slant: Martin Luther's Theology and Poetry," takes up a wide range of issues, in which poetry is not only the focus but an exemplar for consideration of other art forms, and the question of the relationship between theology and aesthetics. Navigating through a breathtaking range of sources

from poets Auden, Rilke, Dickinson, Lorca, and Hopkins, as well as theorists and theologians both early and modern, including Edward Hirsch and Paul Tillich, Scotus, Zwingli, and Luther, Heggen argues for art, especially poetry, as a form of incarnational theology. In particular, he mounts an apologetic for Lutheran theology and the arts. While acknowledging that Luther's primary concern was theological, not aesthetic, he goes beyond some conventional readings of Luther to discern a place for art in the experiential nature of Luther's theology, as seen in both his understanding of creation and his high view of the Eucharist.

A key point for Heggen is that "Art is not ancillary to theological discourse. It is an alternative medium of communicating the judgment and grace of human-divine encounter; it is revelatory, and it shapes Christian imagination and the Christian life" (p. 89). He argues against a purely utilitarian view of religious art, which directly communicates the gospel (as articulated in Auden's essay on Christianity and art), finding in Auden's poetry itself what he finds missing in Auden's theory—an artistic holding in tension of word and flesh, reason and imagination, finite and infinite, eternal and temporal, expressing an understanding of "the creative and redemptive biblical God who is Trinity," which for Heggen "does not collapse reason and imagination into one another, but expands and enlivens both" (p. 98). He lifts up Frederick Buechner's writings as exemplifying such a view of God as "dynamic, physical, sentient" (p. 99). Quoting Buechner, grace thus becomes a "'power beyond all power,' which 'works through the drab and hubbub of our lives to make Christs of us before we're done.'" Heggen thus echoes a strand of Lutheran theology characterized by theosis,[2] in which divine revelation and inspiration works *in* the world, "sensately" (p. 121) to transform it, even to divinize it. For Heggen, art is one of the vehicles of such a redemptive power.

Gilbertson's chapter, "The Translucent Word: Religious Imagination in the Literature Classroom," takes a thoughtful turn to the pedagogical. Gilbertson received the Donald Murray prize for best published essay on teaching and/or writing at the 2005 National Conference on College Composition and Communication for this article. In a sophisticated way that by no means simply reiterates an argument for proselytizing in the classroom, Gilbertson advocates for overcoming the generally accepted avoidance of religious themes in the college literature classroom: "Rather than averting our classroom eyes, we can openly discuss a work's construction of sin and evil, spiritual longing, or revelatory vision just as we discuss its construction of gender, race, class, or empire" (p. 127). Gilbertson is straightforward in her hopes for this project, which go beyond simply the inclusion of themes in an abstract, distanced manner. She has a vision of transforming students' lives, but one that is nonparochial and nonsectarian:

> In so doing, we might deepen students' religious imagination: empower them to develop more nuanced religious vocabulary, engage in complex theological thinking about a fictive world, increase their understanding of other religious expressions, and encourage them to see connections to their lives. In the process they may even be spiritually moved. (p. 127)

Teachers of literature "can face religious literature squarely and without apology, without advocating its authors' or characters' beliefs or losing our critical edge in excessive sympathy" (p. 127). Gilbertson

---

2. Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, trans. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

finds support for this in her reading of Luther's theology as "'incarnational,' not codified," and also finds fertile soil for such teaching in her nonsimplistic reflections on what it means to be a Lutheran-affiliated college. Drawing on Stanley Fish's (reader-response theory) emphasis on the role of community in reading and creating meaning, George Steiner's writings on the immanence of "all good art and literature" in his book *Real Presences*, and Martha Nussbaum's ethical writings on education of the moral imagination as "essential to citizenship" (p. 151), she finds in the potential of art for spiritual transcendence a means for helping students to explore the "religious worlds and . . . faith pleas" (p. 147) of the authors they read.

In reading this chapter, I thought of Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran*,[3] and how Nafisi offers, from a very different cultural context, an example of precisely what Gilbertson is advocating: the teaching of literature to "be better able to influence their commonwealth's response to the violent injustice and sectarian extremes of our time" (p. 151). Gilbertson's contribution to the anthology connects the dots between reading and ethics, translucence and transformation for the public good in a manner that informs and extends the conversation with many of the other essays in this volume.

Hanson's essay on the oral performance of scripture offers another take on incarnational theology—in this case, an argument for the embodiment of scripture through dramatic reading that offers complementary, even alternative, understandings of the text from those accessible at the critical distance of historical-critical or literary study of the Bible. While never discarding the latter as important for interpreting and informing readings, Hanson advocates for also valuing the "fuzziness of experience" (p. 154), the living, transforming experience that is possible through performance (both for performer and audience): "a translucent instrument through which we encounter a living Presence" (p. 154). Hanson brings in a variety of interdisciplinary resources to support his argument, ranging from more theological writings such as Tim Schramm's work on "bibliodrama" to sources much further removed from traditional biblical scholarship: drama theorists such as David Mamet, Uta Hagen, and Sanford Meisner. The perhaps most unlikely partner, Mamet, informs Hanson's argument for the potential of a dramatic reading of the Gospel of Mark as one in which we are caused to ask what each character wants, how their desires conflict, and how what emerges from such a method is not a single "correct" interpretation of the text but rather a truth that "emerges . . . when audience members reenact their own struggles in those of the disciples . . . that aha! of recognition" (p. 169)—a "particular realization of [Mark's] story of Jesus—characterized by 'secret epiphanies' and a Jesus 'on the loose,' one who is present for us, yet can never be fully apprehended" (p. 181)—that might terrify, console, convict, or transform. For Hanson, it is precisely the nonrational dimension of the arts that becomes again an *incarnational* translucent medium: "In ways that rational thought and discourse alone cannot, the arts can be a powerful manifestation of the image of God in us" (p. 181).

Part III brings the book to its conclusion with two autobiographical "Reflections on Translucence," including a more experiential essay on the performance of music, music as gift of God, and consider-

3. Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (New York: Random House, 2003).

ations for musical choices in worship (Karen Black), and a reflection on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction as passion, testimony, resistance, and prayer (Paul Beidler). A hymn, "The Word First Gathered Chaos Up," by Gilbertson, set to the tune "Academy" by Black, appears as a postscript to the volume.

Black centers her article on an experience of singing in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* that for her was an ineffable experience of self-transcendence and the real presence of God in the moment. She discusses Luther's placing of music next in importance to theology (p. 187) as a vehicle, quoting Carl Schalk, for a "glowing center of awareness and comprehension" (p. 188), an "aural art form of great beauty, both temporal and temporary, . . . that also—by pointing beyond itself to God as source of infinite beauty—allows divine light to shine in and through its earthly sound" (p. 188). Her guiding metaphor is music as gift, drawing on anthropologist Lewis Hyde's explication of a gift as that which is freely given in relationship (unlike a contractual exchange), used but never used up, passing through the body (both individual and communal) to give material, social, and spiritual increase. She concludes her essay with recommendations for planning worship, using musical criteria of compositional skill, complementarity of text and music, and the effectiveness of music in grounding church ritual.

This essay prompted many questions for me. As a performer, I could readily identify with Black's experiences of self-transcendence—even what I would think of as *ec-stasis*—in certain musical moments, such as my recent performance of Mozart's *Exsultate, Jubilate*. I would even go a step further than Black in this—it was precisely the "peak experience" of meeting extremely difficult *technical* requirements

Music may, indeed, deeply move us, but not always in ways that feel good or uplifting or that might lead to action for the good.

—the athletic aspect of such singing—together with the ineffability of Mozart's setting of three sacred texts that became for me an elevated moment of experience, one that provided both a narcissistically soothing triumph as well as religious inspiration. I believe that from a psychological viewpoint we cannot exclude our own psychological needs, our identifications, our "countertransference" in relation to the experience of music as we perform or even listen. Like Black, I have recognized in my own body the kinship between music and religious ritual in the power of each to generate passion, as aliveness and even spiritual awe (tapping Heggen's earlier essay on poetry, Lorca's *duende*).

I disagree, however, with the somewhat uncritical optimism of this chapter. Such power is not unambiguous. Music may, indeed, deeply move us, but not always in ways that feel good or uplifting or that might lead to action for the good. I have felt horrified as both performer and audience member by what I experience as the Nazi-associated savagery of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, and personally degraded and depersonalized by my role as a prostitute in a particular staging of Offenbach's

**The power of imagination to reach toward the impossible is an expression of eschatological hope.**

opera *The Tales of Hoffman*. These were not explicitly religious texts. But I have also experienced, including in worship, the very untranscendent bludgeoning of exclusively patriarchal God-language in hymns, the saccharine sentimentality of certain praise songs that felt manipulative and even judgmental (if I could not join in the enthusiasm of the song), and the sense of personal self-betrayal as I sang words to hymns that offended, even violated, my own theological sensibilities and ethical understandings. Tuneful, toe-tapping hymns often can and do subliminally suppress critical thinking and generate enthusiasm for questionable theological propositions. In such instances, the power of music to form us and move us is undeniably present, but what is the nature of that formation, and toward what (thought, desire, action) might we be moved?

Black's assertions would be strengthened by an engagement with theological aesthetics—to inquire What *is* the beautiful? What constitutes "good" art, or even the cultural and temporal influences in the shifting criteria for what constitutes "good taste" and who gets to decide?[5] Is all "good" art beautiful? (Is Picasso's powerful anti-war mural *Guernica* beautiful?) Black's essay also begs the question: What are the ethical moves and theological adequacy of a given musical setting of a text?

Hanson raises a similar question, earlier in the volume, in relation to the dramatic arts, with particular reference to Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*. This question of criteria could be fruitfully engaged in conversation with all the contributors to this volume.

Black's notion of music as gift, even gift from God, is also not a simple one. In fact, it opens a can of worms. As Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion, and John Caputo have explored at length,[6] the notion of "gift" must be problematized to include inquiries about the relative status of giver and recipient, the power, obligation, and even enslavement that a gift may engender, and the response-ability that divine gift entails.

Beidler's essay, "Passion: Deconstruction as Spiritual Quest," which comes at the conclusion of this anthology, answers a number of the questions raised by the preceding chapters by satisfyingly (for me) complexifying them. Precisely in his embracing of "deconstruction," which is not simply destruction but a simultaneous exposing, questioning, and constructing of what lies beneath or behind all texts, Beidler helpfully problematizes anything that was written too uncritically or unambiguously before. In the case of this project, what is it, really, that is shining through the translucent medium? Surely not just one thing, even One Truth. Several complex themes that run through this volume, such as imagination, gift, and temporality and eternity, are taken up by Beidler. Drawing mainly

5. Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Nice, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

6. John D. Caputo, *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999).

on the work of Derrida, Beidler blows apart any simple confidence in the truth of any moment of "testimony," whether of faith, desire, or self-reporting of an instant in time. Using poignant and captivating autobiographical examples, Beidler illustrates how the later telling or memory—the (re) "iteration" of any moment in time—necessarily disconnects it from the immediacy of that experience: "Memory is a type of testimony, and so to recall an instant is to destroy it" (p. 208). He draws on French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan as well, in citing how "both the moment and the self are constituted and structured by language . . . but in re-membering the instant, I destroy it, simply because I do so from another instant, the present instant rather than the one I remember" (p. 210). Beidler shows how such a view is not nihilistic or even atheistic but rather brings a new religious sensibility to the encounter of self (what I have elaborated in my own writings as something multiple, fluid, and in process) with Other—whether that other is another being, a work of art, or an intuition or sense of the divine—echoing Caputo, deconstruction as affirmation, even prayer. In this, Beidler reflects Derrida's (and also Marion's[7]) discussions about God as "the impossible" breaking through whatever possibles we can conceive or know. Thompson expresses a similar thought in his earlier essay:

> The province of imagination is the future, and the domain of the future is possibility. In the Western world possibility has been set against actuality, and the latter has typically been granted the higher position. But possibility needs to regain our attention: in opening the door to possibility, we avail ourselves of the impossible; we unleash a power, what Kierkegaard called the power of the absurd, which makes possible *the impossible*. With this power we are close to the old, half-forgotten concept of eternity, which needs another look. (p. 4)

Beidler rightly rejects the criticism of postmodernism that it leads to a lack of ethics, a rudderless radical relativism. The power of imagination to reach toward the impossible is an expression of eschatological hope. As Thompson writes,

> The God-who-may-be does not impose a kingdom on humans, but rather offers humans the possibility of realizing the promised kingdom by opening themselves to God's transfiguring power. Each person possesses the possibility to be transfigured and in the process to transfigure God. [Citing Richard Kearney,] Kearney's God promises to bring new life and bring it abundantly, and promises a kingdom of justice and love. (p. 30)

The translucence of art, as explored by Thompson, and Derrida, Beidler, and other postmodern thinkers, evokes passion in ways that are not amoral: Derrida's explications of passion as "'passing through, passing on, being passive, loving intensely, suffering deeply, sacrificing oneself'" (p. 214) all invoke ethical themes and questions. To live in "gratitude," the affirmation of all that we cannot know (especially as expressed by a voice from the margins: Derrida himself lived as an "outsider," an Algerian Jew in Paris), and to resist totalistic structures and interpretations, is not, after all, so far from Luther's own disdain for theologies of glory; it is a liberative praxis, eliciting both "prayers and tears."[8]

Another observation I had pertains to the anthology as a whole: the total absence of voices represented in the contributors to this volume from the visual arts (painting, sculpture, etc.), architecture, film, dance,

---

7. Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

8. John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

and more avant-garde and hybrid art forms such as protest and performance art. While visual art is referenced in passing by a few authors (particularly Heggen, in his citing of Tillich's heuristic for evaluating religious art), and Gibson's film *The Passion* is mentioned by Hanson, there is no sustained inquiry into the ways in which these artistic forms also might engage the metaphor of translucence. In my experience, the questions raised regarding the working of surfaces in visual art, especially painting—the depiction of a three-dimensional subject in two-dimensional plane, the use of opaque pigment to create effects of light, dark, and chiaroscuro, and the luminosity, even symbolism, of color (consider, for example, expressionist painter Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* [9]), questions of representational realism, expressionism, surrealism, and abstraction and how these styles differ, might allow something of meaning, even some transcendence, to shine forth. The field of aesthetics might also recall some of the questions often debated by nineteenth-century philosophers and artists regarding the distance between an artist's idea and representation in light of the theme of translucence. No matter how ineffable a work of music may be, did it still in some sense feel to the composer like a failure to grasp the inspiration shining before and behind it—as in Schoenberg's anguished cry through his operatic figure of Moses: "O Wort, du Wort das mir fällt!" (O Word, thou Word that I lack)?[10]

My recent research into the psychology of sacred space, similarly, has sensitized me to all the ways in which sacred space is almost always contested space,[11] and that architectural attempts at inspiring awe, stillness, enthusiasm, or other spiritually tuned values in the design of sacred built environments are always local, particular, value laden, and subject to conflicting interpretation and sensual experience. Similar questions could be raised by scholars immersed in other art forms not represented in the current volume.

While the list of contributors in any anthology that arises from a symposium will usually be the accident of those who originally said "yes" to the symposium invitation, and therefore too much cannot be read into what is omitted, certain essays within the volume led me to ponder whether the very Lutheran focus of the book included an unexamined bias toward literature and music and away from the visual and nonverbal arts. Of the eight essays, three focus on philosophy, two on literature (including both poetry and fiction, with mainly literary references also in the philosophy chapters), one explicitly on scripture in the context of dramatization, and two on music (plus the concluding hymn).

Luther saw music as second in importance only to theology (p. 187), although clearly still subordinate. As Black points out, Luther appreciated music in amplifying God's Word, as "the music, or the notes, which are a wonderful creation and gift of God, help materially" in singing the psalms, "especially when the people sing along and reverently participate"[12] (p. 187).

---

9. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York: Dover Reprint Editions, 1977).

10. Arnold Schoenberg, *Moses und Aron,* Audio CD, Pierre Boulez, conductor, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon, 1996).

11. Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

12. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–86), 43:321, 323.

Thus music was lifted up by Luther for its capacity to enhance the function of the church as "mouth house,"[13] in proclamation of the Word. Heggen counters a critique by Richard Marius and others that "Luther had 'little sense of painting or sculpture'" (p. 88), pointing to the Reformer's close friendship with the painter Lucas Cranach the elder, and his bent toward the sacramental and experiential dimensions of faith. Nevertheless, as Heggen writes, "It is beyond dispute that Luther's first concern is theological rather than aesthetic" (p. 88)—in other words, words about God (theology) and about God's Word (proclamation) are given priority. To engage with this observation might catalyze a further fruitful conversation specifically about the role of the arts in Lutheranism, the question of whether there is a bias for verbal art forms, and what the interplay is between the word (small-w) and the Word (logos).

Finally, with regard to the contributors, it should be noted that all of the authors in this volume are white, and almost all use Western European examples and sources. The list of poets and writers cited constitutes a standard Great Books list, in which dead—and some living—white male authors and composers predominate. The only reference I was able to find to a non-white European or North American art form anywhere in the volume is a negative one, made in passing, about critics' objections to "violent rap music" (p. 192).

I found it particularly disappointing, in light of the ELCA's hymnal *With One Voice* (1995) and its Renewing Worship project, which was already underway by the time this anthology went to press, that no excellent women hymn text writers and translators, such as Susan Briehl ("By Your Hand You Feed Your People"[14] and ELCA Renewing Worship Project[15]), Susan Palo Cherwien ("O Blessed Spring"[16]), Ruth Duck ("Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters"[17]), or other hymnists who have made efforts to expand traditional depictions of God and creation such as Brian Wren ("Bring Many Names"[18] and "As Man and Woman We Were Made"[19]), were cited by Black in her discussion of valuable music for worship. Only Beidler (who more recently presented a paper on the African American jazz poet Amiri Baraka[20]) engaged at length in discussion of a more diverse voice (albeit without explicitly noting her work as such), the British lesbian novelist Jeanette Winterson.[21]

Even though the contributors to the anthology are all white, what fruitful ideas might be generated from engaging a dia-

---

13. Martin Luther, Sermon for I Advent 1521, *Weimarer Ausgabe* (Weimar edition of Luther's works), 10.I.1:48.

14. Susan Briehl, "By Your Hand You Feed Your People," GIA Publications, 2002, *www.giamusic.com.*

15. *www.renewingworship.org/about/people/new_hymnody.html.*

16. Susan Palo Cherwien, "O Blessed Spring," Hymn #695 in *With One Voice (WOV)* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

17. Ruth Duck, "Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters," Hymn #697 in *WOV.*

18. Brian Wren, "Bring Many Names," *Oremus Hymnal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1994), online at *www.oremus.org/hymnal/b/b198.html*; see also Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Words and Music of Congregational Song* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2000).

19. Wren, "As Man and Woman We Were Made," Hymn # 751 in *WOV.*

20. Paul Beidler, "Jazz, Amiri Baraka, and the Arbitrariness of the Sign," Panel on Improvisation and Jazz Writing, Conference of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association, November, 2003, *www.cwru.edu/affil/sce/Texts_2003/Beidler.htm.*

21. *www.jeanettewinterson.com/index.asp.*

logue about the whole notion of translucence with non-Christian, non-Western, non-white, feminist/Womanist, and/or Queer conversation partners? What other authors might have been invited to round out the published anthology, even given the limitations of the original symposium participants? What new light(s), what new truth(s), might be shed by the inclusion of more voices in the conversation? Indeed, how might the guiding metaphor of translucence itself "read" to a Buddhist or a *mujerista* or a poor Black New Orleanian interlocutor? How might *translucence* be understood and experienced differently by a victim of the tsunami or the war(s) in Iraq and Lebanon? Indeed, given the timing of the symposium itself, how and what can translucently shine forth in light of the trauma of September 11?

In conclusion, while this anthology at times somewhat uncritically reflects the bias of a rather homogeneous group of scholars, it engages a very important and often ignored subject for Lutheran theology, and for Christian theology more generally—that of the relationship of theology and the arts. That it generates so many questions is in no small measure a testimony to its importance as a publication. Perhaps it is the many questions raised by this collection of texts, as much as any of the specific arguments and conclusions made by its individual authors, that commend this volume to a wide readership—among Lutheran scholars and beyond. In following the authors' iterations of the theme of translucence, while also deconstructing them—as de(un)-con(with)-structing(making new, consonant and contrarian meanings)—the reader will find her/himself caught up, as I did, in a passionate conversation, inspiring new questions, new intuitions, and new prayers.

# Jesus, Paul, and Homosexuals

David J. Lull
*Associate Professor of New Testament*
*Wartburg Theological Seminary*
*Dubuque, Iowa*

William Sloan Coffin once said,

> Homosexuality is not a big issue for biblical writers. In the 66 books of Scripture (71 if you are Roman Catholic), only seven verses refer to homosexual behavior. Some time ago, I picked up a pamphlet entitled "What did Jesus say about homosexuality?" Opening it, I came across two blank pages. Closing it, I read on the back, "That's right, nothing." [1]

Later Coffin went on to say that the issue the church should be addressing—I am paraphrasing—is not whether "homosexual practice" is "contrary to Christian teaching" but why denying homosexuals full citizenship and participation in the church is not "contrary to Christian teaching." Why has it been so difficult to make the case that less than a dozen, mostly obscure, Bible passages should not be allowed to exclude homosexuals full citizenship and participation in the church when the evangelical message of Jesus and Paul focuses on God's unbounded love for everyone?

To answer these questions is not an easy task, but I have some proposals. First, the biblical evidence is not quite as simple as Coffin has made it out to be. In addition to the seven passages to which Coffin's comments referred (Genesis 19, Judges 19, Lev 18:22 and 20:13, Rom 1:26–27, 1 Cor 6:9, and 1 Tim 1:10) we have to add Genesis 1–2 and Mark 10:7–8, which speak of the joining of a man and a woman in marriage. That makes nine passages (or a dozen, if you count the Synoptic parallels to the Mark passage). But we also should take off the list two of the original seven—Genesis 19 and its parallel in Judges 19, which are not about homosexual intercourse but about heterosexual rape. That brings the number back to seven (or ten).

Whether seven, ten, or a dozen, the number of passages pales in comparison to the biblical witness about heterosexual adultery, injustice to the poor, bearing false witness, and loving one's neighbor. The prohibition against same-sex intercourse did not make it into the Big Ten—Commandments, that is—but the prohibition of adultery did, along with some other biggies, murder and stealing, and the really big one, idolatry. The focus on homosexual sex has been a shrewd strategy: change the subject so that attention shifts to the sex lives of a minority instead of the sexual misconduct of the majority, the complicity of us all in murdering thousands of Iraqis, our silence and inaction in the face of genocide in

---

1. According to *http://www.soulforce.org/article/453*, this excerpt is from an "Open Letter" Coffin presented to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops during a Soulforce, Dignity/USA, Equal Partners in Faith press conference at a vigil and civil disobedience at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C., November 14, 2000, at 10 a.m.

Rwanda and Sudan, our complicity in allowing men, women, and children to die of hunger and HIV/AIDS, our accumulation of more stuff than we need so that we do not have enough left over to help the poor get what they need to survive, our idolatry of wealth, and our complicity in the idolatry of U.S. imperialism. This diversionary tactic, rooted in sin, is condemned in the Bible far more than same-sex relations!

Coffin also misspoke when he said that the seven (ten, or dozen) biblical passages at the center of the debate concern homosexuality. That concedes too much. Even if every one of these passages condemns male same-sex intercourse, they also condemn male same-sex intercourse by *heterosexuals* who engage in idolatrous pagan rituals, or who use sex to exploit others or as a form of violence against women, aliens, and enemies. To identify homosexuality with that kind of sexual immorality is unscriptural and "contrary to Christian teaching"! To condemn all homosexuals on that basis violates the commandment against bearing false witness.

But that is not to say that these passages are irrelevant to the discussion of homosexuality and to homosexuals.

Genesis 1 says that God created humankind in God's image, male and female. Gays are still male, and lesbians are still female. They, no less than the rest of humankind, are created in the image of God.

Genesis 2:18–25 says that God created woman to be a *partner* with man. Its opening to an egalitarian vision of the relationship between man and woman moves in the right direction, even if it does not quite go far enough. Why not go all the way and affirm the ideal of partnership for homosexual and heterosexual unions and committed relationships alike? The scriptural authority of the "family values" embedded in the descriptive statement that "a man leaves his father and his mother" when he unites with his wife, though, might pose a problem to some heterosexual households where a married man and woman remain or return to live with the husband's parents. Is that practice contrary to Scripture and Christian teaching? Are they permitted to live with the wife's parents? This illustration goes to show just how selective we can be about what in the Bible has "authority."

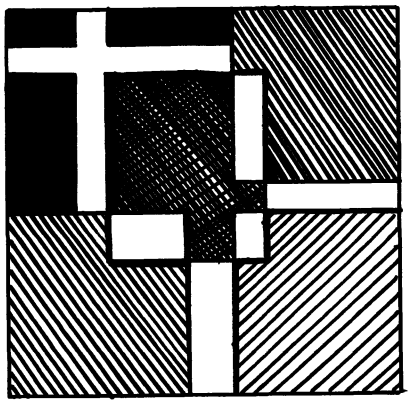
Genesis 19 and Judges 19 condemn xenophobia and sexual violence, period. Their condemnation was originally addressed to heterosexuals, but today we might see its relevance to homosexuals as well. However, sexual violence is more prevalent among heterosexuals. Besides, these biblical stories give tacit approval to the family values dominant in their culture, according to which females in the family are considered commodities that could be negotiated in the observance of codes of hospitality. Does anyone really want to defend the "scriptural authority" of these "family values"?

Leviticus 18:22 says "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman." This passage is silent about a woman lying with a woman, but who is the "you" here? Does it mean that a woman is to lie with a male only in the "missionary position," so as not to lie with a male as with a woman? The parallel in Lev 20:13 clears up the ambiguity—it has to do only with male anal intercourse with another male. If one of the warrants for this condemnation was that male anal intercourse with another male cannot issue in procreation and it is included in the "scriptural authority" of this passage, it also condemns heterosexual anal intercourse and all heterosexual intercourse that cannot result in procreation. The Bible would then condemn sexual intercourse by infertile heterosexual couples and heterosexual couples beyond childbearing age.

I am unaware of any support for such condemnation in our churches.

If one of the warrants for this prohibition is that males are to be sexually aggressive and females are to be passive, I doubt that there would be much support in our churches for asserting the "scriptural authority" of the assumption that females are to be sexually passive. We might agree with these passages, however, that it would be wrong for any male to be sexually aggressive toward another male, just as it would be wrong for any male to be sexually aggressive toward any female, including his wife. Besides, in cases of sexual assault against males (e.g., in prisons and in wars), the aggressors are more likely to be heterosexuals. In cultures where anal rape of men is an acceptable weapon of war, the rapists are more likely to be heterosexuals. These practices clearly are contrary to Scripture and Christian teaching. But the same standards also apply to treating male and female prostitutes as passive sexual commodities. In the biblical world, these passages were speaking to heterosexuals, but today they can also speak to homosexuals—not by condemning all sexual intimacy between homosexuals but by opening a conversation about standards of sexual intimacy for all persons.

The same can be said about the New Testament passages. Romans 1:26–27 has been too narrowly applied to sexual morality, and even more narrowly to homosexuals.[2] Part of the problem lies with the English translations. If everyone had to discuss the New Testament passages in the original Greek, it would be much more difficult to narrow the focus in this way and to be dogmatic about "what the text says." The NIV and NRSV followed the KJV and RSV, which tilt the Romans passage toward sexual matters with the translation "lusts." But the Greek word *epithymia* encompasses a broad



range of passions and desires that includes but is not limited to sexual passions and desires.

It also is clear that this passage does not condemn all passions and desires as such; rather, Rom 1:29–31 condemn only their excessive, exploitative, and violent extremes. The key terms "natural" and "unnatural" in vv. 26–27, the only verses in 1:18–32 that narrow the focus to sexual behavior, also emphasize excessive forms of sexual passions, desires, and behavior. Paul did mean to condemn all same-sex sexual intercourse, but in doing so he was merely echoing his own culture's concepts of human sexuality.

We are under no obligation simply to privilege Paul's culture's concepts of hu-

2. In what follows I have adapted some of what John B. Cobb Jr. and I have written in *Romans*, Chalice Commentaries for Today (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005). See also the excellent article by David E. Fredrickson, "Natural and Unnatural Use in Romans 1:24–27: Paul and the Philosophic Critique of Eros," in *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture*, ed. David L. Balch (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 197–222.

man sexuality as eternal truths—not just because we do not agree with these concepts but because the church has moved beyond so many other concepts about human sexuality and gender in his culture. We can affirm, however, that excessive, exploitative, and violent passions and desires, including but not limited to sexual ones, can lead to degrading behavior and the general decadence of societies—and they have done so, including in our own present culture of sex and violence. The same is true of Paul's primary, and typically Jewish, concern about idolatry as the root cause of all social decadence. We may not think of idolatry quite in the same way as Paul and his contemporaries did, but we know a lot about how social decadence arises from idolatries of sex, wealth, and national imperialism. Persons of all sexual orientations need to heed what Paul says about the connections between these idolatries, excessive-exploitative-violent desires, and decadence.

The Greek of 1 Cor 6:9 is also difficult to translate.[3] The RSV translates both words with a single phrase, "sexual perverts," which might be the best solution if it were not for its narrowing of the first term to sexual perversion. The other translations render each word separately. The NRSV, which translates the two Greek words "male prostitutes" and "sodomites," reflects how these Greek words have usually been taken to mean the "passive" and "active" participants in male same-sex intercourse. Once again, Paul's list of sexual vices tends to focus on male sexual behavior.

More than twenty-five years ago, John Boswell challenged the usual translations of these Greek words and argued that Paul was speaking more generally, and not of male same-sex intercourse. He would translate the first Greek word, *malakoi*, as "unrestrained" or "wanton" and the second, *arsenokoitai*, as "male prostitutes."[4] This proposal rightly draws attention to the fact that the first of the Greek words that Paul uses was a common one with a wide range of meaning. Dale B. Martin's excellent discussion of these terms lends impressive support for Boswell's translation of *malakoi* as "unrestrained" by showing that it covers any male who pursues excessive pleasures of any kind but also who tries to avoid necessary pain, even if it is moderate—both of which make a man "soft" and "unmanly."[5] Because this word encompasses habits of clothing, eating and drinking, and personal grooming, it fits with the nonsexual vices in v. 10 and also with the sexual vices listed in v. 9. The emphasis, however, is less on the *object* of the excessive pleasure, which the Greek word does not specify or restrict in any way, than on the *excessiveness* of the pursuit of pleasures that include, but are not limited to, sexual pleasure. It could refer to a man who

---

3. In what follows I have adapted some of what I have written in "Living Together Faithfully with Our Different Readings of the Bible," in *The Difficult but Indispensable Church*, ed. Norma Cook Everist (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 93–103, and in William A. Beardslee and David J. Lull, *First Corinthians*, Chalice Commentaries for Today (St. Louis: Chalice Press, in press).

4. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 106–7 and Appendix 1.

5. Dale B. Martin, "*Arsenokoitês* and *Malakos*: Meanings and Consequences," in *Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture*, ed. Robert L. Brawley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 124–29. Compare the KJV translation "effeminate" and the translation "sissies" or "dandies" in Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) ad loc.

has an excessive desire for fine food, wine, and clothing. Even if it is limited to sex, it could refer to a man who has an excessive sexual interest in women.

The second Greek word Paul uses in v. 9 appears for the first time in all Greek literature in this verse (and after Paul in 1 Tim 1:10 and other early Christian literature). We would do well to admit, with Dale Martin (see note 5), that its meaning is obscure and leave it at that. But the translator has to put some English word in the text. Robin Scroggs has argued that it referred to pederasts,[6] older males who had sex with younger males.[7] Based on its combination of Greek terms—*arsēn* ("male") and *koitai* ("beds," a euphemism for sexual intercourse)—some interpreters hear in it an echo of the two Leviticus passages,[8] where these Greek terms appear in the Greek versions of these passages.

Boswell's proposed translation of the second Greek word, "male prostitutes," includes males who hire themselves out for sex without specifying their role (whether as the penetrators or as those who are sexually penetrated) or their sex partner (whether a female or another male). Martin's proposal, that this admittedly obscure term could refer to a male who sexually exploits others,[9] is attractive because it makes sense both of its association with the next term in the vice list ("thieves")—if not with all the vices in the list, which all seem to have to do with people who exploit others—and with the theme of injustice that runs throughout 6:1–11.

Boswell is correct that Paul's list of traditional vices does not *focus* on male same-sex intercourse, but he goes beyond the evidence in claiming that this passage does not deal with it at all.[10] The analogy of *mētrokoitēs*, a compound Greek term similarly formed from "mother" plus the "bed" euphemism,[11] which refers to a male who has sex with his mother, suggests that *arsenokoitai* is better translated "males who have intercourse with males." If so, limiting the reference to male prostitutes (Boswell) would be too narrow, and including sexual exploitation of women in this term's range of meaning (Martin) might be too broad.

**Paul's main point is that exploitive and violent behavior arising from excessive passions and desires are inconsistent with Scripture and Christian teaching.**

Paul, in a way in keeping with his culture, did include male same-sex intercourse among the things condemned in this list of vices. We would do well, however, to shift

6. Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

7. Compare the JB translation of *malakoi* as "catamites."

8. See, for example, Hays, ad loc.

9. Martin, "*Arsenokoitês* and *Malakos*," 119 and 123.

10. Compare Martin.

11. This Greek word appears in Hipponax, a sixth-century B.C.E. author, cited in the entry for "*arsenokoitês*" in Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

the focus from this more culturally limited point to the more enduring one that Paul makes in this passage, which, like Paul's main point in the Romans passage, is that exploitative and violent behavior arising from excessive passions and desires are inconsistent with Scripture and Christian teaching. But so is bearing false witness against homosexuals, who are no more prone to such behavior than heterosexuals.

> We need to discover how to live with those who disagree with us on a host of nonessentials, and we need to find ways to persuade others to do the same.

Some segments of the United Methodist Church (UMC) and ELCA have turned Pauline passages about same-sex sexual relations into statements of law. But some parts of the UMC have taken a step further by taking gay and lesbian pastors, and pastors who participate in blessing same-sex unions, to trial in its ecclesiastical courts—one sure sign of how far a church can fall into the legalism trap. It is also unscriptural —one might even say anti-Pauline. For Paul, before he includes same-sex sexual acts in a list of commonly recognized vices, strongly condemns lawsuits in the community of faith: "In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Cor 6:7 NRSV).

If someone points out that the focus of this passage is on lawsuits over financial matters ("fraud"), as it likely is, the two disputed Greek terms in v. 9 that are part of a "vice list" can be viewed as even more remote from the context of homosexual relations in the our contemporary churches. Paul's condemnation would then appear to be aimed more at those who "cheat" members of the faith community *economically.*

In this review of the passages that have dominated the center of the debate in our churches about homosexuality I have fallen into four common traps in these debates.

1. The first trap is that I have perpetuated the habit of allowing these passages to define the terms of the debate. A result of this trap is that it lets sex dominate the discussion. Heterosexual love and marriage are not only about having the state's and the church's permission to have sex with one's lover. So why do we let this debate talk about homosexual love and committed relationships as if they were only about having sex? Why have we allowed the church to assume that "homosexual" love is only about engaging in genital sex? If the debates in our churches could recognize that there is a lot more to homosexual relationships than sex, it might actually celebrate their gifts of ministry and begin recruiting them to serve the mission of the church instead of stripping them of their God-given gifts of ministry and baptismal status as beloved children of God.

2. The second trap is thinking that any side of the debate can someday win the battle over the Bible if they just craft the right exegetical and hermeneutical arguments. History has shown us the foolishness of this strategy, and it is beginning to show us a far better way.

As long as the issue is cast in traditional terms, the church will be stuck in the gridlock created by two mutually exclusive and irreconcilable approaches to the interpretation of Scripture. One approach is reflected in the prevailing votes in the UMC General Conferences and the ELCA General Assemblies to deny ordination to homosexuals in committed relationships. This approach to Scripture entails two nonnegotiable first principles: (1) the Bible's condemnation of same-sex intercourse—even if it is historically and culturally conditioned and, thus, mediated by human wisdom and knowledge—is valid for all times and cultures; and (2) debates about the concept of homosexuality (whether it was known in the biblical world or it was developed only in the nineteenth century), debates about the origins of homosexuality itself (whether voluntary, learned, conditioned by psychosocial factors, or genetically determined), and debates about the nature of homosexuality (whether it is a lifestyle or behavior, or an identity or orientation) do not affect the timeless validity of the Bible's condemnation of same-sex intercourse. The reasons given for both of these first principles include two essentially correct observations: first, that the Bible's condemnation of same-sex intercourse is rooted in a biblical theology of creation (the biblical understanding of the divinely created complementarity of the male and female genders); and second, that both Jesus and Paul assume this divinely created complementarity—Jesus when he says in Mk 10:7–8 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh," a rewording of Gen 2:24, in support of his prohibition of divorce; and Paul when he condemns same-sex intercourse in Rom 1:26–27 and 1 Cor 6:9. This approach to Scripture will likely prevail for the foreseeable future—or until the passing of two or three generations, since younger generations see this as a non-issue.

A more promising way beyond this impasse appeared at the 2004 General Conference of the UMC and at the 2005 ELCA General Assembly. Both church bodies, in different but similar ways, recognized that the church was not of one mind on this issue and pointed to a "still more excellent way," to borrow a phrase that introduces Paul's poem in praise of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Both bodies reaffirmed their commitment to a unity in Christ that transcends and, indeed, encompasses differences of opinion on these issues.

Instead of boasting that "we," and only "we," have the truth, as if there were no ambiguity here, and, even worse, as if the church needs to be of one mind on this issue, this "more excellent way" would allow us to turn our efforts to presenting a more scripturally sound vision of the church, not just on this issue but on a range of issues. That way we can help the church more clearly proclaim Jesus and Paul's evangelical message that God welcomes all to the Lord's table, that our true citizenship is in God's commonwealth in which everyone is welcome, and that we are saved by God's grace alone, not by our doctrines or our lifestyles. It is time to call our churches to practice Jesus' open table in all that it says and does.

Let's let this evangelical message and mission of one people of God living in peace with justice for everyone be that which unites, or divides, the church. All others are nonessentials. This means that we need to discover how to live with those who disagree with us on a host of nonessentials, and we need to find ways to persuade others to do the same. Otherwise Jesus and Paul's evangelical message and mission will be smothered under the heavy blankets

of dissension on nonessentials.[12] Since when was one's opinion about "practicing homosexuals" a test of orthodoxy? Since when did one's opinion about abortion and reproductive rights become a test of orthodox Christian teaching in Protestant traditions? Since when did one's opinion about the death penalty become part of our church's standards of doctrine? Or one's opinion about the Iraq war? or about farm workers' rights? or . . . the list goes on.

I am not saying that we cannot take a stance on these or other moral issues. But it is no accident that the UMC's positions on moral issues are contained in the ever-changing *Book of Resolutions* and not in the *Book of Doctrine and Discipline*. That is where the 2004 General Conference got it wrong when it moved the declaratory statement on "practicing homosexuals" into the *Book of Doctrine and Discipline*. I am glad Beth Stroud's appeal pointed that out. On all the moral issues in the *Book of Resolutions*, most United Methodists affirm the value and goal of living together in communities of the faithful where it is safe to express our different opinions, even opinions that strongly disagree with the official church teachings in the *Book of Resolutions*. I think the UMC is close to a majority approval of just such a statement about our differing opinions about "practicing homosexuals"—especially if it means that the church can put this seemingly interminable debate behind us and advance the evangelical message and mission to which God has been calling the church since the days of Jesus and Paul.

3. The third trap is talking about the *issue* of homosexuality. That is why I have chosen to title my presentation "Jesus, Paul, and Homosexuals." When the issue is cast in terms of "homosexuality," or more broadly "human sexuality," it is too easy to keep gifted and loving persons in our midst out of sight and mind. Whatever our views are about the "issues," we need to remember that we are talking about our daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, dear friends, neighbors, doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, athletes, artists, musicians, soldiers, sales clerks, members of our faith communities—and yes, also our pastors. These persons' lives enrich ours in many ways, and with most of them we may have no idea what their sexual orientation is. Our lives are interconnected and we are blessed by our interconnection, whether we know it or like it.

4. The fourth trap in this debate is legalism. Our churches should have learned from the apostle Paul long ago that it is Christ's faithfulness, even to death on a cross, that reveals God's righteousness "apart from the law" (Rom 3:21–26). In Rom 1:18–3:20, Paul focused on "God's wrath against all impiety and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by their unrighteousness" (1:18). To turn the verses in which Paul includes same-sex sexual relations among the consequences of idolatry (1:26–27) into statements of law is to deny the core of Paul's exposition and defense of the very gospel of which he was not at all "ashamed" (1:16). The "good news" of this gospel was, for Paul, not God's wrath but God's righteousness revealed in Christ's faithfulness (3:21–26) and Abraham's faith (3:31-4:25). Indeed, in all of Romans Paul lays out a tour de force argument that organizing one's life

12. An eloquent case for applying this perspective to the debates about homosexuality in the ELCA is made in Craig L. Nessan, *Many Members Yet One Body: Committed Same-Gender Relationships and the Mission of the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

around obedience to law—legalism—cannot produce the righteousness that is the goal of life. In its place Paul offers not a life of disobedience but "life in Christ" through the power of the Spirit—life immersed in and infused by Christ's faithfulness.

How might our churches apply Paul's gospel to their discernment about the status and role of homosexuals in our churches? First, we should constantly remind ourselves, as in the example of our respective church bodies, that no statement of law but Christ alone is the Word that gives us and our churches our identity and our true unity. If—indeed, because—our true identity and authentic unity rests in and on Christ alone, how can our differences on any other matter divide us? Does not Christ allow, even invite, a life together with our differences?

Furthermore, no statement of law but Christ alone is the Word that justifies and makes us righteous. Paul, almost certainly, would have been shocked to discover that persons baptized into Christ's death and resurrection would want to continue in life patterns that he associated with "impiety and unrighteousness," but he would be even more shocked to learn that churches for whom his letters were foundational scriptures thought legalism was the solution. He would remind our churches that no one was changed by a law. God's redeeming love revealed in Christ, not condemnation, is the center of Paul's gospel. If our churches want to help homosexuals be "transformed," let them be, like Paul, "not ashamed of the gospel" and offer God's redeeming love in Christ instead of condemning statements of law.

Advocates for the ordination of homosexuals in committed relationships, too, can fall into this trap. A statement of law mandating the ordination of homosexuals would be just as much an expression of legalism as a statement of law rejecting their ordination. A statement of law on the ordination of women has made some progress in the acceptance of women pastors but also has demonstrated the limits of law to bring about change. The same is true for persons of color in ordained ministry. Too many churches across all regions of this country reject the idea of a woman pastor or a Black or Hispanic pastor. Statements of law have not "transformed" their hearts and minds. Advocates for the ordination of homosexuals in committed relationships took a more hopeful path when they changed their focus to affirming the wisdom of local discernment of what is "right" in their own context. That focus and the focus on Christ alone as the transforming Word together offer genuine promise of movement beyond our churches' debilitating impasse.

The hope for us and our churches is that all of creation is infused with God's grace and embraced by God's unbounded love as God's free gift. Anyone who says that God loves someone less than someone else does not speak the gospel truth. God loves each and every one of us, and no one can change that, not even an ordained minister, not even a bishop, not even a conference of the UMC or an ELCA general assembly. That *is* the gospel truth.

*A version of this essay was presented June 3, 2005, to the Reconciling Ministries Network, New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York.*

# Book Reviews

***A Scientific Theology. Volume 2: Reality.*** By Alister E. McGrath. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002. xvii and 343 pages. Cloth. $50.00.

There is no question that McGrath's three-volume *A Scientific Theology* is proving to be one of the most impressive theories about the relation between science and faith ever written. This second volume, which follows the first, *Nature* (Eerdmans, 2002), seeks to articulate a specific view of critical realism—the theory that, within limits, human language is or will be able to decipher the cosmos.

Few thinkers share the comprehensive scope in both physics and theology of McGrath, so as to offer impressive details and nuances of argument. This volume seeks especially to refute philosophical nonfoundationalism, as found in Alister MacIntyre, John Milbank, and George Lindbeck, as abandoning any form of realism, as inconsistent. Nonfoundationalism claims that we never deal with reality as such but only with our constructions of it. McGrath's claim is that nonfoundationalists tend to inflate all experience as social construction. While McGrath thinks that the critique of the Enlightenment's view of reason stemming from Johann G. Hamann is correct, that history and culture shape our transmission of even scientific knowledge, it is incorrect to infer that scientists deal only with human constructs and not reality as such. Rather, "natural sciences propose a spectrum of modes of interplay between objectivity and social construction" (p. xiii). Physics, for example, has a low coefficiency of social construction in contrast to, say, psychology. Realism insists "that there exists an extra-linguistic reality which must be allowed to act as the ultimate foundation and criterion of responsible human thought" (p. 4). Hence, to reject foundationalism, the view that an indubitable ahistorical and traditionless rationality can be established, is not to reject realism (p. 37).

McGrath's point is that even if reality is mediated through a tradition-specific means, we still have access to reality. "A tradition-specific rationality which is capable of accounting for the ideas of other traditions cannot be dismissed as 'fideism,' especially when there is no universal rationality or globally valid vantage point from which to judge things. The best we can hope for after the demise of foundationalism is a tradition-specific rationality which reaches beyond that tradition in its explanatory potency" (p. 101). Hence, while it is true that natural scientists use rhetorical techniques in the presentation of their results, it is false to infer that theories are purely rhetorical constructions. "It is the natural world itself which determines how we should investigate it, and how we are to make sense of it" (p. 121). The scientist's intuition that one is investigating the natural world outside oneself and that it "determines how we should investigate it," is to be honored. Science is thus an activity of discovery and explanation—one is discovering laws that were already there (p. 134) and not merely social codifications that predetermine the supposed reality that we really do not encounter. Hence, "whereas many forms of positivism define reality simply in terms of what may be observed, critical realism insists that the world must be regarded as differentiated and stratified, and incapable of being adequately rendered by simple observation" (p. 213).

All of this quite advanced theory is deeply tied to the view that realism is to be affirmed as the most appropriate view of knowledge that accords with the incarnation. While McGrath's view is a significant advance over that of the skeptics that he attacks, it is not clear that he has successfully countered Hamann's other charge that all our knowledge ever amounts to is "fragments." Is faith to be transcended by understanding? Is the comprehensive scope achieved finally only at the cost of a reductionism?

*Mark C. Mattes*
*Grand View College*
*Des Moines, Iowa*

***1 Chronicles***. Hermeneia. By Ralph W. Klein. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006. xxi and 561 pages. Cloth. $55.00.

This amazingly comprehensive commentary, published in the prestigious Hermeneia series, is a genuine *magnum opus* by the esteemed editor of *Currents*. Contents include a substantial Introduction (including discussion of such items as date, author, and place of composition; nature and extent of the work; place in the canon; textual criticism, sources, and language; outline and central themes) followed by two major sections that contain chapter-by-chapter commentary on the genealogies of chapters 1–9 and on the reign of David in chapters 10–29.

Central themes identified and discussed by Klein include kingship, temple and cult, Israel, reward and retribution, attitude toward the Persians (the Chronicler "seems relatively content with life under Persian suzerainty, provided that the worship at the temple in Jerusalem is able to continue without restraint"), personal piety, and possible hopes for the future. Each of the chapter subsections in the commentary proper contains Klein's translation from Hebrew into English, extensive text critical notes (with much attention to the Greek Septuagint), a discussion of the structure of the section, detailed commentary, and a conclusion summing up the major content and significance of the section.

Publication of this commentary is a cause for celebration for Klein and for his spouse, Marilyn, to whom the volume is dedicated. The volume already has been greeted with what can only be deemed rave reviews by several prominent scholars (S. L. McKenzie: "monumental achievement, which every scholar interested in Chronicles will welcome warmly"; P. D. Miller Jr.: "will be the standard against which other commentaries on Chronicles are measured for years to come"; E. S. Gerstenberger: "priceless insights for everyone interested in Hebrew Scriptures and Biblical theology"). The commentary appears some 26 years after Klein was invited to write it, a span of time during which he organized the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah Section of the Society of Biblical Literature, wrote the articles on Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, published commentaries on *1 Samuel* in the Word Bible Commentary and on *Ezekiel: The Prophet and His Message* for the University of South Carolina Press, all the while serving as editor of *Currents*. During this time he also served eleven years as Dean at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and taught graduate seminars there and at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. His prolific scholarly achievements were acknowledged by a Festschrift presented to him at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in 2003: *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein*, ed. M. P. Graham, S. L. McKenzie, and G. N. Knoppers (T & T Clark, 2003).

The appearance of this volume is a cause for celebration also for those whose scholarly pursuits are concentrated on the history and religion of ancient Israel during the exilic and post-exilic periods and specifically for those who engage in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah studies. Preceding the Introduction are nine double-columned pages listing more than 150 scholarly journals, more than 200 commentaries, and other titles that are referred to in the volume. Many other books and articles are first referenced in the body of the commentary itself. Significantly, these hundreds of sources are not simply listed as window dressing. Klein is very much at home in his sources, including many that represent European (especially German) scholarship, and engages in extensive critical conversation with them in the commentary. For example, already in his Introduction, Klein offers critical comment on the views of McKenzie, E. C. Ulrich Jr., and W. E. Lemke on the textual characteristics of the Chronicler's *Vorlage* in Samuel as well as on the dramatically differing views of C. F. Keil and A. G. Auld on sources for Chronicles from Samuel, Kings, and Psalms.

In the commentary proper, Klein gives an abundance of fascinating thumbnail sketches of various scholarly positions. For example, in the commentary on chapters 2–4 one finds interesting discussions of H. G. M. Williamson's detection of a chiastic arrangement in the genealogy of Judah, T. Willi's thoughts on the geographical notices in several of the genealogies, a juxtaposition of the opinions of legendary scholars J. Wellhausen, M. Noth, and W. Rudolph on the

structure of these chapters, and comment on the opposing ideas of M. Kartveit and Willi on how much of these chapters the Chronicler may have derived from older sources. Another example: In his commentary on chapter 12, Klein includes an extended discussion of three scholarly strategies that have been proposed for making sense of the inflated numbers in the military units said to have rallied to David. His own view is to read a primarily theological motive at work here, reflecting the Chronicler's all-Israel agenda. A third example: While commenting on the Chronicler's presentation of Davidic dynastic succession and Temple building in chapter 17, Klein offers a convincing alternative to W. M. Schniedewind's argument that Chronicles must have been written in the early Persian period (539–460 B.C.E.), since the Chronicler's royalist and pro-Temple message would have been applicable only in that time. (Elsewhere, Klein argues for a date of composition in the first half of the fourth century B.C.E., toward the end of the Persian period and the arrival of Alexander the Great.) These sorts of discussions, which appear throughout the commentary, provide a marvelous entrance into the scholarly literature on Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and the exilic and post-exilic periods.

Klein's exhaustive tables showing the relationship between Chronicles and its sources in Samuel-Kings and Psalms, his diagrams of the linear and segmented genealogies in chapters 1–9, his discussion and schematic of the genealogy of the high priests, and his identifications of nations and peoples that formed Israel's cultural milieu again are of wonderful worth to serious readers. Budding (and veteran) scholars can benefit by opening this commentary to just about any section to receive a lesson in how to identify significant scholarly opinions, present them fairly and concisely, and, after engaging them respectfully, present one's own judicious suggestions and conclusions.

This volume offers cause to celebrate also for teachers, students, Old Testament scholars, pastors, and theologians. Let's face it: Chronicles seldom comes in high on anyone's list of favorite biblical books. Klein, however, has a knack for clear presentation of even the most complicated scholarly arguments and for making even the most tedious material (like nine straight chapters of genealogy) interesting.

Among my favorite sections of this commentary were:

- Klein's discussion of the contents (including a listing of the signs of the zodiac) of a Hebrew and Aramaic mosaic inscription in the synagogue floor excavated at En-gedi in relation to the genealogy in chapter 1;
- in relation to Shallum in 2:41, the comment on three seal impressions published by N. Avigad, dating to just before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and inscribed with the name Meshullam, a name interchangeable with Shallum;
- Klein's highlighting of the Chronicler's openness to outsiders, evidenced by his inclusion of six instances of Judahites marrying foreigners in chapter 2, without adding a word of judgment or condemnation;
- the masterful discussion of the Chronicler's presentation of the death of Saul in 10:1–14, in comparison to his sources in the books of Samuel, including his theological judgment that Saul died because of unfaithfulness to the LORD (a judgment not present in 1 Samuel 31);
- the careful presentation of several proposals for translating and making sense of the manner in which David and his supporters captured Jerusalem in chapter 11;
- Klein's analysis of how the tradition of Elhanan's slaying of Goliath (see 2 Sam 21:19) was transformed into the Chronicler's notice that Elhanan slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite in 20:5;
- the fascinating treatment of the Ark narrative in chapters 15–16, including the Chronicler's inclusion of a song of thanksgiving fashioned from portions of Psalms 96, 105, and 106;
- Klein's comments on the Chronicler's omission of the Uriah and Bathsheba incident in the story of the defeat of the Ammonites in chapter 20, along with comments on the god Milcom, whose crown David took as booty from his cult statue; and
- the engrossing discussion of the Chronicler's presentation of the Levites in chapters 23–27 (which probably contains some materials added later to the Chronicler's work), especially the families of singers presented in chapter 25.

I cannot resist remarking that, without men-

tioning the recent popular interest in the Prayer of Jabez in 4:9–10 as a sort of mantra guaranteeing success in family and business, Klein notes that in context the prayer asks God to counteract what would appear to be negative connotations of pain and harm in the popular etymology of the name Jabez. Thus, to protect himself, "Jabez asked for liberation from the dire consequences of his birth and name, so that he would not suffer pain, as his mother had at his birth and as his name threatened him every moment of his life" (p. 132).

In conclusion, I want to note that Klein's views on the Chronicler's work are available to a very large audience also through his introduction and notes to 1 and 2 Chronicles in the highly regarded and widely used *HarperCollins Study Bible* (NRSV translation with notes by members of the Society of Biblical Literature), in both the first (1993) and second (2006) editions. A wealth of information is found at Klein's Web site, *http://prophetess.lstc.edu/~rklein/*, which features sections on the OT, biblical studies in general, and the Ancient Near East, along with personal information, listings of search engines, and other miscellaneous professional and scholarly items.

While preparing this review, I was reminded of the state of Ralph and Marilyn's dining room in the flat they rented while Ralph was working on his Harvard Th.D. dissertation, *Studies in the Greek Texts of the Chronicler* (1966). Imagine the room piled with books, the dining table covered with papers and note cards, and Ralph making wonderful sense of the jumble. So, for Ralph it has been at least a 40-year-long love affair with the work of the Chronicler and his translators and interpreters. How biblically appropriate! To Ralph and Marilyn: *Ad multos annos!*

*William J. Urbrock*
*University of Wisconsin Oshkosh*

***Chasing Down a Rumor: The Death of Mainline Denominations.*** By Robert Bacher and Kenneth Inskeep. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005. 192 pages. Paper. $13.99.

A rumor has been circulating in Christendom that mainline denominations are headed for extinction. With an apparent surge in growth among evangelicalism along with other factors, many speak of mainline denominations becoming dinosaurs. In this book, Robert Bacher and Kenneth Inskeep examine this rumor to see if it has validity. Early in the book they nuance the rumor to state, "If mainline denominations are in trouble, religion in America is in trouble" (p. 10). The book follows with a closer look at "the rumor" that includes examples from multiple denominations and suggestions about the implications for the future of mainlines.

The text is organized into three main sections: Perspectives (chaps. 1–3), Prospects (chap. 4), and Possibilities (chaps. 5–8). In Perspectives, the authors build a foundation by introducing various sections on history, the denominations themselves, and interpretations of church trends over the past fifty years. They then move into the second section, where chapter 4 presents statistical analysis. Denominations are compared in various aspects of theology and worship by looking at questions posed to both laity and clergy. There is a friendly warning to skip part of this section if you don't like to view charts and graphs (p. 84), but many readers will find these statistics valuable. The third section looks to the future, culminating in a summary of the findings, worries for mainlines, and a "to-do list for mainline denominations" beginning on p. 178.

This book addresses an important topic as the church moves forward in the twenty-first century. Mainline denominations are an integral part of the fabric of America, and therefore any breakdown or massive change in their core shakes the essence of American Christianity. With that said, this book offers an opening to discussion but is far from comprehensive in addressing the issue. Because of the nature of the data and anecdotes presented, the text reads unevenly at times, and some readers may get bogged down in the details. Chapter 4 is especially helpful as it presents the reader with a good deal of statistical

analysis comparing various mainline denominations such as the ELCA with denominations like the Southern Baptists. This sort of comparison helps to alleviate the force of the rumor as it shows that many presuppositions surrounding it may be false. Although the final say is yet to come with regard to the future of mainlines, Bacher and Inskeep have given readers an opening for dialogue and a resource in which to begin study.

*George Tsakiridis*
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

***Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works.*** Vol. 6: ***Ethics.*** By Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by Clifford J. Green. Translated by Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. xiii and 593 pages. Cloth. $55.00.

This edition of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* finally presents this collection of manuscripts—central to understanding Bonhoeffer's thought—in a form that is fully accessible to English-speaking readers. The volume is based on the German critical edition (*Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, vol. 6, *Ethik* [München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992]) (*DBW*).

Bonhoeffer's *Ethics* is resolutely christological in method, and he distinguishes this method sharply from all ethics grounded on abstract human ideas about the right or the good. This is particularly seen in his development of the themes of the Christian's formation by Christ into the form of Christ, and the free responsibility of the human being who has been liberated and made fully human by grace. Yet Bonhoeffer's Christocentrism does not confine his thought within the bounds of Evangelical church dogma, as can be seen in his innovative treatment of the penultimate good of human natural life and his understanding of the command of God and the divine mandates.

Bonhoeffer's responsibility ethic is a particularly important and original ethic for the Christian in society. It demands selfless participation in the world in response to the concrete situation for the sake of the concrete other person. It therefore contrasts with the theologically bankrupt alternatives—still found within contemporary churches—of quietistic acquiescence to political and social injustice, narcissistic retreat into private virtue, or a dualistic religious sanction for violent revolution. Bonhoeffer's responsibility ethic is particularly relevant today precisely because we live in a world in which the visibly immoral use of power regularly undermines the legitimacy of all kinds of authority—parents, bosses, politicians, and church leaders—and thus separates the question of what is ethical from obedience to human authority.

Bonhoeffer never completed his planned volume of theological ethics due to his arrest and execution by the German National Socialist government. The draft manuscripts in *Ethics* date from September 1940 to April 1943, during which time Bonhoeffer's criticism of the Nazi regime led to the curtailment of his speaking and publishing and during which he participated in a failed plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

This compositional history accounts for the practical impetus of Bonhoeffer's thinking and for the difficulty in interpreting the *Ethics* manuscripts without assistance. Bonhoeffer's manuscripts make no explicit references to other thinkers with whom his writing was concerned, and his frequent references to the historical situation of wartime Germany, the Nazi regime and its horrors are oblique, given the repercussions he would have incurred from direct speech. The first two German editions and the English translations based on them provided little introduction or notes to help the reader interpret the references in Bonhoeffer's thought. The earlier English editions also contain misleading translations of certain theological terms, further obscuring Bonhoeffer's thought for English-speaking readers.

The Fortress translation pays careful attention to the theological significance of technical terms in Bonhoeffer's manuscripts. For example, responsibility has the character of *Stellvertretung*, which is translated as "vicarious representative action" in the Fortress edition, where previous English editions translated it "deputyship." Thus, this term now carries its proper connotation of representative agency rather than subordination, and it recognizes the link that Bonhoeffer intends between his ethical

use of *Stellvertretung* in *Ethics* and his christological use of the term in *Sanctorum Communio*.

A second example is Bonhoeffer's use of the terms *Oben* and *Unten* to describe the relationships of human authority established by God's command. The Fortress edition translates these terms as "above" and "below," where the previous English editions translated them as "superiority" and "inferiority." The new translation rightly reflects the purely relational meaning that Bonhoeffer intends rather than suggesting that God establishes essential inequalities between human beings.

The historical context and references in *Ethics* are explained in the Fortress edition's introduction by Clifford Green, the Afterword by the *DBW* editors, and extensive interpretive notes by both the German and English editors. These illustrate, for example, how Bonhoeffer's development of the concept of free responsible action—a venture that is free even to incur guilt before God and trust in God's grace when faced with human necessity—enabled him to act toward ending Hitler's rule rather than be paralyzed or co-opted through strict adherence to abstract moral principle. They show how Bonhoeffer reworked the dangerously quietistic interpretations of the two kingdoms and orders of creation doctrines that dominated early twentieth-century neo-Lutheran ethics into a doctrine of divine mandates for marriage and family, work, government, and church. As divine mandates rather than natural orders, these remain the command of God for ordering human freedom and thus remain accountable to the will of God revealed in Christ rather than to the form of any particular historical institution. Finally, the interpretive resources in this volume show how Bonhoeffer's concrete ethical judgments—such as his condemnation of Nazi programs of forced "euthanasia," sterilization, and abortion for populations deemed "worthless" or "genetically unfit"—can be understood as a guide for contemporary Christian ethics only when they are interpreted analogically as responses to Bonhoeffer's historical situation and not as immutable abstract principles.

*Bruce P. Rittenhouse*
*University of Chicago Divinity School*

***Finding God in the Singing River***. By Mark I. Wallace. Augsburg Fortress, 2005. xii and 183 pages. Paper. $20.00.

*Finding God in the Singing River* weaves ecological theology and spirituality with Neo-Paganism, Native American spirituality, and deep ecology into a text that attempts to reclaim a God, "as carnal Spirit who imbues all things," indicative of a green spirituality. Wallace uses graphic images in conjunction with his text to convey an embodied spirituality in an earth-centered religion.

He begins by stating that we have an ecocidal addiction, declaring war against the earth community. To overcome this addiction, Christians need to see the Spirit as the force that gives life to "all members of the lifeweb" (p. 38). He revises trinitarian imagery into the Mother Bird God, the Earthen Mother Spirit, and Jesus Christ, eternally in a dance. With the basis for his green spirituality established, Wallace discusses different movements within wilderness recovery and the activists involved within it, declaring that green spirituality fulfills visionary and prophetic roles. Wallace strives to define his green spirituality within the confines of postmodern constructionism, using Kenneth Gergen's social constructionism as a model. The final chapters build to Wallace's final point that God and God's Word are in special union with Nature, resulting in humanity living in harmony with the world.

While Wallace's references to paganism and body-centered images may cause some readers to not read further, the rest of his text is rich in imagery and ideas that could help pastors rethink their positions in relation to ecology and the Spirit. This text poignantly melds seemingly disparate themes into a foundation for green spirituality and should be a part of any collection on ecological theology.

*Joseph E. Gaston*
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

***Fortress Introduction to the New Testament.*** By Gerd Theissen. Translated by John Bowden. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. xii and 206 pages. Paper. $19.00.

This is a refreshing read, intended not for scholars but for people who are interested in learning about the present status of New Testament introduction. Theissen summarizes modern scholarship on the various issues that the NT poses, without stating all viewpoints and without arguing with opposing positions. There are no footnotes and few references to earlier scholars.

Theissen comments on the term "New Testament," saying it "points to a new ethic (not based on the law), a new rite (the Eucharist) and a new myth" (in a neutral meaning: the narrative of Jesus, p. 5). Jesus, like John, presented an eschatological message: the imminent end of the world and the coming of the kingly rule. The synoptic problem has the two-source theory as its solution. Theissen mentions frequently the itinerant charismatics who continued the charismatic ministry of Jesus with his radical ethic and delivered the oral tradition for the "logia source." All four Gospels, dated after 70 C.E., are products of the second and third generation. Theissen deals with the synoptic problem and the logia source immediately after discussing Jesus himself, but the Gospels in their entirety are discussed after Paul so that a historical sequence is followed. Theissen stresses Paul's significance, as seen in the seven authentic epistles; Paul expanded the personal letter form into letters to communities. 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles are pseudepigraphical, stand in the Pauline tradition, and were made necessary by developments in later times. Romans is Paul's Testament, a treatise in letter form, but also a real letter. It takes up themes from his earlier epistles and thus constitutes his mature thinking and testament.

The Gospels are a new form of literature, somewhat similar to the Greek *bios*. Four factors contributed to the origin of the Gospels: (1) the first generation died, including the apostles; (2) the local communities grew stronger; (3) the Jerusalem temple was destroyed; and (4) the importance of the Gentile Christians increased. The Jewish rebellion of the 60s and the victory of the Romans are also involved. Because of Jewish monotheism, Jesus could not be depicted as claiming divinity during his lifetime. Therefore Mark developed the "messianic secret." The centurion under the cross confesses Jesus as God's son. Matthew represents an ethical Christianity with a Jewish-Christian stamp; Jesus fulfills the true intention of the Jewish tradition. Luke, writing as an historian in both his Gospel and the Book of Acts, has the Roman upper class in view as readers. He writes as an evangelist of the poor and an evangelist of the rich. Theissen presents a succinct characterization of the synoptic Gospels on pp. 118–24.

The pseudepigraphical letters of "Paul" were written because the writers understood themselves to be coauthors with Paul, writing in his spirit but taking into account the new situations in the communities. The Catholic Epistles and Hebrews are discussed very briefly. The Johannine Writings constitute a link between the Gospel and Letter Literature. In the Gospel of John the eschatological salvation is shifted into human life in the present so that Jesus and his message become a timeless confrontation with the eternal God. John's Gospel develops a high Christology, calling Jesus the Son of God and even God. The last chapter discusses the development of the canon as a way of making the New Testament a literary unity.

The translation reads well; however, I noticed that the German idiom of expressing probability by using the future perfect tense is often translated literally. On p. 79, the clanging cymbal of 1 Cor 13:1 has become a symbol; on p. 129, "Ephesians" should be read instead of "Philemon." A list of further reading, a glossary, and an index of biblical references complete the volume.

*Wilhelm C. Linss*
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

***Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine***. By Graydon F. Snyder. Rev. ed. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003. 325 pages. Cloth, $45.00; paper, $18.95.

***Irish Jesus, Roman Jesus: The Formation of Early Irish Christianity***. By Graydon F. Snyder. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003. vii and 280 pages. Paper. $24.00.

These two books by Graydon Snyder complement each other. *Ante Pacem* is a revised edition of a work first published in 1985. The new edition preserves the structure of the first edition but revises the content in the light of more recent research and reviewers' reactions to the first edition. Snyder concentrates on Rome for clear reasons—though he ranges throughout the Roman Empire. Snyder does not use non-Christian or early Christian literature as the glasses to interpret the material remains; rather he uses comparative material as an aid in interpreting the remains. He deals with iconographic symbols, pictorial representation in frescoes, mosaics, and sculpture, architecture, epigraphic texts and papyri (the last two cursorily). He illustrates the text with 47 figures and 50 photographic plates.

I have problems with details here and there. He often does not integrate the plates into his text, e.g. Plate 2, Paul on shipboard (p. 30). On p. 15 he uses the Latin phrase *cum solo voce* (with one voice); it should be simply *uno voce*. (*Cum* never has the sense he gives it.) On p. 24 he asserts, "One . . . does not find narrative art prior to the peace of Constantine." This is certainly wrong about non-Christian art, as a quick glace at Mithraic art makes clear. But, having given such examples of items that need correction, I still recommend this volume as the best collection of early Christian materials in print.

How does one interpret the Christian theology of an early ethnic group when no texts survive? That is the problem Snyder faces in discussing early Celtic [Irish] Christianity. His solution is (1) to describe what can be known about Celtic art and history in general; (2) to examine and interpret carefully the surviving Celtic Christian art; and (3) to contrast it with the Christianity of another group, in this case "Roman Christianity" (known from *Ante Pacem*), which survives both in texts and art. It is a courageous book that moves into unknown territory.

Ancient Celts are ethnically related to the Gauls who entered Asia Minor and gave their name to Galatia, to Celts in Spain, in France, and in Ireland. After describing the prehistory of the Celts, Snyder discusses Paul's mission to and relationships with Galatian Christians. Paul introduced Jesus to Galatia. Snyder asks, What Jesus traditions were available to Paul in 49–56 C.E.? He uses the Old Testament, Mark, and Q to recreate this material (without asking how he knows that the latter two were known to Paul!). In short, he infers too much knowledge of this material in Paul. After a chapter in which he gives his reconstruction of "The Jesus Material in Paul's Teaching," he discusses "Paul and Spain." I find much of this material highly speculative—possible, but not persuasive.

He then turns to the history of the Celtic communities in Spain and Ireland. He does not give a similar description of the Gauls in (modern) France. There follows what is the most important part of the work, a description of the early Christians in Ireland, their art and architecture, and the use of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament in their art. He illustrates this with sixteen plates of Celtic crosses and other relevant art. Here he makes his greatest contribution to early Christian history. He frequently refers to art that is not illustrated in the book. (I wish the publisher had included more of his pictures of Celtic art, which I have seen.)

Snyder argues that Paul introduced the Jesus tradition to the Celts in Galatia, that it moved from there to Spain and from Spain to Ireland (see p. 216). He attempts a reconstruction of the Pauline Jesus tradition in an appendix. He notes that Pauline apocalyptic and eschatology did not survive, a major problem for this reconstruction. He interprets Pelagius, Patrick, and Columba as Celtic theologians.

This work is both speculative and stimulating, profoundly provocative and challenging. I look forward to the discussion it is bound to call forth. If you are interested in historical reconstruction based on minimal sources, this book is your meat.

*Edgar Krentz*

***Light from the East: Theology, Science, and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition.*** By Alexei V. Nesteruk. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. viii and 287 pages. Paper. $22.00.

Despite the abundance of recent publications in religion and science, the Eastern Church has not been prominently involved in the discussion. Alexei Nesteruk begins to remedy this with a book that covers science and theology in a setting of Greek Patristic thought. His basic thesis is that the universe is best understood when "humanity establishes itself as a priest of creation" (p. 230), with the human hypostasis being seen more clearly through the lens of Christ. Just as Christ is fully human and fully divine, humanity operates in two planes: the physical world and the hypostatic dimension (p. 210), allowing it to be a mediator for the universe.

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction, and chapters 2 and 3 lay the groundwork for Nesteruk's thesis. In chapter 2 he covers a large span of Patristic thought on science and nature, contrasting the East with the West. The third chapter compares this thought with the modern understanding of theology and science. These sections are quite helpful in reviewing the Greek Church Fathers' views of science, and seeing the differences in their thought compared to more recent concepts regarding science.

In chapters 4 through 6 Nesteruk builds his argument by dealing with methodology in Greek thought as well as building scientific and philosophical arguments. The fifth and sixth chapters will be difficult for novices to the topics of *creatio ex nihilo* and issues related to time. The discussion in these chapters is more technical than not, but even without a full grasp of these chapters, the conclusions found in chapter 7 (the final chapter) are understandable.

Nesteruk has done a good job of integrating many topics of the religion-and-science dialogue and rooting them in Greek Patristic thought. Although not an introductory text, *Light from the East* is worthwhile for those interested in religion and science who would like a broader perspective. In a world that has become more pluralistic, those in ministry will benefit from seeing how other branches of Christianity add to the religion-and-science dialogue. For those already interested in this discussion, Nesteruk has presented a thesis worth considering.

*George Tsakiridis*
*Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago*

***The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research.*** Edited by Scot McKnight and Grant R. Osborne. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, and Leicester: Apollos, 2004. 544 pages. Paper. $32.99.

As the subtitle claims, this book gives a comprehensive overview of the state of recent scholarship on the New Testament writings. Part 1 has chapters on the social world of Jesus and the Roman Empire. Part 2, "New Testament Hermeneutics," has chapters on Greek grammar, textual criticism, general hermeneutics, social-scientific interpretation, and the use of the Old Testament. Part 3 covers research on the historical Jesus, including parables, miracles, and John the Baptist in addition to a general chapter on Jesus. Part 4 has chapters on virtually all of the NT writings, except that there is a chapter on the historical James rather than on the letter, and there is no coverage of the Johannine letters.

The various authors are all experts on the topics they cover, so the reader can have some confidence in the reliability of the guide. The whole project is done from a moderate "evangelical" stance, but virtually all of the essays show an awareness of other scholarly perspectives, even if they do not often agree with the more "liberal" views. As the editors note, the essays do not all approach their task in the same way; some look more at the variety of methods, while others take a more thematic approach. This inconsistency can be frustrating, but it also gives the reader an even broader overview than might have been the case if the editors had forced the contributors into a single mode.

The overall effect is an impressive book that will enable pastors and scholars alike to get a sense of what is happening over the broad field of NT study.

*David W. Kuck*
*United Theological College*
*Kingston, Jamaica*

***Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities***. By Bruce Winter. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003. xvii and 236 pages. Paper. $26.00.

***Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7***. By Will Deming. Second ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004. xxii and 271 pages. Paper. $28.00.

Deming's work, first published as volume 83 in the Monograph Series of *New Testament Studies* in 1995, is now available at a much more reasonable price and in a slightly revised edition. He argues that Paul was in favor of celibacy but not asceticism. He begins by reviewing scholarship on 1 Corinthians 7, then examines the Stoic-Cynic debate on marriage in a long and valuable chapter (pp. 47–104). He then turns to Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 7. Marriage is a social obligation for the Stoics, and Paul recognizes this to a degree. But it can also draw the Christian away from Christ. Paul's views of marriage, celibacy, and the remarriage of widows reflect the language of that Stoic-Cynic debate (pp. 105–206). Deming concludes that Paul approves of marriage but prefers celibacy, though not for ascetic reasons. Two valuable appendices provide the Greek text and translation of Antipater of Tarsus, *On marriage* (SVF 3.254. 23–257.10, from John Stobaeus 4.507.6–512.7 W-H.), and [Ocellus Lucanus] *On the nature of the universe* 43. This is a valuable resource for reading 1 Corinthians.

Winter's book both pleases and disappoints. His starting point is a brief Excursus, "The 'New Woman': Representation and Reality," by Natalie Kampen and Elaine Fantham, in *Women in the Classical World,* by Elaine Fantham, Helene Peet Foley, Natalie Boymel Kampen, Sarah B. Pomeroy, and H. Alan Shapiro (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 280–93). The preface to the work describes the excursus as follows: "[They] are devised to present special or 'deviant' aspects of women in the ancient world: for example, . . . the 'new woman' represented by the love poetry of the late Republic and Augustan Age, emancipated and outside respectable society."

Winter has published a series of books and articles that locate Paul's thought in its Greco-Roman context: *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (2d ed., 2002); *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (2001); *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (1993)—all published by Eerdmans. They all are very helpful because they anchor Paul in the social and cultural world of the first century. I picked up this latest work with great anticipation. And was somewhat disappointed.

The appendix on the "new woman" is based largely on Roman love poetry and satirical poetry. But are Catullus, Ovid, Juvenal, and Martial representative of the bulk of Roman society—and of society in the Greek east? Certainly the views of Musonius Rufus and Plutarch, along with much epigraphic evidence, would give a different picture. Thus I find Winter's interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2–16 as reflecting Paul's reaction to these "new women" ingenious but unpersuasive. Where is the evidence that the Corinthian Christian women were drawn to this lifestyle? Roman women (and men) regularly drew the toga or other garment up over their head when functioning in religious rites. See the statue of Caesar Augustus found in the Julian basilica at Corinth, as well as the head of Nero.

Winter is on much firmer ground in his interpretation of the directives in 1 Tim 2:9–11, 1 Tim 5:11–15, and Titus 2:3–5. These passages certainly urge modest behavior in line with Plutarch and other moral philosophers.

These are two significant books on women in Paul, both interpreting Pauline texts in their first-century Greco-Roman world. They are helpful in understanding texts in the Pauline corpus, evidence of how deeply early Christians were imbedded in the social world around them. Both deserve wide, careful, and critical reading.

*Edgar Krentz*

***Q***. By Luther Blisset. Translated from the Italian by Shaun Whiteside. New York: Harcourt, 2004. xi and 750 pages. Cloth. $26.00.

A laborious historical fiction about Europe's more obscure sixteenth-century religious and political power struggles . . . sounds like a gas, right? It is. *Q*'s pseudonymous authors, collectively known as Luther Blisset, pour gasoline on Reformation history as we know it. No one is spared: Lutherans, Catholics, or Anabaptists, princes, peasants, or popes—all are contaminated in the nobility of their goals.

Two nameless antagonists find themselves the only survivors of a long war for European bodies and souls. From Muentzer's Peasant Wars to the inner intrigues of papal politics, these men do the dirty work of establishing the kingdom of God on earth, learning that one either embraces the struggle or gets swept away. That one of them goes by the name "Q"—for Qohelet [the author of Ecclesiastes]—inspires one to wonder how much of the grand endeavor is simply vanity.

As social commentary, *Q* does not descend into allegory. The reader does not need to impose current events into a bygone era; rather, our questions today automatically insert themselves into the story. Is firm faith a blessed virtue or a catalyst for fanaticism? For what would we die? or kill? At what point do we open negotiations on our souls? *Q*, like Ecclesiastes, asks us to consider what is worthwhile and just about our own living.

A warning: *Q* is R rated. Where *The DaVinci Code* excited audiences through little peeks of the scandalous, *Q* offers a full frontal view of all that is beautiful and hideous about our humanity. It is *The DaVinci Code* for connoisseurs of moral chaos.

*Martin J. Lohrmann*
*Epiphany Lutheran Church*
*Toledo, Ohio*

***The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon***. By Martin Hengel. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. xvi and 153 pages. Paper. $19.95.

***The Septuagint, Sexuality and the New Testament***. By William Loader. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004. x and 163 pages. Paper. $24.95.

These two studies focus on the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), in distinct ways. The book by Hengel, renowned professor emeritus of New Testament at the University of Tübingen, explores its origin and use as canonical Scripture in the early church. Not only did the LXX constitute the first pre-Christian commentary on the Old Testament, it was the Bible of most New Testament authors and the primitive church until the late second century and became the Old Testament of the Orthodox church.

Among fascinating items, Hengel tells how the "legend" of its inspired translation by the seventy elders in Alexandria was accepted by the early church fathers and how its use to confirm Christian teaching such as the virginity of Christ (Isa 7:14) led the Jewish community to use other Greek translations.

This is a learned and comprehensive study that only rare scholars like Hengel can write. Though readable, it will have limited appeal for general readers.

On the contrary, the book on the Septuagint and sexuality themes in the New Testament relates to contemporary issues. Loader, professor of New Testament at Perth, Australia, attempts to show how in three texts of the LXX (the Decalogue, the creation stories, and a divorce passage) the LXX introduces themes and nuances not found in the Hebrew, which influence both the writings of Philo, the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, and, more importantly, selected New Testament passages.

With regard to the Decalogue, the LXX changed the order of the second half from murder to adultery and also separated the final prohibition against coveting into two commands: not coveting one's neighbor's wife and then his

possessions. The majority of New Testament texts reflect this emphasis on adultery and sexual sins found in the LXX.

On the creation stories (Genesis 1–3) the author shows convincingly how at key points there is a new stress on Adam as a male in the image of God and on woman in the image of man. In part, the LXX translators had difficulty with Hebrew puns and wordplay (Adam/Adamah = human/earthling). They translate Adam as anthropos (human) but Adamah as the male, Adam. The temptation of Eve is also given a more sexual sense (snake seduces Eve). And the curse of the woman is to go back to her husband who rules over her and her pregnancies. Many New Testament texts seem to reflect this strong subordinate role of woman found in the LXX.

On the divorce text (Deut 24:1–4), Philo interprets the grounds for divorce as adultery on part of the woman. In Mark 12:2–12, Jesus disputes any grounds for divorce by appeal to Gen 1:27 and 2:24. The saying "the two shall become one flesh" reflects the LXX translation and affirms that the union which God effects includes sexual union (*sarx* = flesh). Matthew allows one ground for divorce but does not use the LXX.

In the final chapter, Loader summarizes his results with great clarity. Because all Greek and Hebrew words are translated, along with helpful tables of comparisons, the study is very accessible. This book could serve as a refresher course for pastors on the biblical languages and on the issues of sexuality and the role of women that are still with us.

*Walter Pilgrim*
*Pacific Lutheran University*
*Tacoma, Washington*

***Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity***. By Larry W. Hurtado. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003. xxii and 746 pages. Cloth. $55.00.

Larry Hurtado, well-known and frequently published New Testament scholar, is Professor of New Testament Language, Literature and Theology at the University of Edinburgh. In this work he explores the confessional statement Lord Jesus Christ as found in devotion of Jesus for the first two centuries of Christianity. He defines "Jesus devotion" not as Christology or as spiritual experience but as "the significance and role of Jesus Christ in both religious life and thought," that is, "how Jesus functions as divine in the religious life of Christian groups" (p. 2).

Hurtado has three basic points: (1) a noteworthy devotion to Jesus emerges early in the circle of his followers, a devotion not to be explained by the incursion of extraneous influences; (2) devotion to Jesus developed quickly with unparalleled intensity and diversity of expression; (3) devotion to Jesus, with reference to him as divine, occurred within a strict monotheism that insisted on the validity of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures (pp. 2–3). To explicate these intents Hurtado examines the background of Jesus devotion, especially Jewish monotheism (pp. 27–78), then the expression of that devotion in early Pauline Christianity (pp. 79–153), in Judean Jewish Christianity (pp. 155–216), in the sayings source Q (p. 217–57), in the Synoptic Gospels (pp. 259–347), in the Johannine Literature (pp. 349–426), and then in subsequent or divergent materials (pp. 427–605).

Hurtado wishes to interpret reverence for Jesus as a faith compatible with the monotheism of the Hebrew Scriptures—a reverence or devotion that arose immediately after the crucifixion and is not the result of Hellenistic influences. Working through this thesis entailed considerable analysis of the sources and debate with those who believe, or have believed, otherwise.

The author has an interesting style. The reader feels like a student in one of his classes. Hurtado speaks often in the first-person singular and addresses the reader(s) as listeners (first-person plural) who participate in his discussion with other scholars. His discussion with academics is often quite extended and his bibliographic notes close to reference level. In that sense this work is more than a study of Jesus devotion. It can serve an introduction to the Jesus/Christ-oriented literature of Christianity for the first two centuries (that is, Jesus books).

Hurtado has several difficulties in proving his thesis. He is fully aware of the weak points, so he spends extra time with them. Some examples: Does the appearance of Jesus as a divine

being break with the heritage of Jewish monotheism and thereby signal a shift toward Hellenistic cults (as seen in W. Bousset's *Kyrios Christos*)? Hurtado tries to show that there were multiple manifestations of God already in the Hebrew Scriptures and Judaism (pp. 32–48). Another problem is that of the earliest Christian Jesus tradition. Does it show the Jesus devotion of which the author writes? The problem is Q (Quelle), the sayings tradition later used by Luke and Mark. Most Q scholars would assume it does not refer to a divine Jesus. Hurtado enters into a lengthy, thorough discussion of the Q text and a debate with Q expert Kloppenberg Verbin (esp. pp. 222–25 of chap. 4). He asserts that some Q texts show more Jesus orientation than scholars have granted. Yet at the end he maintains that any listener to or reader of Q would have known the tradition, so the words of Q would have brought to mind the kerygmatic "narrative substructure" (from Richard Hays, p. 247).

The Fourth Gospel also presents a serious problem because most scholars would assume it shows a strong interaction with the Hellenistic way of thinking, as well as fairly strong anti-Semitism. Hurtado argues that John, in writing this end-of-the-century Gospel, was in sharp conflict with Judaizers. The conflict caused him to make the Jesus devotion even more pronounced than it was with prior traditions. The resulting high Christology only appears to be an outside incursion (pp. 402–7). The Gospel of Thomas presents a special problem. It does not use the usual Jesus devotion language but rather coded, mystery language. While it does express the divine nature of Jesus, one cannot say this Gospel represents a true picture of early Christian Jesus faith (p. 472). I agree with Hurtado that the Gospel of Thomas does not reflect a community of believers, so its affirmations about Jesus are individualistic. On the other hand, Hurtado discounts the Gospel of Thomas too quickly. His later dating will not do. Paul knew the Gospel of Thomas tradition in some form. At least the material in 1 Cor 8:6, 13:2; Gal 3:27–28, 5:16–18; Rom 2:29 derive from some Thomas-like source that is neither Q nor the Gospel of Mark. While my response is not fatal to Hurtado's argument, still it shows his case to be indeed fragile in several places.

Whether one agrees or not with Hurtado, this work is a very important contribution to New Testament studies and an excellent reference work for early Christian literature.

*Graydon F. Snyder*
*Chicago, Illinois*

***The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God's Family***. By Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. xvi and 134 pages. Paper. $14.95.

This moving book is not only a powerful story about personal experiences and the significance of adopting children. It also provides the biblical and theological foundations for a theology of adoption. Adoption is an underdeveloped metaphor for communicating the way of God with humanity. God's mercy and compassion for humanity, based on the Hebrew word-root transliterated *rhm*, is "womb-love." This womb-love certainly comes to expression in the healthy relationships between biological parents and children. But with equal force it also comes alive in the relationships between birth parents and the children they relinquish for adoption and between adoptive parents and adopted children. When we begin to comprehend that God has this kind of womb-love for us as divinely adopted children, we begin to reconceive both our understanding of God and our way of interpreting the meaning of adoption.

As an adoptive parent herself, Stevenson-Moessner authentically articulates the many faces of the adoption process, not only the joy but also the grief and the guilt. Her work is enhanced as she draws creatively on the experience of many others whose lives have been deeply affected by the adoption experience: adopted children, birth parents, and other adoptive parents. Adoptive families come in many configurations and the author, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care at Perkins School of Theology, brings great sensitivity in sharing their stories. The personal vignettes about adoption are juxtaposed against the background of a rich variety of biblical passages and images that highlight the way of God with God's adopted family, the church.

This book is not only of value to those who

have been personally touched by the experience of adoption. One out of five couples deals with the challenges of infertility and childlessness. This book can serve as a primer for pastoral care with these struggling people. Even more, *The Spirit of Adoption* provides a fresh and multifaceted metaphor for understanding whose we are as God's people. The Scriptures express very poignantly the agony of barrenness and the thrill of childbirth. The expectant waiting, joys of homecoming, and the struggles of growing pains are experiences of adopted families that connect profoundly with our collective experience as the people of God. Adoption provides nothing less than a comprehensive metaphor for our ecclesial experience of being given a new name in baptism as we are received as adopted children into God's family, the church. We have a God who embraces each child with a womb-love that will not let go. And we are called to live together as a church that is bound together with one another in the spirit of this same womb-love.

*Craig L. Nessan*

***Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition.*** By Hans Boersma. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004. 288 pages. Cloth. $29.99.

This is a bold book that reclaims the redemptive significance of human and divine violence. The author's argument develops by means of an engagement with the dominant atonement motifs in the Christian tradition—moral influence, penal, and Christus Victor—carefully suggesting how each illuminates the nature of redemptive violence. Along the way, the author pursues an intra-Calvinist debate on the nature of election, provides a trenchant analysis of René Girard, and proffers a critique of the theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy over the character of justice in public.

Boersma argues that violence can be good. He points to Augustine and the development of the just war tradition, the violence of God in the Old Testament (advancing the stunning claim that the ban, whereby men, women, children, trees, and pets were to be slaughtered was in fact an instance of God's "preferential option for the poor"), and argues that Jesus himself was violent. As for those who would question the goodness of the violence on display at these points in the Christian tradition, Boersma wonders if such voices are not finally instances of cultural accommodation or subjectivism, if they are really concerned with justice. At times he asserts that to distance God from violence is to distance oneself from the Christian tradition; that the effort to create such a distance can only be Marcionite or neo-Gnostic.

Undergirding Boersma's argument is the claim that violence is intrinsic to the "creational structures," including human nature, in this time between fall and resurrection. Even God is powerless to correct evil nonviolently; indeed, to refrain from violence would be to ensure that the devil, evil, and the worst violence would conquer. Apparently, Christ's victory on the cross remains in doubt, ensured only by the ongoing history of good violence.

Not that Boersma's endorsement of violence lacks limitation. He confesses that we are called by Paul to an unconditional hospitality that renounces violence, and so even as he insists that we cannot abide by the resurrection mandate and must get our hands dirty, he also insists that the call to unconditional hospitality remain the eschatological horizon that influences us to be more restrained in our violence. We are to use only as much violence as is needed to protect God's eschatological justice and hospitality.

Readers will notice immediately, for good or ill, the Niebuhrian character of this work. Astute readers will recognize as well that, the prominence of the language of hospitality notwithstanding, this book is not an exhortation to the practice of hospitality. This is the case not simply because the meaning of hospitality remains frustratingly ambiguous. Not only is there a difference between conditional and unconditional hospitality, but unconditional hospitality is associated with at least four different and not entirely compatible realities: the divine eschaton, pacifism, contemporary therapeutic culture, and the naked public square. On the contrary, this is a sustained argument against too much hospitality. The argument is not to trust, to dare, to risk hospitality in faith. On the contrary, it is a call for caution, for restraint, for suspicion, for security.

Boersma wonders if those who would question the justice of divine violence are mere cultural accommodationists. This same question might be put to him. Is this not a vision that is particularly well suited to a culture of fear—whose first response to the stranger is suspicion and who believes it has a duty to do whatever it takes for the good end of defeating evil and terror? In this regard, Boersma appeals to the Latin American liberationists and to the contemporary movement for restorative justice, noting how their concerns comport with the Bible and Christian tradition. Yet, there is too little of their spirit in this work. They are about risking hospitality, welcoming the stranger, the offended, and the offender in precisely those situations (this fallen world) where Boersma repeatedly warns us that violence is the order of the day, always tempering our hospitality.

*Daniel M. Bell, Jr.*
*Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary*
*Columbia, South Carolina*

***Virtues and Values: The African and African American Experience.*** By Peter J. Paris. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004. xi and 84 pages. Paper. $7.00.

Peter J. Paris, Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, argues in this book on Christian ethics in relation to the experience of Africans and African Americans that the diverse traditions and cultural expressions of African peoples are spiritually integrated and therefore unified. The book has four chapters: The African Factor in the African American Experience; Virtue Theory; Some African and African American Moral Virtues; and The Christian Factor in African and African American Social Ethics.

The foundation of Paris' argument is that African and African American social ethics are rooted in the dynamic structural unity among the four constitutive spheres of African experience—God, community, family, and person. Because Africans are very spiritual they incorporate these religious beliefs and morality into daily life. Therefore, Paris argues, African theology and ethics can be practically transferred to and adopted for the well-being of a community.

In chapter 3, drawing on the shared common morality and worldview of President Nelson Mandela and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Paris expounds on six distinctive African and African American virtues, each carrying both a private and public value, namely, beneficence, forbearance, practical wisdom, improvisation, forgiveness, and justice. Finally, after briefly surveying the development and movements of Christianity on the continent of Africa and among African Americans, Paris evaluates their enormous cultural resources and mutual enrichment. He concludes with an ambitious attempt that is to present the African and African American virtues and values as a cross-cultural ethics for acceptance and argues for universal adaptation within world Christianity.

This is a book of exceptional value and particular conviction. Its concise eighty-four pages are a snapshot of Paris's faith journey and reflection on the meaning of being a Christian African in diaspora. This leads to the formation of his insight in and advocacy for the global application of African Christian ethics. Although his work offers a new challenge, the question remains of how to introduce or revive and consequently relive this African spirituality and ethics in light of the familial and social issues haunting the black church in America.

*Alan L. Chan*
*Chinese Lutheran Church*
*San Francisco, California*

***Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith.*** By Francis Watson. London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004. xv and 584 pages. Cloth, $145.00; Paper, $39.95.

This is a major study of Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament. Does the apostle play fast and loose with Israel's scriptures to justify his Christian convictions? Have Luther's interpretations of the apostle, especially regarding the contrast between faith and works righteousness, been proven untenable by modern scholarship? Francis Watson, Professor of New Testament at the University of Aberdeen, delivers a vigorous No to both questions.

Most of his book consists of detailed—but not overly technical—case studies of how Paul approached the prophets (pp. 78–163) and the Pentateuch (pp. 167–513). Extensive footnotes offer lively debates with the positions of other scholars, notably E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, Richard Hays, and Daniel Boyarin. Watson insists that Paul did not simply use the Jewish Bible to argue for christological convictions to which he had come entirely apart from its writings. Rather, his convictions about Jesus were decisively molded by his reading of the Jewish scriptures.

Paul's exegetical arguments are generally fair and logical. To support this contention, Watson explores the original historical sense of key Old Testament texts and compares the apostle's interpretations with those of other ancient Jews, such as Philo, Josephus, the authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls and 4 Ezra (he gives little attention to rabbinic literature). Paul, he argues, discovered within the Old Testament itself a tension or antithesis between unconditional divine promises of salvation and declarations that salvation hinges on performing works of the law. Like Luther, Paul came down on the side of the unconditional promises (realized through faith in Christ).

Watson says little directly about how his conclusions might affect Christian belief and living today. Yet pastors and teachers who care about Pauline theology and the relation of Christianity to Judaism will find here a richly stimulating and well-reasoned presentation.

*David M. Hay*
*Coe College*
*Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

# Briefly Noted

***Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible*** (Deutsche Bibel Gesellschaft, 240 EURO; Libronix, $280). The German and Dutch Bible Societies have combined to produce this handsome computer-based electronic research aid (SESB) for students of the Bible who use the Windows operating system. One of its most distinctive features is that the critical apparatus for the Hebrew and Greek texts is provided in electronic format. Click on a hyperlink in the Hebrew Bible for example and you get the full textual note from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, with Latin words spelled out fully, but not translated. The apparatus is also searchable. You can find the 812 occurrences where the apparatus refers to the Greek version of Symmachus! The font for the biblical texts themselves is the best I have seen in a computer program. A right mouse click on a Hebrew word parses the form and suggests a meaning (in English and German) and also facilitates a search on that word. A search on the word Elohim came up with 2,601 occurrences in 587 "articles" (articles here means chapters). A similar search in Bible Works came up with 2,602 occurrences in seventeen different forms. The WIVU database permits searches involving both morphology and syntax, at least for Genesis–2 Kings. SESB will do very complicated searches, but I also found the learning curve for using the program quite high. Once you search for a word, it appears in bright blue. Only two English versions are provided (NRSV and NIV), the most commonly used in churches today, but competitors offer many more options. *RWK*

***Qoheleth.*** By Thomas Krüger (Fortress, $52). This commentary in the Hermeneia Series takes its place as the best of current commentaries on Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth. There are highly competent discussions in the introduction about Qoheleth's themes and organization (or lack of

it) and the genres therein contained. The book is found to be coherent if one takes into account its discursive character and considers the possibility of an ironic playing around with traditional genres and themes. Qoheleth was probably written at the end of the third century B.C.E. and polemicizes against an understanding of wisdom as the guarantee of a long, successful, and happy life. Experience taught Qoheleth that wisdom is by no means as easy to find as Proverbs 1–9 and Sirach assert. Qoheleth criticizes hopes for a continued existence of the individual after death. The temple is needed not for the atonement of guilt (5:5 Why should the Deity become angry over your speech?) but for the cultivation and transmission of religious traditions (4:17 draw near in order to hear and not in order to make a sacrificial offering). Qoheleth can serve as an example of an intellectually honest treatment of cultural and religious traditions that is itself not above criticism. K. raises the possibility that the epilogue in 12:9–14 is the book's original literary conclusion. These words make clear that the critical wisdom expressed in this biblical book is also self-critical. The bibliography in this commentary runs to 55 pages! *RWK*

***He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism.*** By Sigmund Mowinckel (Eerdmans, $40). This classic treatment of the messiah was first published in English in 1956. Now, fifty years later, it remains the best comprehensive treatment of the subject, though M. was a child of his time and this book was written too early to take advantage of the new information in the Dead Sea Scrolls. M. restricted "eschatology" to mean the end of the present world order and therefore denied that there was true eschatology in the prophets. M. demonstrated the continuity between the royal ideology of the ancient Near East and Jewish messianic expectation and showed how Jewish messianic expectations differed from those espoused by early Christianity. M. recognized the difference between the Servant and the messiah since the servant's task was to bring Israel back to Yahweh, a task not associated with the messiah. M. erred in seeing the Son of Man as a development of the myth of Primordial Man, whereas in Daniel the Son of Man is a heavenly angelic figure, who represents Israel on the heavenly level but is not identical with it. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide evidence that M's notion of a national messiah was alive and well in the first century B.C.E. A foreword and a short bibliography on messianism by John J. Collins gives an appropriate perspective for receiving this great book. *RWK*

***Defending God. Biblical Responses to the Problem of Evil.*** By James L. Crenshaw (Oxford, $37.50). C. is well known for two related passions: the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and the problem of theodicy. Here he returns to the latter issue, often drawing on the former passion. His eleven chapters are divided into three parts: Spreading the Blame Around (e.g., blaming the devil does not help since God has ultimate control over Satan), Redefining God (justice in tension with mercy, punishment for sin as blaming the victim), and Shifting to the Human Scene (suffering as atonement, resurrection, or is anthropocentrism the problem?). Don't expect easy or final answers in this book, but do expect to hear afresh the Bible's honest confrontation with the problem . . . and with its God. *RWK*

***Wondrous Depth. Preaching the Old Testament.*** By Ellen F. Davis (Westminster John Knox, $19.95). In these Beecher lectures from 2003, D. seeks to show that biblical interpretation and preaching are essentially related to one another and are inextricably connected to the church's life. Chapter 1 argues that the Old Testament is an urgent presence, not separated from us by a vast chasm, using Bonhoeffer as a model. Chapter 2 suggests a strategy for preaching on the Psalms, urging attention to their poetic form. She appends a sermon by John Donne to illustrate her point. Chapter 3 deals with christological preaching on the Old Testament while chapter 4 discusses Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), the best example of the preacher as traditional artist, in her judgment. She adds four sermons of her own on Gen 21:1–21, Isa 5:8–25, and Psalms 1 and 22. An important and distinctive voice, deeply indebted to her teacher Brevard S. Childs. *RWK*

***Biblical Archaeologist CD-ROM Archive*** (American Schools of Oriental Research, $109). Founded by G. Ernest Wright, the noted Harvard archeologist, *BA* evolved from a small black-and-white format to a slick, large-sized journal with four-color pictures. In the meantime archeology also evolved, leading to a name change of this journal in 1998 to *Near Eastern Archeology* and a focus that is broader, somewhat more technical, and not always of immediate applicability for biblical scholars and pastors. All sixty years of *BA* appear on this CD, allowing the user to find, read, or print out important articles (there are more than 1,000 to choose from) or use the pictures (thousands of them) for PowerPoint presentations. Not everyone is happy with the changed name and changed direction of this journal, and I for one miss the balanced views of *BA* that have been replaced by the sensationalism of *Biblical Archaeology Review*. It's great to hold the legacy of *BA* in one hand! *RWK*

***The Shadow of God. Stories from Early Judaism.*** By Leo Duprée Sandgren (Hendrickson, $16). Passing himself off as a fictitious research assistant to Josephus, S. tells stories about the people and places the master left out of his massive history. He begins with an anecdote about Jewish debates in Babylon on whether to serve Nebuchadnezzar and ends with a tale about a conversation between Johanan ben Zakkai and Vespasian that won Johanan a claim to imperial property near Jamnia, where he founded rabbinic Judaism. In thirteen other stories in between he brings out human interest features of Jewish history such as life in the military colony at Elephantine, during the Maccabean revolt, and at Qumran. *RWK*

***The Commentators' Bible. The JPS Miqra'ot Gedolot. Shemot Exodus.*** Edited by Michael Carask (Jewish Publication Society, $75). This is a "large format Bible," containing on every page a short Hebrew text from Exodus, two twentieth-century Jewish English translations, and the medieval commentaries of Rashi (1040–1105), Rashbam (1085–1174, Rashi's grandson), Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), and Nahmanides (1195–1270), all in English. (Other medieval commentators are included now and then). Reading these multiple commentaries together on one page engages the reader in the conversation/debate going on among these great commentators, whose questions are often not the same as ours. Rashi, for example, concluded that Moses killed the Egyptian by pronouncing the Tetragrammaton, but Ibn Ezra was sure it was with a stone or a spear. Since Moses loaded his family on *the* ass (Exod 4:20, the definite article is in the Hebrew), Rashi concluded that it was the same ass Abraham had used at the time of the (near) sacrifice of Isaac and that the Messiah would use at the end of days (Zech 9:9). Beautifully printed. *RWK*

***Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah.*** By George W. Nickelsburg (Fortress, 29). This is the best introduction to the literature of the intertestamental period (325 B.C.E. to 100 C.E), and in this second edition N. has included several more works from the apocrypha and the Dead Sea Scrolls and completely updated the bibliography. This edition comes with a CD-Rom that allows searching of the text and contains 100 pictures and a study guide. This literature shows the lively character of the various kinds of Judaism in the New Testament period and of course supplies indispensable background to many of the New Testament's ideas (e.g., son of man, messiah, apocalyptic, exegetical methods). *RWK*

***From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective.*** Edited by David Rhoads (Fortress, $22). The ten authors in this volume represent a wide variety of ethnic perspectives—African American male and female, Hispanic, Cuban, European Canadian, Nigerian, European American female, Chilean/Costa Rican/Brazilian, and Chinese American. These writers from diverse cultural and social locations give responsible interpretations and responsible appropriations of the Bible for relevant contexts in the contemporary world. Each of us, whether we do it consciously or not, interprets with interests, dynamics, and concerns specific to our cultural/social context. This book challenges directly the idea that texts can be read objectively. Interpretations also have ethical impacts on contemporary contexts. In-

terpretations that foster patriarchy, racism, or colonialism are to be denounced. Awareness of our social location as interpreters makes us aware that the writers of the New Testament also had their own distinct cultural/social locations. The author of Revelation invited his readers to withdraw from social, economic, political, and religious affiliation with the Empire in the confidence that they will populate the new Jerusalem when it comes. The purpose of this book is for readers to be transformed by encountering diverse cultural interpretations of the Bible. *RWK*

***Jerusalem Besieged. From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel.*** By Eric H. Cline (University of Michigan, $19.95 paper). The author tallies some 118 conflicts in and for Jerusalem in the last 4,000 years, but this book focuses primarily on ten of those, ranging from David and Nebuchadnezzar in the Old Testament period, the Maccabean wars, the Jewish revolts of the first and second centuries, the arrival of Islam, the crusaders, the Ottomans, and three chapters devoted to battles of the twentieth century. As C. notes in the final chapter, "Those who fought for Jerusalem down through the ages thought that they alone had a God-given right to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sherif and the surrounding city," and "It is likely that the history of Jerusalem will continue to be used and misused by political and military leaders in the propaganda of present and future conflicts." There are twenty-four maps and ten full-color paintings by the nineteenth-century artist David Roberts. *RWK*

***The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1–15*** and ***The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 15–31.*** By Bruce K. Waltke (Eerdmans, $50 each volume). This massive, nearly 1,300-page commentary displays the erudition, diligence, and extensive knowledge of Hebrew for which W. is well known. It also shows his evangelical/conservative stance that insists that Solomon is the author of at least chapters 1–29. W. devotes seventy pages to the theology of Proverbs and forty to bibliography. The commentary interprets individual proverbs all by themselves and also as part of the various collections in the book. W. is quite knowledgeable about wisdom in the Ancient Near East and has certainly read very widely in the secondary literature, though he finds "fundamentalistic" historical criticism (= mainstream contemporary scholarship) as rigid as theological fundamentalism. While I do not subscribe to his isagogical conclusions, I found on page after page well-argued and often quite fresh interpretations. One of the most debated verses in the book is Prov 8:30 "I [wisdom] was beside him [God], like a master worker" (NRSV). W. devotes four pages to this crux and comes up with a rather bland "And I was beside him constantly." The overlap in the titles of the two volumes stems from the fact that the first twenty-nine verses of chap. 15 are in the first volume and the last four verses are in the second. *RWK*

***The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures.*** By Michael D. Coogan (Oxford, $53). This textbook by a well-known OT scholar includes treatments of the apocryphal or deuterocanonical works in addition to the standard Old Testament. Its attention to both history and literature will help students locate biblical writings in their historical contexts. Each chapter begins and ends with words linking it to what went before and what comes after, and key terms and questions for review end each chapter (I wish the basic bibliography were fuller). Each chapter also has a number of sidebars or excurses in "boxes," dealing with specialized topics (there are 115 of these scattered throughout the book). Numerous pictures (eleven in full color) and dramatic layout will enhance enjoyment of this account of state-of-the-art scholarship. Coogan is in the mainstream of North American biblical scholarship and writes with vigor and authority. *RWK*

***The Uttermost Parts of the Earth.*** By Richard R. Losch (Eerdmans, $16). This handy guide to more than seventy places in the Bible, ranging from Ai to Ur, devotes three pages to each on average. L. describes the geographical setting and the history of the site, locates it on one of six maps, and suggests a pronunciation for it. Rome gets a whopping thirty-three pages, allowing the author to give a helpful survey of the Roman Empire. *RWK*

# Preaching Helps

Proper 13—Proper 21, Series C

## Realigning Life

**Mary W. Anderson**, the author of this series of Preaching Helps, observes that the scriptures in August and September call for a realignment of our lives as we define and refine our discipleship. She writes, "How disciples realign themselves from vain emptiness to the fullness of God is the subject matter for these August Sundays." Mary offers the Prayer of the Day for Proper 13 to set the tone: "Benevolent God, you are the source, the guide, and the goal of our lives. Teach us to love what is worth loving, to reject what is offensive to you, and to treasure what is precious in your sight."

Mary makes the point that, from the world's perspective, a realigned life, a life in line with the gospel, is craziness. Among other things, the gospel calls us to live in order to be ready for Christ or the kingdom, which in all likelihood will not come in our lifetime. In fact, the gospel calls us to be ready for something for which there is no evidence of advent. And the gospel calls for action as well as attitude. We are to change our priorities, redefine our relationships, reassess how we use our resources, and recognize where we find real meaning. And the guidance the gospel gives us on how to do this is crazier than the task. But still we pray, still we try, still we struggle to align ourselves with Christ.

The issue is not works righteousness. We do not realign our lives in order to come into relationship with Jesus. The problem is that we are in relationship with Jesus, and Jesus has this way of turning everything upside down. Jesus creates a crisis with his presence and his preaching. He will not encourage a peace born of oppression and violence, a faith that does not show itself in daily living, or a church that does not exist for the sake of the world. Christ's presence and preaching, which turn things on their heads, lead us to realign our living away from worldly vanities to kingdom values. So the question is not what we should, must, or ought to do but how God in Christ is realigning reality and what that means for both our lives and how we live them, and the church and how we live and serve together.

One way we can help our people to realign their lives is by realigning our preaching. I served as Mary's thesis advisor in the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching program, and I find hints of her work in these pages. Mary realigned

her preaching from her strong Christian upbringing and all the assumptions that go with that by engaging skeptics, seekers, and folks on the fringes of her congregation in conversation about sermons, texts, the faith, and their lives. Her first discovery is that they are eager to talk when preachers are eager to listen. Her second discovery is how much they have to teach us. Her third discovery is that sometimes sermons provide answers to questions no one is asking, while overlooking or sidestepping what is on everyone's mind and heart. So, as you read these pages, keep alert for the people that Mary invites us to realign our preaching with, and, as you prepare to preach, find ways to seek these people out yourself.

Some of the best preaching advice I ever received came from my friend Fred Meuser, Trinity Seminary's president during my years there. Fred told me to go into the nave as I practiced my sermon and sit where one of my parishioners will sit when I preach it. Read the sermon aloud, he said, and consider how that person will hear it. How will Mabel or Roy or Jim or Rachel hear this sermon? The next week, sit somewhere else, in someone else's place, and hear the sermon through that person's life. Now that I no longer live next door to a church where I preach, I really miss this practice. Sitting in my study isn't quite the same.

Mary's work takes Fred's advice one step farther. Mary asks us to hear our sermons through the experience of those who may not be sitting in church as we preach, or who are there after being away a long time, or who aren't sure why they are there, or who are afraid to be there and are ready to spring from their seats. When we engage in these conversations and reflections, our preaching will be realigned and, through our preaching, over time and by God's grace, our congregation will be as well.

Mary W. Anderson is the senior pastor of Incarnation Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina. She previously served St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Evanston, Illinois, on the ELCA churchwide staff, and as pastor of St. Mark's Lutheran in Prosperity, SC. She is a graduate of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and holds a D.Min. in Preaching from LSTC.

Three books that you may find helpful as you realign your preaching are Jim Nieman and Tom Rogers's *Preaching to Every Pew* (Augsburg Fortress, 2001), Joey Jeter Jr. and Ron Allen's *One Gospel, Many Ears* (Chalice Press, 2002), and Christine Smith's *Preaching Justice* (United Church Press, 1998). Each goes about the task differently, and all are worthwhile.

Preach Good News!

*Craig A. Satterlee*
*Editor of Preaching Helps*

# Proper 13
# August 5, 2007

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12–14; 2:18–23
Psalm 49:1–12
Colossians 3:1–11
Luke 12:13–21

Many a politician stumps for family values. The Bible does so even more. Often politicians avoid difficult questions by telling us what we want to hear. The Bible creates difficult questions and frequently tells us what we don't want to hear. As preachers we are shaped by scripture rather than politics. The discipline of the lectionary frequently fills our week with texts we would rather avoid. I was once counseled by a wonderful preacher to never allow a difficult text to be read in the public assembly and then not address it in the sermon.

These scattered verses from Ecclesiastes could easily fall into that category of difficult and disturbing readings. In our culture, which often seems to be publicly fighting depression, these words will not be particularly welcome. Vanity, the Hebrew word *hebel*, is used 86 times in scripture, 38 of them in Ecclesiastes. The word means futile, emptiness, worthless, empty breath or vapor. This ancient observer of humankind tells us that all that we believe advances us and makes us great (or at least better), including education, hard work, and developing our skills, is in the long run pretty worthless. We die and are forgotten in a generation. The things in which we took great pride may be tossed in the dumpster by our children when they clean out our house.

Perhaps some of us aren't this harsh or skeptical, but we know enough to catch the vanity of it all.

Paul in his letters tells us that all of his education and religious credentials are now so much garbage in his life, too (Gal 1:14; Phil 3:3–9). He no longer considers them valuable; they are pure vanity. But instead of leaving it there, instead of seeing a dead end, Paul sees an exchange, a reorientation. The vanity of the world's values has been exchanged for the meaning of the values of the Christian life shaped by the cross.

How disciples realign themselves from vain emptiness to the fullness of God is the subject matter for these August Sundays. This is heavy work for folks in late summer who hope their biggest challenge is to decide whether to head for the beach or the mountains for vacation. And yet, the realignment of our lives is always in season and desperately needed.

The Gospel reading with its diamond-hard parable about "a rich man" (one of several "rich men" we will hear about in these Sundays) has no doubt conjured the reading from Ecclesiastes in our lectionary. The story begins with a man coming to Jesus for counseling, although he has already decided what needs to be done: "tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus isn't a lawyer, and he doesn't play one in the Gospels. The law of Moses is certainly clear in such matters. The oldest son is to receive a double portion of the younger son's share (Deut 21:17). Perhaps the brother is asking that there be an equitable division. He probably has his reasons.

Jesus is not interested in the details of the plea or in debating it. Instead, he takes this as an opportunity to teach about the kingdom of God. That always means turning things on their heads and realigning our living away from worldly vanities to kingdom values. Since the subject of inheritances and possessions has been lifted up, Jesus realigns with the simple but powerful teaching, "one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." One does not need to look far in first-century Palestine or

twenty-first–century America to see that this is a countercultural statement.

To illustrate the point, Jesus tells a parable about vanity. The story tastes like Ecclesiastes but has enough sugar added to help it go down. Our lives do not consist in the abundance of possessions—for their own sakes. Possessions without stewardship are empty things, just vanity. When stewardship and relationships begin to shape our wealth, they are transformed from vain things to things of value.

It's true, we can't take it with us, but we can leave it, share it, and develop it for others. Both the rich man and the philosopher of Ecclesiastes stand in cold isolation. They are not connected to a community they value or one they believe values them. Though out of season, the ghost of Ebenezer Scrooge feels present in this teaching. He is a caricature of lonely vanity. His realignment came through connecting himself to others, to a people, to a community that would stand with him and live beyond him. Vanity evaporates in the warmth of such relationships. MWA

## Proper 14
## August 12, 2007

Genesis 15:1–6
Psalm 33:12–22
Hebrews 11:1–3, 8–16
Luke 12:32–40

This week we are gifted with scripture illustrations of the realigned life. The immensely beautiful and inspiring verses of Hebrews 11 are read this day. In this litany of the saints, the models of faith from the Hebrew Bible, we are called to focus specifically on father Abraham. Just as Ecclesiastes despaired about the vanity of human existence, the writer of Hebrews soars above and through human existence with poetry and people of faith. The philosopher bemoaned his life and his pointless contributions. Life ends and nobody really cares. What's the point?

In stark contrast, Hebrews also looks at the reality of life, the real struggles of men and women who believed God's promises. Their woes were not philosophical but physical: "They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword" (Heb 11:37). Although their faith was praised and remembered, they did not themselves see what was promised—Christ Jesus.

And yet, this does not mean the faith is nothing but vanity. In chapter 11, the author of Hebrews presents the fathers and mothers of the faith in a way that documents not only their own stories but their part of the larger story of the faith. If their stories stood all alone—I lived, I believed, I died without seeing anything religiously fantastic—the case for vanity could be made. But all of their stories are woven together as the community of saints beyond their own time and space. They are links in a chain, steps on the staircase. They are part of a people and a salvation story.

Yes, the philosopher and the poet are at seemingly opposite hermeneutical ends. Yet both are presented in scripture, and both are no doubt represented in our gathered congregation. The preacher is cautioned not to assume that all of those gathered are on the side of the poet. It could be that the new seeker in worship and the skeptic spouse of a long-time member are kindred spirits with the philosopher. Some of the core faithful may be as well. These difficult questions about faith and life need to be honestly acknowledged rather than dismissed.

Abraham, who is lifted up by Hebrews as a model of the faith, is a fine example of one who wrestled with the lack of evidence

that God's promises were anywhere close to being fulfilled. Hebrews 11 begins with those famous words, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (v. 1). The word translated as "conviction" is connected to the word "evidence." In the reading from Genesis 15, Abraham, who was promised lots of kids and land of his own three chapters earlier, still has neither. He also has no *evidence* that either is on its way.

Abraham has aligned himself with this great God, has received mighty promises, but continues to live in partnership with Sarah against the barrenness of their lives. In these beginning verses of Genesis 15 (these verses and more were the first reading for the Second Sunday in Lent this year) God appears in a vision and once again underscores the promise. Note that God does not give any new evidence that the fulfillment is at hand. What Abraham resolves to do is to trust in the promise giver. He exchanges his concern about the vanity of it all for faith in the maker of the stars of night. That exchange is a witness to the realigned life.

The teaching of Jesus in Luke 12 describes one characteristic of the realigned life—that of constant readiness. Is it vanity or craziness to always be ready for something that likely will not come in our lifetime, something for which there is no evidence of advent? Those who have aligned themselves with the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is both here and not yet fully here, are called to live lives with kingdom values. How do we look, act, and speak as those who are "dressed for action," as those whose lamps are lit? What causes us to be sleepy, distracted, and spiritually disorganized? MWA

# Proper 15
# August 19, 2007

Jeremiah 23:23–29
Psalm 82
Hebrews 11:29–12:2
Luke 12:49–56

It's the third Sunday in August with our scripture readings continuing another movement of this summer symphony aligning our lives to Christ. It could be that a number of regular listeners have been away for the last two weeks, that vacationing visitors are with the congregation for a random Sunday. It could be that the regular preacher has been away, too. All of this is to say that reviewing the theme of realignment, weaving in the philosophy of Ecclesiastes, and repeating previous sermon points are not unfaithful ways to preach.

The Hebrews text continues to soar on, and we are humbled by its accounting of our faith heroes. As we noted last week, these "heroes" were hardly superheroes; they were persecuted, imprisoned, and mocked. Clearly, aligning oneself to God does not lead to a charmed life. The focus of our realignment this Sunday is on the costs incurred. The writer of Hebrews names some rather bloody consequences. Jesus has his list as well.

Many a parishioner has a canon of least favorite (if-I-could-take-it-out-of-the-Bible-I-would) texts. Among their number are the stories of the widow's mite and the rich young ruler, and Jesus' anti–family-values speech here in Luke 12. It does not sound like the Jesus we love and long for. We want him to bring peace, not swords, and we look to him to unite rather than divide our families. It is another fine example of a text that should not be read in worship without comment in the sermon or at least in the bulletin.

Consider the thirty-year-old visitor who has decided to return to church, to give it another chance, after twelve years of spiritual-crisis absence. Can the preacher leave him alone with this text today?

Sermons are not the same as Bible studies, nor are they theological lectures, but in cases like this the political and social context of first-century Palestine matter so much that they need to be artfully woven into the sermon. Although there is great tension in this text, it is the preacher's task not to dissolve it but to help us discern how to hold it in our lives. That is what the thirty-year-old returnee may be looking for.

Many of us dearly love the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd with the little lamb laid upon his broad shoulders. But the gospel truth is that Jesus creates a crisis by his presence in our world and in our lives. Crisis does not mean emergency but a time of decision-making. "To be placed in the situation of decision is critical, for to turn toward one person or goal or value means turning away from another" (Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation [John Knox Press, 1990], 166–67). Answering the call to take up the cross and follow Jesus did and does have consequences for the follower. All obstacles to receiving and living the gospel are to be put aside, even our family relationships. Discipleship is primary. The cross has central place.

As North American society becomes more and more multicultural and multireligious, we may slowly rediscover the tension in this text. We are also a society that would rather blend than choose, would rather keep peace at home than witness in the world. We are working as communities of faith to discern how to support religiously diverse families. Many a pastor has seen a Christian and a Jew enter into marriage and for the sake of offending neither family opt to be religiously nonobservant.

We also have seen those who struggle to make decisions as a family, decisions that risk misunderstanding or rejection. Decisions imply a direction—to Nineveh, to Jerusalem—and decisions create a crisis. The decision to follow Jesus to Jerusalem will be full of crisis, but it is the only road to Easter. There are costs to discipleship, not just for the Bonhoeffers of the world but for each of us.

Jeremiah rails in the first reading against the false prophets who preach lies rather than truth. Earlier the prophet verbally attacked prophets and priests who declared peace (material and spiritual well-being) when none was to be had (Jer 6:14). Jesus rails against the idea that he will bring peace, that is, support the status quo. Instead he will disrupt it.

From our recent history we know that peace on the surface of a society does not mean peace in its bowels. Rome provided "peace" to its empire by suppressing revolt with fear and a highly organized power structure. Beating victims into voiceless submission is not the same as peace. Are we such avoiders of conflict and crisis that we let this kind of peace reign? We may, but Jesus will not. Are we willing to count the cost? MWA

## Proper 16
## August 26, 2007

Isaiah 58:9b–14
Psalm 103:1–8
Hebrews 12:18–29
Luke 13:10–17

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits" (Psalm 103:2). There are costs to discipleship, yes, but there are joys in communion with God beyond hu-

man telling. Our texts this Sunday conclude the theme of realigning our lives in God with the blessings that flow from this grace-grounded relationship.

A first reading of these texts will draw us to the theme of Sabbath keeping. Preaching on the Sabbath and the ancient and modern practices of observing it always makes for a much needed sermon.

The prophet of Isaiah 58 speaks the word of the Lord for the purpose of restoring the people returned from exile. The people of the exile are invited to become more deeply the people of God. They are offered a gift we often long for: a chance to start over, to do it right this time. As God and people restore their covenant relationship, God describes what is needed for such restoration and envisions the results. Employing a series of "if . . . then" statements, the master plan for renewal and realignment is preached by Isaiah.

In preparation for preaching, reading and reflecting on the whole of Isaiah 58 will be an inspiration. The first eight verses take up the subject of vain fasting that has been the practice of a people who isolated fasting from justice. Their empty rituals have not changed or helped the world (just like many of our vain attempts to give up something for Lent). Therefore they are nothing but vanity in God's eyes. Fasting is valuable, God proclaims in 58:6–7, when it accomplishes valuable things: loosing the bonds of injustice, letting the oppressed go free, sharing bread with the hungry, and providing homes for the homeless. *If* these values are lived out among us, *then* the light will dawn and healing will spring forth.

The focused verses of chapter 58 for this Sunday, this poetic series of *if . . . thens* thunders with the call for Jerusalem to rebuild its foundations on justice rather than vanity. Let's get it right this time. Perhaps we cannot imagine Isaiah's voice preaching this powerful sermon, but we can imagine the voice of Martin Luther King Jr. hammering these words home before a bank of microphones and a throng of people thirsty for justice.

Sketch out for yourself these "if . . . then" clauses: If you feed the hungry, then *your* bones will be made strong; If you refrain from pursuing your own interests on the Sabbath, then I will make *you* ride upon the heights of the earth; If you satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then *you* shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in (58:10–14).

Some theological clarity may be needed to demonstrate that this call is not works-righteousness—Do these things so God will love you. It is similar to the preaching we heard in Advent from John the Baptist in Luke 3:8–17. John calls the newly baptized to bear fruits worthy of repentance so that their baptism will not be in vain. When challenged on the nature of such fruits, he detailed simple ethical living of sharing and caring for others in daily life.

Living justly is not a condition for God's covenant of grace but is a response to this grace. The prophetic call is for us to break out of our vain pattern of piety that seeks to do what is required by the law in order to get something back from God. That is pure isolated selfishness, not covenant living in the community of the faithful. That is bondage, not freedom.

The gospel story from Luke 13:10–17 is an illustration of how we are freed from bondage when we realign ourselves with kingdom values. Jesus frees a woman bound by illness and causes a controversy (crisis) by connecting Sabbath freedom from work and freedom from suffering. MWA

# Proper 17
# September 2, 2007

Proverbs 25:6–7
Psalm 112
Hebrews 13:1–8, 15–16
Luke 14:1, 7–14

Culturally, this is a hinge Sunday, we know. Labor Day weekend in most of our communities is the last gasp of summer and the last Sunday before congregational programming resumes. Culturally, it is a holiday to reflect on our work and to enjoy a fast from working. In worship, it can be a time to reflect on our vocations in the world as we serve God and neighbor.

A first reading of these texts leads us to reflect on their most obvious theme: hospitality, especially hospitality as lived out at table. Our Christian value that "all are welcome" is not only to be on our lips but embodied in the people around our dinner tables at home and our communion tables at worship. Most of us have dinner parties almost exclusively for our close friends and family. Frankly, it is one of the ways we feast together by fasting from the rest of the world. We have little desire to invite the homeless man who begged from us at the train station to come to dinner. When we feast in the privacy of our homes, we want to fast from these awkward relationships. Our home is our sanctuary, after all. Those of us who are working on our relationships across racial lines frequently make note of and design efforts to overcome our patterns of extending hospitality only to those within our own racial group.

The reading from Hebrews serves up a buffet of examples evident in a life that is shaped by God's love in Christ. The theme of hospitality appears here as well and specifically refers to graciousness to *strangers* assuming that hospitality to those we know and love is little challenge. Hospitality to strangers, however, is countercultural and goes against our natural instinct to seek safety and comfort among those like us.

Reflecting on our practice of hospitality to the stranger is a worthy topic for this week's sermon. But we might also peel back the layers of the Proverbs and Luke readings to discern a deeper concern for our life with God and each other.

Both Proverbs 25:6–7 and the alternate reading, Sirach 10:12–18, address the sin of pride. Proverbs calls it putting yourself forward and standing in place of the great. Jesus teaches us in Luke 14:8 not to sit down in a place of honor lest we be disgraced when the host asks us to give up "the best seat in the house" to someone else. These community lessons preached well in a shame and honor culture, but what about our culture? Thinking highly of ourselves, having good self-esteem, is greatly encouraged among us. We also are shamed by very little. Shrugging our shoulders and saying "Oops, my bad!" covers, we think, a multitude of sins. We are, for the most part, shameless.

These teachings about places of honor, about who is included and excluded, ask us to reflect on hospitality, yes, but also on the deeper question: How do I know my place? Pride says, "I decide!" The world says, You know your place by the money you make, the education you have, the job you do, the size of your house, and the people on your Christmas card list. Do not exalt yourself, counsels Proverbs, Jesus, and Paul as he does in Rom 12:3: "do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think."

Scripture calls us to remember that our worth comes from God and not ourselves. It also calls us to understand that our worth does not come from others who may claim to put value on our lives. What is our place?

In baptism we are claimed as part of God's family, honored children of God. This is the source of our honor. Those who claim to humble others are put on warning. It is not within our power to humble those God has exalted. MWA

## Proper 18
## September 9, 2007

Deuteronomy 30:15–20
Psalm 1
Philemon 1–21
Luke 14:25–33

In the life of many congregations, today will be some sort of Rally Day. We usher in the programs and activities that will fill our calendars until the beginning of next summer. Since this is frequently a day marked with an air of celebration (often including balloons), the preacher may be a little deflated at discovering that the Gospel text seems more appropriate for a Sunday in Lent rather than this day when we cheerlead the congregation into a new year of ministry. However, if we look forward to Holy Cross Day on September 14, the texts and tone are very complementary.

Each Sunday is a celebration rally around the cross. Even to say this points to the oddness of our faith. Except for Good Friday, we tend to forget that the cross was the Roman way of criminal execution and that they counted on it being as inhumane as possible. Millennia later, the blood-stained cross has given way to crosses made of gold and to the happy shapes of cookie cutters and Sunday school projects. It is for us no symbol of death but a symbol of our faith in the one who died on it and then defeated it.

The readings from Deuteronomy, Philemon, and Luke all involve life and death choices that are before those who are called into discipleship by the Spirit. In the context of Luke's community, the cross was costly. Would-be followers needed to understand what Christian discipleship required of them. We (including all the young children rallied in the congregation) hear Jesus teach that we must *hate* our families and even our own lives in order to follow. The Greek word *miseo* does translate as hate, despise, or to be indifferent to. It is not a soft word, and we are charged to interpret it faithfully. Jesus is not asking us to despise our parents, to treat them badly, or to ignore them. We are not being told to view our own life as worthless. God, remember, is the one who makes us worthy. But what is clear, for all its harsh language and uncomfortable imagery, is that to follow the cross is to give Christ central place. All relationships are rearranged, renegotiated, in light of our discipleship.

We may not struggle as much with family relationships and business arrangements as the first church did, but we definitely have our conflicts over the centrality of the cross. Many a pastor has bent over backward to carefully arrange a regular time when all the confirmation students can meet. Invariably, somewhere along in the program, a family will announce that the confirmand now has baseball practice at the same time as class. Usually it is the pastor who is left with the task of making it work by teaching make-up classes or by rearranging a time for everyone to meet.

Our culture likes lots of choices and wants to be able to do everything. Worship, Sabbath keeping, and faith formation are often not at the center, just part of the mix: Maybe it'll work, maybe it won't. We'll let you know, Pastor.

We also are painfully aware that faithful Christians have very different views about what actions, practices, and doctrines grow out of our commitment to the cross and

our call to discipleship. The road to the center is often in dispute.

Jesus, and Moses in Deuteronomy, put serious choices in front of us. It seems a no-brainer to choose life instead of death, prosperity instead of adversity. Psalm 1 describes life lived under the law of God as a tree planted by water—a life-giving position to be in when there is no rain. We cannot live without a center, a heart, a direction, a foundation.

If we take up our call to follow the cross, if we center our lives in God, we must be prepared to experience change in the way we live and challenge in the way we think. Scripture is clear that God's ways are not our ways and our thoughts are not God's thoughts, so we need not be surprised, and yet we often are. Paul challenges Philemon to imitate Christ rather than follow the imperial status quo regarding the freedom of his slave Onesimus. We wonder how he responded, especially if they read this personal letter out loud in the congregation as Paul intended!

We make numerous choices and decisions every day. Do they grow out of our discipleship, our relationship with God, and our love of neighbor? Balloons or not, this seems a good question to rally around as we intensify our ministry in all the places we worship and serve. MWA

# Proper 19
# September 16, 2007

Exodus 32:7–14
Psalm 51:1–10
1 Timothy 1:12–17
Luke 15:1–10

"I once was lost but now am found" is a phrase we easily sing from the hymn "Amazing Grace," and often at funerals. Many American Protestant families request this hymn and the reading of Psalm 23 at the burial of their loved one. The comfort of the psalm is deep and ancient. The blessing of the hymn is the assurance that we cannot be so lost that we cannot be found.

The texts for this Sunday speak of being lost in sin and found in mercy. The parables teach us about God's relentless pursuit to find us when we are lost. The readings from Exodus and 1 Timothy relate historical/theological accounts of actual persons in our faith history who once turned against God's will but who were folded back into grace. Psalm 51, traditionally the beginning words of the Ash Wednesday liturgy, is a hymn of the penitent making confession and imploring God's forgiveness. The context is believed by some to be David's song of confession after his sins of adultery and murder are uncovered by the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12).

Many of us learned the story of The Golden Calf as children. It is a fascinating account of the covenant between Israel and God as it is broken and restored. The full dramatic narrative is found in Exodus 32–34 and is worth reading as sermon preparation. Using this story as the primary preaching text is attractive because the core of story—the making of the idol—is familiar, but the larger story is known only as scattered bits of drama.

Ponder the roles various characters play in this saga of sin and forgiveness. Just as Exod 31:18 reaches its climax on the mountain saying in a voice like thunder, "When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God," the faithfulness of the people at the bottom of the hill evaporates into the desert air. Why? "The people" become impatient in Moses' absence, they want a tangible sign of God's presence, and in their frustration they select Aaron as their new leader. Why does Aaron get swept up in this revolt? Is he weak or ambitious? Take a look as well at Yahweh's and Moses' responses. Moses ultimately gets madder than God. He not only throws down the tablets and breaks them at the foot of the mountain, but then in anger he burns the calf, grinds it to a powder, mixes it with water, and forces the people to drink it (32:19–20). Lordy!

Throughout this often wild story are unfaithfulness by the people, anger and distress on everyone's part, and both forgiveness and punishment. Though the people try to force God's hand, though they complain about nearly everything, though God is often incredulous at their lack of praise and thanksgiving, God and people continue on with each other through the wilderness of their relationship. All of the characters, including Yahweh, have moments when they are not at their best. Faithfulness to a relationship, especially such an unequal relationship between God and human beings, is a daily struggle. If it were not for God's persistent mercy and love we would indeed still be lost in the wilderness.

The parables of Jesus teach us about this divine persistence to find the lost. For many these stories are as comfortable as an old pair of slippers. Functioning as a parable, these stories give assurance that God will not abandon the search for the lost, but they do not give some of the specifics that might calm our troubled spirits. They do not tell us how long a search might take, how it might be carried out, or through whom God will do the searching. God is quite creative and does not operate on our time schedules, even the time frame of our individual life spans.

Because these parables of the lost and found are so comfortable, preachers may want to study them through the lives of others. Not everyone is fully comforted by these stories of search and rescue. Some, like a speaker I once heard, are panicked that they are too lost to be found. A victim of incest, this speaker referred to the parable of the woman sweeping the house for the coins. With tears she said, "I feel like one of those coins, but I have rolled down between the cracks of the floor and all the sweeping she does will not be able to find me."

Listeners in our congregations have similar stories of despair. The preacher may need to go beyond the parable by tapping into the assurance of God's persistence: If sweeping doesn't turn up all the coins, the woman will grab a crowbar and take the floor apart board by board. "Oh, there you are!" she cackles when she discovers that last coin way down between the cracks under the stove. Put safely in the big pocket of her apron, she calls the neighbors to rejoice—and to help rebuild the floor. MWA

# Proper 20
# September 23, 2007

Amos 8:4–7
Psalm 113
1 Timothy 2:1–7
Luke 16:1–13

Last Sunday we were cradled in the arms of some familiar parables; now we are presented with another familiar one, but one that annoys rather than comforts—the parable of the Dishonest Steward. The lectionary skips the parable of the Prodigal Son in this season since it was the text for Lent 4 this year.

Seek out your most trusted commentaries on Luke to discern some historical critical interpretation. We discover a variety of views on the parable, but the general consensus is that we do not really understand all that the parable hopes to teach us.

Some preachers take up many minutes in a sermon wringing their hands over how strange and difficult the parable is, pointing out the difficulties from various angles. But this does not preach the gospel or help form us in the faith. Instead of ruminating over what we do not understand, can we discern the heartbeat of the parable and share its rhythm with our congregations?

As noted earlier in these pages, Jesus creates a crisis with his presence and his preaching. He will not encourage a peace born of oppression and violence. This parable is about a man who finds himself in a crisis. He is facing charges of mismanagement; the rich boss has finally figured it out and is now demanding an audit of the books. The steward is called to account for his stewardship of the owner's assets. A crisis demands a response. The two most popular ones are to flee or to fight. This steward decides on a plan of action to address the crisis before him. In this he is clever, and he is commended for taking action rather than fleeing the country.

Congregations are planning or are already carrying out their annual stewardship campaigns. Stewards are called to account for their stewardship. This can create a crisis for individual members and for whole congregations. Have we been faithful stewards of all God has entrusted to us? Too often we narrowly focus this yearly performance review on our congregational budgets and our personal checking accounts. In truth, the accounting crisis we are facing is bigger than our pledge card.

Jesus calls us to have a plan of action for addressing the crisis of the coming kingdom of God. This is the kingdom of justice and mercy. Are we ready to receive it? The steward of the parable had a sense of crisis only when he realized that the world he knew and had been manipulating was about to come to an end. Then he sprang into action.

Where's the crisis? The prophet Amos detailed the crisis he saw all around him in a culture that seemed to be doing fine on its surface. It appeared to be a time of peace and prosperity. Amos creates a crisis in the midst of these good times by declaring that God will judge a society by how it treats its poor and powerless. Fraudulent business practices are laid bare in his preaching, practices that abuse the poor and delight the rich. It's status quo stuff, that pesky peace that is no peace. A crisis is created, as it was in the parable, by laying open the ugliness of what's really going on. Those who have the power to change it, those who have been entrusted with the stewardship of this community, are called to account.

The prophets of our own time are called to name the crises among us. This is preaching no one wants to hear. Americans want to hear that their country is the best in the

world, doing good for every other nation. Faithful Christians want to believe that the church is free from corruption and full of honesty. As stewards of the mysteries of God we have much responsibility.

Where is the crisis in our world? We estimate that 8 million people die each year because they lack the basic resources for a healthy life. This may be a very appropriate time to launch a stewardship campaign that supports the goals of The ONE Campaign supporting ways to end poverty.[1]

This lectionary lemon can be turned into a powerful opportunity to preach about our world in crisis, our call to account for our mismanagement, and our need to discern how we will faithfully respond as citizens of heaven and earth. MWA

## Proper 21
## September 30, 2007

Amos 6:1a, 4–7
Psalm 146
1 Timothy 6:6–19
Luke 16:19–31

What will it take to inspire the powerful to do the right thing? Last Sunday's parable demonstrated that creating a crisis often gets us off the couch. If we pay close attention to the realities of our world, we know that we are in a crisis of poverty, an environmental crisis, and a crisis of war and violence. But for most of us, it's only a crisis if it affects our way of life and living. The greatest luxury the rich and powerful have is the luxury to look the other way.

In the eighth chapter, Amos attacked the evil practices of dishonest merchants. This week, in the sixth chapter, he attacks the wealthy elite, describing not only their lavish lifestyles but also their oppressive indifference. Our relationship to wealth, our addiction to it, our responsibility to those who have none of it, and our call to Christian stewardship continue to be themes this week. 1 Timothy tells us that money is not the root of all evil, but the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Today we might speak not of the love of money but of an addiction to money. Like most things, money and power are tools that can be used for good or evil.

One of the side effects of an addiction to money is gross self-centeredness that allows us the luxury to lie on our couches feeling good about our life while others lie in the streets. From the perspective of the couch, the world is a pretty peaceful and prosperous place. Why change anything?

A few years ago, a small rural congregation decided to write a mission statement for itself. After much conversation about their mission and ministry they proudly published their new statement declaring: *We take care of our own!* To declare this as your mission is to declare yourself out of mission. The couch perspective does not belong solely to the wealthy.

The parable of the rich man (traditionally called Dives, Latin for "rich man") and Lazarus reviews this couch perspective for us. Several verses have been omitted between the Gospel readings for the previous Sunday and this one. Luke 16:13 ends with the proclamation "You cannot serve God and wealth." Verse 14 tells us that the Pharisees were listening to all that Jesus was saying. Luke also describes them as "lovers of money" and reports that they mocked Jesus' teaching. Jesus' response to their ridicule was to observe that their outward

---

1. See *www.elca.org/advocacy* for information about the ONE Campaign and the Millennium Development Goals.

appearances did not match their inward desires. While people may not see the difference, God does (16:15). Verses 16–18 are sayings about the law and about divorce that appear to interrupt the flow of these teachings about our relationship to wealth. This interruption can cause us to forget that the Pharisees are standing there and that they are the primary ones for whom the parable of Lazarus is told.

The Pharisees' love of money does come within a theological framework that justifies their position. Deuteronomy 28 affirms that obedience to God will result in blessings on the battlefield, in the marketplace, down on the farm, and within the family. Scriptural arguments can be made that prosperity, wealth, *is* a sign of God's favor (Craddock, *Luke*, 192). Other parts of the scripture certainly call for a different point of view (Deut 15:7–11; Lev 19:9–10; Isa 58:6–7). Jesus interprets God's will from these and other texts about our care of the poor and the obligation of the whole community to care for all its people. Here and elsewhere in the Gospel accounts, Jesus and the Pharisees disagree on the interpretation of scripture.

Jesus' perspective is not from the couch of the prosperity gospel but from the viewpoint of the couch-less. This parable teaches us that God will ultimately establish justice for all. The mighty will be toppled from their thrones and the lowly lifted up—if not in this world, then in the next; if not in this kingdom, then in the kingdom yet to come.

The most jolting part of the parable is in the desperate plea of Dives to have word sent to his family to tell them God was serious about desiring mercy, not sacrifice.

Already done, Abraham replies, haven't you read Amos?

Maybe Dives and his brothers thought the prophets were just crazy guys causing trouble. They apparently don't have much credibility in the Dives household. But, he pleads, if someone rises from the dead and tells them to repent, that will really make a difference!

I doubt it, Abraham replies with a deadly calm that seeps from the story even now.

The mighty acts of God are mighty enough. The divine drama doesn't need to be digitally enhanced for anyone's benefit. The Word of the Lord! MWA

# Trading on Trust

Phyllis Anderson
*President*
*Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary*

At every ordination we hear the familiar words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 4: "This is how we are to be regarded, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. It is required of stewards, moreover, that they be found trustworthy."

With elegant economy, these words bring vividly to mind both the awesome nature of the gift of ministry and the tremendous responsibility that comes with that gift.

We know that the trust extended to leaders is all too often abused. We are profoundly disappointed when we discover that a CEO is making four hundred times as much as the average employee, even as the corporation reels toward insolvency. University officials vote themselves handsome perks while students borrow to pay for double-digit tuition increases. Our elected leaders pervert the truth. Politics and special interests trump the public good. Nobody believes what they read in the newspaper. Broken trust breeds cynicism and shreds the fabric of society.

We hope that it will be different in the church. So it hurts all the more when the "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" prove untrustworthy. When pastors abuse their power for self-aggrandizement or sexual gain, we all suffer.

We urge our religious leaders to keep the trust, assuming that the trust is still there to keep. It is becoming increasingly clear to me how far the reservoir of trust has been depleted. As trust is diminished, so is the authority that we need to be effective servants and stewards. That is one reason why ministry is so much more difficult today. It is especially daunting to enter into a parish after the previous pastor has been asked to leave because of broken trust. Our leaders not only have to keep the trust; more and more they have to earn trust, one member at a time.

Those of us in leadership have to prove ourselves—as Paul had to do with the Corinthians—through the demonstration of our own trustworthiness, knowing how flawed and prone to sin we are. God help us! God help us as we do our part to reweave the slender threads of trust. God help those who long for the mysteries we steward and the Christ we serve, but hesitate until they see if we can be trusted.

## *Web sites*

***produced by professors at the seminaries publishing* Currents**

Wayne Weissenbuehler (WTS): Center for Theology and Land
http://ruralministry.com

Ralph W. Klein (LSTC): Old Testament Studies
http://prophetess.lstc.edu/~rklein/

Gary Pence (PLTS): Healing Religion's Harm
http://healingreligion.com

## *Responses*

***are welcome!***

Readers who would like to respond to any article published in *Currents* are invited to contact the editor by mail at the address below or by e-mail, rklein@lstc.edu.

## *Change of address?*

If you are moving, please send your corrected mailing label, or a photocopy, or any change-of-address form, to *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, IL 60615, or call (773) 256-0751, or FAX to (773) 256-0782 (specify *Currents*).

Whether you write or call, please include the six-digit code at the top left of your address label for our reference. Thank you.

Currents in Theology and Mission
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
1100 East 55th St.
Chicago, IL 60615

Non-profit org.
Bulk Rate
U. S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 26
Paxton, IL 60957